

A composite image featuring a doctor with a stethoscope, a woman's face, and a man in a suit. The doctor is in the upper right, the woman's face is in the upper left, and the man in a suit is in the lower right.

THE

**BIG
HUSH**

**Kristi
Zanker**

Chapter 1

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The Big Hush
(A *Dragnet* Fan Fiction Story)

By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter One

Sergeant Joe Friday sat at his desk and was silent for a minute before picking up the receiver. His partner, Officer Bill Gannon, had taken Larry Watson to the Interrogation Room for questioning. But the seasoned detective had a hunch that this young boy, only seventeen years old, was not a suspect in this case. Joe lit a Chesterfield. After taking the first drag to calm his nerves, he picked up the phone and dialed Central Receiving Hospital.

“She didn’t tell me!” the sandy blonde-haired boy named Larry cried. He yanked on the collar of his gray polo shirt, as if doing so would provide an answer. His choking sobs had settled down into a quieter weep. “I loved her so much and she didn’t tell me!”

Joe now sat at the table in an Interrogation Room with Bill and Larry. It had been ten minutes since Joe had called to find out the result of sixteen-year-old Shelly Forrester. It had been forty-five minutes since Joe and Bill entered the apartment and found her body, crumpled on the floor in the hallway, her hand still holding the receiver of the telephone. A trail of blood went from the kitchen table to the phone stand in the hallway of her parent’s small apartment. The crime lab was there now, checking for fingerprints and taking more photographs.

“Oh God!” Larry muttered, staring down at the table. “All that blood! There was so much of it! She didn’t even tell me....why didn’t she tell me?” His watery blue eyes pleaded with the two men who sat across from him.

“Are you going to be all right, son?” asked Joe.

“Yes...I’ll...I will be in a minute,” Larry said in between hiccups. He pulled out a white handkerchief from the back pocket of his khaki pants and blew his nose. “I...I think I’m ready now,” he said softly.

His breathing remained quick and intense from the earlier emotional explosion. He was like a child who had fallen off the monkey bars at the playground during recess, silent for a second, and then furious sobs and shuddering would ensue due to the sharp stab of pain that, in mere seconds, would envelope his body.

“Do you want to start from the beginning?” asked Joe and the boy nodded.

He sniffled, dabbed his nose with the handkerchief, crumpled it into his fist and then began. His voice still trembled. As he spoke, Bill jotted down notes into the notepad in front of him.

“We met last year, in Math class. We did the things that other kids do. We liked to go to the diner, bowling, roller skating, bike riding, listen to records, watch television, you know. We would also do our homework together. Shelly had trouble in math a lot, so I helped her out. After going together for five months, I asked her to be my steady and she said yes. I gave her my class ring and we each met our parents. Mine really liked Shelly...said she was a nice girl. Her parents liked me, I think. We didn't do anything wrong... We really loved one another and talked about getting married after graduation. We thought it was okay to...you know...since we were practically engaged.”

The boy's face turned three shades of red and he cleared his throat.

“Do I have to...I mean, do you want me to—“ He couldn't look Bill or Joe in the eye.

“No, son, you don't have to go into that kind of detail. We understand what happened,” said Joe.

“Well, about a month after we...uh...well, suddenly Shelly didn't want to go roller skating or bike riding anymore. I didn't know why, I thought maybe she was getting bored with me. Anyway, her parents went out of town on Saturday morning and I tried to call her to see if she wanted to go to a movie. But the phone was always busy. Sometimes, Shelly likes to talk with her friends, so I didn't pay much attention to it. I called about an hour later and the line was still busy. Well, I rode my bike over to her apartment. Our parents said we couldn't have a car, even though we have our licenses to drive. So, we ride our bikes everywhere.”

“You're going off on a tangent, Larry,” said Bill, who stopped writing in his notebook. “We just need you to tell us the events leading to you finding Shelly.”

“Oh, sorry...well, I knocked on the door, but there was no answer. I called her name, still no answer. Then, when I went to turn the knob, I was surprised that the door was open. I went inside and called her name again. As I walked across the living room...I...I saw her there,” tears began again at the vile memory.

“I used the phone in the kitchen to call you. Right away, I noticed the kitchen table. The tablecloth was all a mess and wrinkled, like someone had been lying on it or something. When I went closer, I saw the blood,” he blew his nose once again. “When you told me she...had an abortion, I didn't even know she was pregnant! Why didn't she tell me?”

It was back to that first question that neither Bill nor Joe had an answer for. The hospital had informed Joe that the girl had hemorrhaged to death from a botched abortion. They didn't know if had been self-induced or a “back alley” one. Just then, the phone rang, startling all of them, especially Larry out of his trance.

“Interrogation Room, Friday,” Joe said into the mouthpiece. “You didn't? I see...so it wasn't robbery...just had to make sure. No, we haven't gotten a hold of the girl's parents yet. They're on vacation. I called the hotel several times and left a message with the clerk at the front desk. Okay...how about every wastebasket, did you check those? How about the outside cans...nothing? Okay...okay,” And he hung up.

“We definitely know now that it wasn’t robbery. If someone did come into the apartment, they must’ve been wearing gloves as there are no fingerprints anywhere. The only ones they found were the girl’s and yours, Larry.”

“Oh, well, all I touched was the doorknob to come in and the wall phone in the kitchen.”

“Did you know if Shelly’s friends had said anything?” asked Bill.

“About what?” Larry asked.

“Well, you had said that Shelly didn’t want to go roller skating and such, do you know if her friends hinted anything?”

“No, I didn’t know anything until today. I just can’t understand, if she loved me so much, like she said she did, why didn’t she tell me that she was going to have a baby...our baby,” the boy began to cry again.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. Joe answered it and a man and woman entered the room.

“Mom...Dad?” said Larry.

“What is all of this, son?” asked Larry’s father.

The only thing Larry could do at that moment was weep.

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It was around eight o’clock when Joe drove out of the parking lot of Parker Center. The rush hour traffic had ceased by then. But Joe couldn’t get Larry or Shelly out of his mind. The boy’s parents had taken him home. Bill and Joe finished up the latest paperwork and finally signed out for the day. They had worked three hours of overtime; a short time compared to others. At least it hadn’t been the entire night. Joe knew about those days too.

How many cases is this now? Joe thought as he lit a cigarette at a stoplight. When the green light surfaced, he stepped on the accelerator and glided down the freeway.

Larry and Shelly’s story had similarities to the findings from three days ago. A nineteen-year-old woman was found by her parents, sitting beneath the wall phone in the kitchen, with blood engulfed around her. By the time the ambulance made it to the hospital, the girl was DOA. And a week ago, a woman was found in her bedroom, lying on her bed with the knitting needle still.... Joe couldn’t think about that anymore. It had been two weeks, since these murders had begun.

It was springtime in Los Angeles, the beginning of May, 1967. A familiar quotation seeped into Joe's mind. In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love... He remembered that from high school. It was Tennyson who said it. Spring meant happy times, a burst of energy, as everyone welcomed spring from the long, endless days of winter. Spring was even more special if one was in love. That was how he interpreted the quotation. But there was someone who was defying spring and its meaning. For some unexplained reason, they didn't want people like Larry and Shelly to be happy and in love. Instead, they got a thrill out of snuffing out lives.

After he parked his powder blue 1964 Ford Fairlane, he stubbed out the cigarette butt in the waiting ashtray near the side entrance of the building. Joe then unlocked the side door with his key, and slowly climbed the stairs to the second floor. As he took each step, he tried very hard to wash away the evening's events, the entire two weeks.

When Joe unlocked the door to his apartment, he was startled at first to find his girlfriend Gracie Adams there, sitting on his couch. Before he could even say hello, the timer on the stovetop buzzed and Gracie got up to retrieve the warmed-over meal in the oven. After setting the plate on the table she scurried across the room to Joe, wrapped her arms around him, and gave him a generous kiss of "hello."

...a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of... Tennyson's words echoed through his head as he kissed her back, his arms magnetically circling around her waist and pulling her close. ...thoughts of... ... thoughts of... His mind became a skipping record, but it was Gracie who pulled away, causing the invisible record needle to scratch.

"I don't want your dinner to get cold," she said, as she took his hand and led him into the kitchen. "You look exhausted," she told him, as he sat down at the table.

"It was a very long day," he said, picking up his knife and fork to cut up the chicken breast.

"You've had quite a few of those lately," Gracie said as she got a bottle of root beer out of the refrigerator.

What the hell is this? Joe thought irritably, wishing he could have something a lot stronger than root beer.

"Your refrigerator was awful, Joe. Hardly any food in it. So, today after work, I went to the A & P, got a bottle of A & W and then picked up some S & H trading stamps," she smiled at him.

"You what? You said you went to the A & P and got A & W, oh skip it!" He stabbed at a piece of chicken with his fork.

"No, I just thought of that on the way home and it sounded funny to me. I bought you other stuff too."

"I hope you got some Crown Royal. You know I'd like that better than root beer," he scowled at the childish drink in front of him. Gracie didn't see the look on his face for she had turned to the cupboard to retrieve a glass. Joe sighed; he didn't mean to sound so harsh just then.

Before she handed him the drink of his choice, she plunked a single ice cube in the glass, swirling it a little.

“Oh, honey, I didn’t mean to sound so cross. Thank you for going grocery shopping for me. It’s been such a hectic week and I haven’t had time to do anything,” he pulled her close to him and gave her waist a squeeze. “Is your book almost filled up?”

“Yes, it is,” Gracie replied, sitting next to him. “A few more and I can redeem the stamps. Would you like to go to the Redemption Center with me and pick out something?”

“Maybe I will,” he said, thinking about the kinds of objects they had there like vacuum cleaners, sewing machines, row boats, phonographs, heating pads, even television sets, among other useful and entertaining items.

“We got a call today around five, just before we were going to leave the room. I wish I had a nickel for every time that happened,” said Joe, circling his spoon into the mashed potatoes. “That’s what took so long.”

“Oh. Well, your day’s over and your with me now. You can relax and take it easy,” she said, giving his arm that rested on the table a gentle pat.

“It feels wonderful to be home, but at the same time, it’s exasperating to know that I have to be back to work in twelve hours.”

“Well, it’s Thursday and the weekend is coming up.”

“With my luck, they’ll call us back,” Joe said as he took a sip of Crown Royal. The burning whiskey rushed to his stomach and he sighed.

“Thank you for this dinner, honey. If it weren’t for you, I would’ve just opened a can of soup and ate directly from the can itself. I’d be too damned tired to make anything for dinner. I really appreciate this.”

“It’s no trouble, Joe. Even though I ate two hours ago, I can still sit here and keep you company. Besides, we can have dessert together.”

“What do you have?”

“You’ll see.”

When Joe finished his plate, Gracie took it from the table to the sink. He watched her as she went to the refrigerator and pulled out a glass bowl of chocolate pudding. She retrieved two smaller bowls from the cupboard and began to fill them with the velvety dessert. After that, she covered the larger bowl with tinfoil and then brought out whipped cream. She gave each bowl a decent amount. When the refrigerator door shut, she grabbed the two bowls off the countertop and brought them to the table.

“This is too much. You’re spoiling me,” said Joe, reaching over to give her a kiss on the cheek.

“I don’t mind. You’re the kind of person who needs to be spoiled,” she said, getting up one last time to fill two glasses of tap water.

When the bowls were empty, Gracie took them to the sink. When Joe started to move, she told him to sit there while she did the dishes.

“Do you want any more to drink?” she asked with her back turned to him.

“Oh no, not right now. I think I’ll rest for a minute,” Joe said as he got up from his chair and slowly walked into the living room and then the bedroom. He sat on the bed for a moment and then lay on his back. He hadn’t even put away his badge or the pistol. He removed his I.D. and badge from the front pocket of his gray blazer and tossed them on the nightstand next to him. Carefully, he took the pistol and put it in the drawer. When he felt everything had been taken care of, he turned on his side and fell asleep.

Joe didn’t know what time it was when he opened his eyes. Someone was silently calling his name and telling him to wake up. Oh, go away! His mind shouted. Leave me alone! But the voice continued.

“What!? What is it?” he woke up with a start.

“Shhh, Joe, settle down,” Gracie’s soothing voice surrounded him.

“Oh, it’s you.”

“Yes, come on now. Let me help you take off your clothes. You can’t be comfortable in that tie.”

“Oh, hell I was so tired,” he said, as he felt Gracie’s fingers intertwine the knot of the tie to begin the process of removing it. Suddenly, he felt chilled, as he lay on the bed, the covers still tucked in and bedspread smooth underneath him. The room was dark, as Gracie discarded his tie and began to unbutton his shirt.

“What time is it?” He stifled a yawn.

“Don’t worry about that. I’m almost finished, then you can go back to sleep,” she whispered to him, as he sat up for a moment to take off the blazer and button-down shirt.

Internal instincts had other ideas as her hands undid his belt and then the button and zipper. He felt himself becoming very aroused at her touch.

“I need you to—“ she began, as he arched his back a little for her to pull the pants off.

Now, he was very cold in his undershirt and boxers. He reached out to find Gracie in the darkness, and what he felt first felt was her satiny red nightgown. He absolutely loved how it felt and looked on her. If the light had been on, he'd gaze at how the material hugged her shape, accenting all of the right curves. His hands moved up and down her hips and then back up to her waist. The only thing that kept them separated was the cotton material and a seductively thin layer of silk and satin. He pulled her down on top of him and kissed her, parting his lips to invite her welcoming tongue.

To Joe's surprise, Gracie sat up and he groaned as she took and placed him into her inviting flesh. She gasped as she slowly slid further. He watched as her silhouette in the darkness moved back and forth, slowly at first, getting used to the position. He could see her hands cup her breasts and rub them as she swayed. He removed her hands and began to knead them. They felt so ready as he played with her taut nipples. It was as if they couldn't wait to be freed from the trappings of a brassiere, slip, clothing, and now a slight covering of silk was in the way. She moaned as he caressed her and sighed when his thumbs ran across her firm nipples, creating a tingling sensation in both of them. In an instant, he had had enough.

His hands pushed the nightgown up and it seemed like an eternity as he waited for Gracie to get rid of the unwanted piece. His eyes were focused now to the dark room, and he could see her nakedness gleam in the moonlight, that streamed through the parted curtains. He pulled her to him, taking a swollen breast into his mouth, sucking, and flicking his tongue over the toughness of the nipple. Joe kissed his way to the other one repeating the pleasing gesture.

Joe knew his body would explode any minute if he didn't take care of it. Being careful, as to not spoil the moment, he held onto her as he rolled her over onto her back and he smiled at her. He sat up only for a brief second, to do away with his undershirt and boxers. The temperature had steadily risen causing him to break into a sweat.

In his haste and stimulation, he quietly cursed at the boxers that wouldn't come off when he intended them to. Once they were thrown into the shadows of the room, he positioned himself and began to move rapidly above her. He didn't want to miss this heavenly second, as he felt his insides progressing to their peak. The flowing juices within responded instantly, causing him to cry out with each embedded crest.

He shuddered, as he hugged Gracie to him, his swift breathing settling down.

Gracie's hands gently stroked his back, as he kissed her again with their tongues doing the exploring now. As fast as the wonderful sensation arrived, it had dissipated causing more fatigue to battle its way in.

The only words spoken were a murmured "goodnight" to one another, stuck in the spoon position, and finally underneath the covers, as Joe's hand greedily cupped one of her breasts and the other ran up and down her leg. His hand aimlessly wandered to her middle and remained there until the alarm clock spun to morning and daylight stumbled into the bedroom.

Chapter 2

The Big Hush
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By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter Two

“Where the *hell* is my pistol?” asked Joe, to no one in particular, as he dashed around the apartment for the third time. He checked the usual drawer on the wet bar—it wasn’t there.

So far the day had been off for him ever since he woke up. Like clockwork, he began his morning preparation for the office. He had immediately forgotten about the middle-of-the-night rendezvous when the Big Ben alarm clock sounded. He was puzzled as to why he had nothing on, but then remembered the early hours, and peered over at Gracie to confirm the memory.

Like a washing machine, with its particular dials, and certain stages of cycles, when it came to getting ready in the morning, you did not bother Joe Friday. The carpet, for all he knew, could’ve been run-down in the same exact spots as he made his way to the bathroom. He could probably do his routine in the dark, if he wanted to. He had it timed perfectly, so that even if traffic was heavier on the way to the office, he would not be late. He couldn’t stand being late and despised it when others were late for appointments—whether it was Bill or even a suspect for an interview.

It was a stroke of luck after he and Gracie first woke up together nearly three weeks ago now. She learned swiftly of the sergeant’s habits and caught on very fast that he detested lateness of any kind.

So, when Joe couldn’t find his regulation .38 caliber pistol, he felt the seconds draining into him, as they turned into minutes.

“Are you sure you put it in that drawer?” asked Gracie, who sat on the couch, waiting for him.

“Yes, I *always* put it in here. Where could it be?” he said, slamming the drawer for the fourth time. Somehow, he thought if he had opened the drawer again, the handgun would appear. When it hadn’t, anger started to mount inside of him.

“I have to find it soon or I’m going to be *late!* And I’m *never* late!” He ran into the bedroom again, giving the area another sweep. *Did I leave it in here?*

“Do you have your badge?” Gracie called from the living room again.

“Yes!” he called back, for that had been on the nightstand.

As if he had been struck by lightning, he remembered where it was. He rushed to the nightstand, threw open the top drawer and his pistol lie there, still in the holster, waiting. “Oh, of *course!*” he muttered to himself as he snapped the holster around his waist. Joe had been so tired yesterday; he had forgotten even dropping it in that drawer. Walking out into the living room, he announced his success. When he brushed the pockets of his trousers and fished through the pocket of his gray blazer, the lightning struck again.

“*Goddammit!* Where the *hell* are my *keys!*” He turned around and went back into the bedroom. “Shit!” he muttered to himself as he opened the nightstand drawer again, hoping for the keys to emerge.

Slamming the drawer, he hurried into the living room and yanked open the drawer where the pistol was originally supposed to be.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake!” he said, grabbing them as the last drawer slammed. Now, he remembered. With him being so exhausted and the surprise of finding Gracie at his place at that hour, he must’ve mixed up where he laid the two most precious items he needed for work. He also couldn’t believe he didn’t see them in the drawer the other times it was rifled through. Joe let out a sigh of relief

“I take it that you found them,” Gracie said.

“Yeah...I can’t believe I did that, but I must’ve been so tired,” he chattered while opening the door for Gracie, then closing and locking it behind him. He took quick steps as she followed him to the stairwell. When they got to the bottom landing, Joe groaned.

“It’s raining! No wonder I had such a bad morning,” he said.

“Let me take one more look at you,” Gracie said, placing her hands on his smoothly shaven face. “You’re not bleeding any more.”

“Well, *that’s* a relief,” said Joe, taking her hands off of his face and holding them tightly. Nicking himself twice while shaving had been the first instance of possibly being late. When the pistol and keys couldn’t be found, it was too much. Joe peeked at his watch. Time was on his side for only another minute. His luck may be beginning after all. He bent to kiss her goodbye, as both of them would brave the downpour as they ran outside to their respective cars.

He saw Gracie’s lights turn on and she careened out of the space. Joe eased out of his parking space and when he passed her on the street, he waved and smiled at her, while she in turn, did the same.

Joe sighed again, and got out a cigarette at the first stoplight. In the frenzy of getting ready, he hadn’t had time to have a smoke along with his breakfast and coffee. He could feel his irritation begin to soothe itself as he took another drag.

He had to admit to himself though. He really enjoyed last night, even if those desirable events began the domino effect of the lousy morning. Gracie was so sweet, trying to make him comfortable, when he fell asleep in his clothes. But ever since they had crossed over into the cloud of bliss, his body kept yearning for her—everyday! He'd find himself thinking about Gracie and at once his insides would respond. It happened everywhere, at the office, in the car, while going out to lunch, on a call—it was getting complicated to focus during the day. In his mind, he'd see concise images of their time together and they left nothing to the imagination. Even the slightest thought of Gracie sent his loins into a fit of eagerness, screaming for action—that wasn't available at these delicate moments. *Here we go again!* He thought as his middle reacted to the erotic thoughts of last night. *I'm worse than a goddamned teenager!* That thought had been swarming around his head all week.

The rain came down steadily, as he merged onto the freeway. The *swish-swish* of the windshield wipers was like the second hand ticking on a clock. Glancing at the hands of the clock in the car, he still had enough time to get to work without being late. That is, if the rain cooperated and stayed at the same pace as it was now. In all of the consistent braking and accelerating, Joe's mind whirled.

First, he tried to rationalize his behavior by saying his body was working overtime to make up for the years he'd missed out on being with a woman. *Did this always happen?* He wondered to himself. *Every time you love someone?* Was it because he had never loved anyone in a long time to go this far in a relationship?

Since the brief encounter with Peggy Sanders at sixteen, there were others he went to bed with. However, Joe soon realized he didn't really care enough for them to continue going this route. He looked at his then seventeen-year-old self in the mirror one day, and decided that he didn't like the fraction of himself that didn't care. He had been stung when Peggy wouldn't see him anymore. For a while, as his memory drifted back, he had been angry and decided he would go out with any girl he wanted to and hoped that they would react to his advances. Not all of the girls he took out wanted to and he respected that. He never forced himself on a girl. That was out-and-out wrong.

But to the few girls who *did* respond, he'd feel great for a little while and then the feeling would wear off. It was then, all those years ago, standing in front of the bathroom mirror, that Joe decided he wasn't going to bed anyone until he absolutely felt love, respect, and really cared for them. When it reached that point, marriage wouldn't be too far in the future, so waiting a few more months wouldn't hurt.

As Joe grew older, he went on dates, but still kept that promise to himself. From his teenage experiences, he learned that sex wasn't everything. He was glad he realized it then because he knew that many a girl would be hurt and so would he, had they taken that enormous step.

And now, with Gracie, he was elated that he listened to his conscience and brain, instead of the urges. He was learning about himself as well and he came to a decision. With these long nights and then going to work the next day was becoming just too much! He'd have to find a way to let Gracie know that it would be better if they made it on the weekends instead of during the week. Oh, he enjoyed it for sure, but it was wearing him down and he hated to own up to that.

For now, it was an overwhelming feeling, but he knew better than to discuss it with anyone. What he *did* know was that too many rely on their urges, especially today. Men, these days, seemed to have lost the ability to think with their correct head. And with the advent of the Pill a few years back, suddenly that seemed to give many women the green light. He'd seen in more times that he'd like to admit at how the act of sex ruined harmed or even killed people. That thought in mind brought him to the present as he remembered Larry Watson yesterday.

Did Larry feel the same way he did right now? *Maybe...*he thought. But Joe also knew that he would never forget the hurt in the young boy's eyes, when the girl he loved didn't even confide in him that she was pregnant and ended up murdered by some butcher.

Once settled into a parking space, Joe turned off the ignition and got out of the car. The rain had eased a bit, but he still ran to the building. When the elevator door opened to the third floor, he could hear the office humming with activity. Bill was on the phone, as he went to check his mail slot. He pulled out the envelope which concealed his paycheck.

"Joe, we have another one," said Bill, after hanging up the phone.

He shoved the envelope back into the slot and turned to Bill. His partner had just received a phone call from a Resident Assistant in the one of the girls' dormitories at the nearby university. A girl on the floor came running and crying to the RA's room, thinking her roommate was dead. The RA had called for an ambulance, after taking one look at the other girl. She had called the police as well. Bill tore off the sheet of paper that contained the name of the RA and dormitory address.

As they entered the front doors of the girls' dormitory, a wooden plaque with a gold-engraving read *Wicker Hall, Est. 1950*. They wiped their feet on the thin carpet and then strode onto the cracked linoleum floor. A large sitting area loomed in front of them.

Two faded flower-patterned couches stood across the other, while a dark wood coffee table sat in the middle of them. Two matching chairs were positioned at each end of the couches. The walls were a chipped and lightened cream color. Several large pictures of the campus from decades ago and a serene painting of a waterfall dotted the plain walls. The only lively look in the quiet room were two girls who sat on one of the couches chatting away about classes, the music scene and such.

Both looked up at the two men as they walked past to the empty front desk. Bill rang the silver bell that was placed next to the telephone. Mailbox slots stood inside the desk area on each side. Both could see that some boxes were empty whereas quite a few had unclaimed mail piling up. They heard a lull in the distance of people talking for they both guessed that that was where the cafeteria must have been. The clattering of silverware on plates and trays being dropped onto the tables confirmed their assumption.

"Who are you here to see?" asked one of the girls behind them. Both turned toward the voice. The girl wore a paisley pink dress with a matching headband.

"We need to speak with the person who should be running this desk," said Joe. His impatience grew by the minute. If something was terribly wrong, well, it wouldn't be their fault for not getting there in

time. A bulky white sign in large block lettering announced “No Males Allowed Beyond This Sitting Area.”

“Are you professors?” the other girl wondered whose hair was tied back with a gold clip and wore a green cotton dress. Before either of them could answer, she leaned over to the girl in the paisley dress, who sat next to her, and said rather loudly at how old they looked and how awkward it was to see men of their age in the lobby of the girls’ dormitory.

The same girl asked, “Are you someone’s parents? We haven’t seen anyone’s parents since the new semester began in January.”

“Do either of you run the front desk here?” asked Bill.

“No, I think Millie went to get some coffee in the cafeteria. She should be back in a minute,” the paisley-dress girl replied.

The only noise in the area now was the rain tapping on the windows and the two girl’s chattiness. Their conversation switched from talking about the two men, to The Beatles and their new look.

“I don’t like their moustaches,” the one with the headband said. “I liked it better when they first came on the scene. But I like their new song “Penny Lane.” It’s very catchy.”

“Oh, I think they look older, more mature,” her friend in the green dress replied. “Besides, you can tell them apart better now, ever since John got those glasses.”

“You *would!* You always like older fellows,” the girl in paisley laughed. “Why don’t you speak with *them.*” She pointed to Bill and Joe. “Maybe you’ll find out that one of them is free tonight!” A burst of giggles sounded.

“Where *is* that girl!” muttered Bill with his back to the laughter.

“They’re just kids, Bill. Take it easy,” said Joe, who stood beside him.

“She’d probably pick *you,*” Bill replied. “She’d probably think I was someone’s *grandfather.*”

“Are you kidding? I’d never go out with a young, immature girl like that!”

“Can I help you gentlemen?” asked a girl who now stood behind the counter. Her brown hair was done into a flip. A barrette held the sides of hair away from her face.

“Is your name Millie?” asked Joe and the girl in front of them nodded.

“We’re police officers, Ma’am,” continued Joe showing his badge and I.D. “I’m Sergeant Joe Friday and this is my partner, Officer Bill Gannon. We received a call not too long ago from—“

“Carrie Darling. She’s a Resident Assistant on the fourth floor here,” interrupted Bill reading from the piece of paper.

They heard commotion behind them. As Joe and Bill turned around, the two girls now stood up, mouths open wide in surprise.

“What’s the *fuzz* doing here?” The girl in the green dress asked.

“It’s never good when *they* arrive,” the other girl chided, as they went around the corridor. Ignoring the rude comments, they looked at Millie behind the desk.

“Oh yes, I’ll have Carrie come out and speak with you,” the girl said as she held the receiver in her hand and dialed.

“Look, Ma’am. We received a call about a—“ Joe was interrupted again.

“Carrie? There’s two men here to—“ and she set the receiver back into its cradle. “She’ll be right down.”

About a minute later, a door to the left of them flew open and a girl in a blue blouse and beige skirt ran toward them.

“I’m Carrie...she’s upstairs! She’s upstairs,” the girl said. “Please hurry!”

The two men followed her up the stairs to the fourth floor. As they briskly walked down the hallway, a small cluster of girls, some still clad in pajamas and curlers while others were dressed for classes, had gathered outside one of the rooms. Someone in the group was crying and one other proclaimed that she was going to be sick and dashed through a door that Joe and Bill presumed was the bathroom. As they neared the huddle, Joe fished out his badge and I.D. again, explaining that they were police officers and needed them to step aside. Within seconds, the girls parted, creating a tiny space for the men to enter the room.

Two yellow birds cut out of construction paper and taped to the door read each girl’s name of who was in the room. One gave the name of *Dorothy*, whereas the other bird announced the name of *Donna* in black ink pen. A blonde girl with her hair pulled into a ponytail and still in her nightgown knelt on an oval green and white braided rug that was situated next to each bed in the middle of the room. She looked up, away from the apparently dead roommate, as they came into the room. The Resident Assistant, Carrie, stood behind them.

“Donna,” said Carrie. “These men are police officers. They want to look at Dorothy.” The girl, Donna, who had been kneeling on the rug beside the bed, stood up and sat on the bed across from Dorothy. Her hands were folded into her lap, as if she were praying.

The red-headed girl lay still. The blanket had been pulled back revealing that the pink flowery nightgown she wore was heavily stained toward her middle.

Carrie stepped forward and said that she had already called for an ambulance and that they should be here in any minute. Just then they heard several footsteps down the hall and the wheels of a gurney scraping across the fractured linoleum tiled floor.

Joe and Bill stood aside as the attendants carefully lifted Dorothy onto the gurney. A massive pool of blood on the sheets became more visible as Dorothy was placed onto the gurney. They strapped her in tightly and then each of them grabbed a string at the end and pulled her out of the room.

During this entire process, Dorothy's roommate Donna sat silently on her bed, with tears streaming down her face. As the girl was being wheeled out, she spoke.

"Where are you taking her?" she wailed.

"To Central Receiving, Miss," said Joe. "We'd like you to come with us...we need to ask you some questions."

"Why do you want to talk to me for?" she whimpered.

"Don't worry, it's just routine questioning. I'd like your Resident Assistant, Carrie, to come along too," Joe said as he patted her shoulder and then looked over at Carrie.

"I'll be right back. Just let me get my purse," she said and dashed out the door, trying not to bump into the lingering horde in the hallway.

"I have a class in ten minutes!" Donna said with uncontrollable hiccups.

"We'll let your professors know what's happening," said Bill.

Donna nodded, her ponytail bobbing up and down as Carrie came back into the room.

"I'll have to get dressed," said Donna, half whispering. She still sat on the bed, as Carrie shut the door. Then, they heard the sound of wire hangers being pushed aside. Joe told the remaining onlookers that there was nothing more to see and to head back to what they were doing. Some slowly shuffled back to their rooms, while a few others went downstairs.

Donna emerged from her room in a blue and white striped dress.

"Wait," said Carrie. "Let me fix your dress for you." She noticed that Donna's dress wasn't buttoned up all the way in the back and fastened each remaining one. She then took both ends of the ribbon that hung at each side and tied them into an elegant bow which sat below the buttons. Strands of hair stuck to her tear-stained face.

"I'll fix your hair on the way there," Carrie said, resting her hand on Donna's shoulder. "I know how you must feel right now, but I think everything's going to be okay."

It was a pleasant gesture of comfort, but both men could see that dread along with uncertainty clouded her eyes. The girls were obedient when Joe and Bill took their arms to escort them down the hallway.

As the four of them walked toward the stairwell entrance, the girls sometimes peered into the other rooms that had doors open. They saw someone at their desk, probably doing homework or studying for an upcoming test, while passing the next room, a girl sat on her bed reading a book.

All of the rooms looked the same—with the cream-colored paint on the walls, only splashed with posters or pictures of friends and family. As they went by an additional room, a record player softly spun The Critters' "Mr. Dieingly Sad." The lead singer sang the title of the song, repeating the three same words over and over until they faded.

How appropriate at this particular moment, Joe thought to himself, as the door to the stairwell closed behind them. One by one, they descended the staircase. Too many people were going to be sad and are already heartbroken. An image of Larry Watson's scrunched up face appeared in Joe's mind for the second time that morning. How many more will continue to be hurt and sad...?

Chapter 3

The Big Hush
(A *Dragnet* Fan Fiction Story)

By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter Three

Joe watched in the rearview mirror as the elder of the two girls produced a comb from her purse and proceeded to fix the younger one's hair. She carefully parted Donna's hair off to the side with the little black comb. Gently, while keeping the part in place, she gathered up the loose hair, ran the comb through once more and wound the rubber band until it was tight enough to keep all of the hair inside. From viewing this he could already tell that this girl probably was one of the oldest, if not *the* oldest in her family. Even though she was a college student, Carrie seemed more of a mother-figure. Both of them were silent as she brushed the ponytail. Donna mumbled a quiet "thank you" while Carrie acknowledged with a slight nod, and put the comb back into her purse.

Like at the dormitory, both men escorted the girls through Parker Center to an elevator. Once inside, Joe pressed the round "3" button and up the cage went. When the doors opened, they filed out into the hallway and Joe led them down to an Interrogation Room. He stopped and poked his head into the office and wondered if policewoman Dorothy Miller could join them. She obliged and followed everyone to the room.

Before opening the door, Joe turned the black rectangular sign to "Interview in Progress." He then unlocked the door for the two somber girls, policewoman Dorothy Miller, and Bill. After everyone was seated at the table, and the door closed, Bill took out his notepad and Joe did the same.

"We'll start with you." Joe pointed with his pencil at Carrie who sat across from Bill. "What's your full name?"

"Carrie Elizabeth Darling," she replied. "That's my last name, Darling."

"How old are you?" he continued with the pencil poised millimeters above the notepad.

"Twenty-one," she answered.

"You are the Resident Assistant on the fourth floor of Wicker Hall, is that correct?"

"Yes."

"How long have you known Donna and Dorothy?" asked Bill.

"Since the beginning of last semester. They're freshmen; most of the girls are on my floor. There are a few sophomores and juniors though."

"I see," said Joe. "Do you have any siblings?"

“Yes, I’m the oldest of three girls in the family.”

“What is Donna’s roommate’s name?” asked Bill.

“Dorothy Richmond. I don’t know her middle name. I mean, I have it written down, it’s just that I can’t remember it right now,” said Carrie, who was silent for a few seconds and then spoke again. “Is Dorothy going to be okay? Maybe we should call the hospital.”

“The hospital will notify us as soon as they find out something,” said Joe. “When did you first hear that Dorothy wasn’t feeling well?”

“Donna frantically knocked on my door. I had been studying for a test when I heard the knocking, then her crying. She said that Dorothy was bleeding very bad.”

Carrie removed her purse that had been on her lap, and placed it on the table in front of her. She put her arms around it as if to hug and protect it.

“I didn’t know what to think, so I went down to their room and there was Dorothy. I called an ambulance and then the police,” she resumed, pushing a strand of hair out of her face. The flip she wore had been matted down by the rain that had had slowed to a drizzle when they entered Parker Center.

“What made you decide to call the police?” asked Bill, as he flipped the first page over and began to write on the next one.

“Well, something didn’t seem right to me. Besides, I’d seen this before....a girl bleeding like that.”

“What about this other girl you saw?” asked Joe, who repeated what Bill had done with his notepad a few seconds ago.

“Her roommate had said she had an abortion.”

“And you think that’s what happened to Dorothy?” commented Joe.

“Yes, I do. But I don’t know anything else about it, where Dorothy went or who did it. I do know that a friend of mine told me once that some girls who had an abortion at school, they’d throw the remains down the garbage chute. Every floor in the dorm has a chute. But I don’t know anything else. I’ll help in any way that I can with Dorothy and Donna, but I’m telling you, I don’t know anything beyond finding Dorothy like that in her bed.”

“Donna?” asked Joe. “Is it alright if we talk with you now?”

At the sound of her name, the girl raised her head slightly and mumbled, “Okay.”

“What’s your full name?” asked Bill.

“Donna Elizabeth Peary,” she responded and then cleared her throat.

“How do you spell your last name?” asked Joe.

“P-E-A-R-Y.”

“How old are you?” asked Bill.

“Eighteen,” she replied softly, although she looked much younger, more like fifteen or sixteen in her blue and white dress and hair pulled back into a ponytail.

“Are you the oldest in your family too?” Bill continued, trying to create small talk to ease the girl’s nervousness.

“No, I have an older brother.”

“What do you know about Dorothy’s condition?” asked Joe.

The room was silent after the question had been raised. Donna folded her hands in front of her on the table. She cleared her throat again.

“Would you like a glass of water?” inquired Bill.

“No, thank you,” the girl answered back, waited a few more seconds, took a deep breath and then spoke. As she told her story, her hands unfolded and refolded several times. When unfolded, she’d run her finger slightly across the table, as if to feel how smooth the surface was. Donna never looked anyone in the eye while she talked. Her face would blush at times dealing with the context of what had happened.

“Well, about two weeks ago, Dorothy told me she was pregnant. She had a boyfriend named Danny. I didn’t see him much. But when she met him, Dorothy always came back to our room very late. She wouldn’t share anything with me, except that she had a good time on her date. But one night, she told me she was going to have a baby.”

Donna began to cry just then and Carrie whipped a pink handkerchief from her purse and handed it to her. Policewoman Dorothy Miller, who sat next to Donna at the end of the table, gently touched her shoulder for reassurance.

“I didn’t know...I thought you...I...well...I thought you had to be *married* to have a baby. Honest, I really thought that. It was wrong to...*you know*...you had to wait until you were married. It’s what my mother told me.”

“It could be, in the proper perspective, yes, but in reality? No...you don’t have to be married in order to have a baby,” replied Joe, feeling sorry for the sheltered girl. “But we’re not here to discuss the dynamics, morals or values of a relationship; we just want to know what happened with Dorothy.”

“I didn’t know whether to be happy for her or what. I asked if she wanted a boy or a girl. She just laughed at me and said I was so naïve. Dorothy and I weren’t close friends, but we got along as roommates. She ran with a different crowd, I guess.”

Joe listened intently as Donna continued her story. The girl still fidgeted with her hands, pulling at her fingers more and more as she went on. When her roommate had asked Donna to go with her to someone’s apartment, she wondered why her other friends didn’t go with instead. When asked that, Dorothy explained that her friends had classes and couldn’t miss them. At first, Donna thought she was going to a party, but the time seemed to be off, still it was a Thursday and that’s when the parties began. However, she knew that parties didn’t usually start until much later in the evening or even at night. So, she went along, taking the bus to a neighborhood near the campus.

Joe and Bill had asked for an address, but all Donna could do was shake her head. When asked to describe the building, the girl remarked that it was very old and dirty. The hallway and stairwell smelled musty, like nothing had been cleaned in ages. They had climbed a staircase to the second floor and knocked on a door. A voice told them to come in and as they entered, Donna was especially surprised to find the living room looking like a waiting room of some sort. A desk sat in the middle of the room and a girl had been there typing something on the typewriter. Two other girls were seated against the wall in the same kind of metal chairs that were in the dorm rooms, Donna had shared this puzzling moment with everyone in the interrogation room.

To Donna, her roommate seemed like she knew what she was doing for she went up the girl at the desk and gave her name, then handed her a piece of paper with a stack of dollar bills, and the girl said the doctor would be with her soon. This bewildered Donna. A doctor? Here, in someone’s apartment? Something didn’t seem right, but the younger girl kept her mouth shut. To her, Dorothy was older and more mature and knew about certain things that Donna never even heard of. Joe had asked her to describe the room around her and what she saw.

Besides the living room, where the desk sat, more chairs were situated in where the dining room should have been. There was a kitchen in which Donna noticed that the appliances were older and very dirty. The linoleum floor in the kitchen resembled the linoleum in the dorms. There was a thinly carpeted hallway where two doors were shut. One of them was open and she had guessed that must’ve been the bathroom. She did mention that she saw a spider crawling up the wall, then shuddered, for she hated spiders or insects of any kind.

When asked how long they sat there before Dorothy was called into one of the rooms, Donna guessed it had been around twenty minutes or so. Both men wondered if anything had happened in those twenty minutes, like did they see any other girls emerge from the rooms down the hallway. She nodded and told them that a girl *did* come out of one of the rooms, holding her stomach. Someone who had been waiting for her asked if she was okay. The girl mentioned that she felt groggy, had cramps and wanted to get some aspirin at the drugstore and then head home.

When Dorothy’s name was called, Donna stood at the same time, but was told to wait until everything was finished. She sat down again and watched her roommate head into the far room toward the right.

“Waiting while she was in there was so scary. I kept wondering what was going on,” said Donna, who now had her hands in her lap, folded.

“Did the receptionist at the desk say anything or did the phone ring at anytime you were there?” asked Joe.

“Yeah, I remember the phone ringing. It rang once and she picked it up. I could only hear her side of the conversation of course. She had asked how far along the caller had been and then took her name and set up an appointment. She then asked the person at the other end how they got this number. I thought that was strange.

“How long did you wait for Dorothy?” asked Bill.

“I was there until it got dark outside. When Dorothy came out of the room, she looked sick, like the other girl did. She asked the girl at the desk if she could use the phone to call a cab. When we got back to our room I asked her what went on there and that I hadn’t known she was going to a doctor. She said, “Remember what I told you—about me having a baby? Well, I won’t be having a baby anymore.” I honestly didn’t know or understand what she was talking about. Then, she became very rude toward me, saying, “Don’t you know *anything*! What kind of cave do you live in? Do you honestly think I could finish school with a bun in the oven? My parents would *kill* me if they found out I was pregnant! So, I had to get rid of it and the doctor there took care of everything.” I told her that I really didn’t think her parents would kill her, they’d be angry for sure, but they wouldn’t do that. I told her that it didn’t seem right to kill her baby and she told me to shut up.

“I just sat there staring at her. She rolled onto her side and her back was to me. I was in shock; I couldn’t believe what I just heard. When she told me she was going to have a baby, I kept picturing this little baby boy or girl. “You *killed* your baby!” I said and started to cry just then. Her poor baby! I couldn’t help myself; this whole thing was so frightening. And then, the next morning, I saw the blood and I thought Dorothy was dead.”

The girl began to cry again, dabbing her eyes with Carrie’s pink handkerchief. Carrie gently rubbed her back and policewoman Dorothy Miller touched her arm lightly, to indicate that it was going to be okay. Amongst Donna’s sobs, the phone on the table rang and Joe picked up the receiver.

“Interrogation Room, Friday,” he said and then paused to listen to the caller on the other end. “Okay...I see. We’ll talk early next week then.”

The receiver was rested once again on the cradle of the phone.

“That was Central Receiving,” announced Joe.

As soon as Donna heard, she gasped, “Is Dorothy alright?”

“She’s okay. They stopped the hemorrhaging, but she’s still under the anesthetic and won’t be able to talk to anyone until early next week. She’ll need a lot of rest this weekend.”

“Why not? Why can’t we go see her?” asked Donna.

“They need to keep an eye on her to make sure she doesn’t start bleeding again. Bill and I will see her Monday morning.”

“I would like to go with you,” asked Donna.

“No, it would be better if you didn’t this time,” said Joe. “But she *is* okay. She will be resting for awhile. She’s been through a lot.”

“Where’s her baby?”

The question startled Joe and he had trouble finding an answer. He didn’t want to tell her that the baby probably had been thrown away in a dumpster or burned in an incinerator. He told the youthful girl that the baby was in better place now and that sometimes this world was so unpleasant, that they had to leave quickly. That answer seemed to satisfy her for the time being.

After the questioning was over, Joe and Bill drove both girls back to the dormitory. It was no longer raining, but the sky remained gloomy, tempting everyone that the rain could appear at any minute. They walked the girls to their rooms, first Carrie, and then Donna. They noticed that when they reached Donna and Dorothy’s room, the soiled sheets and mattress were gone. A new mattress and crisp white linen had been placed on the bed. It was almost as if nothing had happened.

For the rest of the day, Joe and Bill tried to reach Shelly’s parents, but the hotel clerk said he hadn’t seen them. The coroner had brought a bag that held her belongings, including Larry’s school ring on a chain. For the time being, the bag was put away in a filing cabinet.

When they returned from lunch, someone had left a message for Joe on a slip of paper. He read the message which informed him to call Gracie when he got back. Before catching up on paperwork, he picked up the phone and called Gracie where she worked at the insurance company.

Joe listened as she explained that her car wouldn’t start and wondered if he could pick her up from work. She went on to say that one of the guys, who was a mechanic on the side, said there was a problem with the distributor or something. She wasn’t sure what was wrong, so a tow truck was summoned and the 1962 adobe beige Corvair was sent to a local repair shop.

He said that he would be delighted to pick Gracie up, if work didn’t go overtime. He was sure they probably wouldn’t work late today and said he’d be there around five and if, for some reason, plans changed, he would let her know.

“What are you grinning about?” asked Bill, as Joe hung up the phone.

“Gracie’s car broke down,” he replied, as he began to organize a stack of papers in front of him. He wasn’t saying anymore.

Chapter 4

The Big Hush
(A *Dragnet* Fan Fiction Story)

By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter Four

As Joe and Bill left the entrance of Parker Center, both ended up getting caught in another downpour. The rain had stopped sometime during the interrogation that morning, only to continue as Joe sprinted to his car to avoid being soaked to the skin. He couldn't fish his keys out of his pocket fast enough to ignore the drench. It was raining so hard that in haste, he put the wrong key in the car door. Cursing to himself, he fumbled through the other keys on the chain—the entrance into the apartment building, a separate key to open his door, a smaller key for the mailbox, a key for the office, and the key to the car. Finally, his slippery fingers grasped the correct one and the door obeyed when he yanked it open. He promptly climbed in the driver's seat and closed the door with a bang.

Joe sighed as he turned the key in the ignition, hoping and praying that *his* distributor worked properly. When the car purred in response, he eased out of the parking space. While glancing at his watch he saw that it was ten minutes after five. He hoped Gracie hadn't been waiting long for him. But he was unsure of how long it would take to get to her in this rain, with the morons who thought they knew how to drive on the freeway, and nervous teenagers in the car next to him braking impulsively trying to avoid an accident. He hoped the young man driving the red Mustang wouldn't decide to cut in from of him. In an instant, Joe slammed on his brakes, hoping the car behind wouldn't ram into him.

He didn't feel a jolt, but to himself, told those damned teenagers to go back to Driver's Ed. On this evening home, especially in this downpour, he had to be steadily alert and couldn't stop to think about what had transpired during the day, if the interrogation with Carrie and Donna had gone well enough, or whether they would finally get a hold of Shelly's parents at that damned hotel. He couldn't even pause to light up a *Chesterfield*.

When he careened into the parking lot of where Gracie worked, he stopped near the entrance of the building, but kept the engine idling. Within a matter of seconds, he saw Gracie run to his car, her yellow flowered cream-colored blouse and brown skirt getting soaked through, with her hair disheveled, and sticking to her face.

"I see you got caught in this too," Gracie said after she shut the door. "But it looks like it's clearing up." She pointed in the direction of where the cloudy sky was about to disappear. While Joe backed out, she fumbled in her purse for a comb and began to fix her hair to make it look somewhat decent. Once it was combed through, and a clump gathered in her hands, she snapped the clasp of the brown clip and glanced in the visor mirror in front of her.

"I guess this'll have to do in the rain," she replied, looking herself over one more time before folding the visor, and dropping the comb into her purse. "Luckily, I chose not to wear mascara today!"

She slid over to Joe and gave him a hug and kissed him on the cheek, thanking him for picking her up. He let his hand fall from the steering wheel to her hand and gave it a squeeze of approval.

“It’s worse than it was this morning,” he murmured, drifting into another lane, while Gracie enveloped her arms around his waist.

“*Not* now, honey, this kind of weather is what causes accidents that could’ve been prevented.” He didn’t mean to sound so callous just then, for he was responding in another way to her touch that was beyond his control. Trying his best to ignore the ignited feelings inside, he stared straight ahead, as the traffic slowed bumper to bumper.

When the Chevy in front of Joe completely stopped, he did the same. He ran his hand down his face in frustration and sighed. Just then, the car in front of him began to crawl ahead. *Why can’t people learn how to drive in the rain?* His mind could not provide an answer to that question. As if a giant force was navigating the cars, they stopped and crawled, stopped and crawled down the freeway for what seemed like hours.

“If they don’t get moving soon, I’m going to run out of gas,” Joe said. “Dammit, I *knew* I should’ve had the car filled up this morning!”

“You’ll be okay, I’m sure there’s plenty left,” said Gracie.

Gracie—always the peacekeeper and positive thinker, he thought and felt a surge of love for her just then that if they were in a remote area, he would... He couldn’t bring himself to finish *that* thought. Instead he took her hand once again into his gave her fingers a kiss.

“I hope you’re right,” he said, looking straight ahead, bringing her hand to his chest and pressing it there, while leisurely continuing to caress her fingers.

They were stuck in traffic for the next half hour. During that time, the discussion of dinner was brought up. They both agreed on eating out since it was going to be a late night getting home. While they waited, Joe turned the knob on the radio, just in time to hear an orchestra begin the song “Oh, Johnny! Oh Johnny! Oh!”

After two songs and The Mills Brothers’ “Til Then” played, traffic began to pick up. Margaret Whiting was next after a commercial break and sang about “Faraway Places” as Joe turned into a filling station. He saw an attendant approach him, and he rolled down his window. The rain had decided to quit at that moment.

“What’ll you’ll have, sir?” asked the teenager in a mechanic’s uniform.

“A full tank,” said Joe, as the boy went right to work.

Joe sat back and relaxed as he heard the *ding-ding-ding* chime at every gallon the pump unleashed into the car. While the tank filled, the boy took a rag from his back pants pocket, opened the hood and checked the oil. After stuffing the rag back into his back pocket, he proceeded to clean the windshield.

The dings on the gas pump had stopped while the boy finished the windshield. He then ambled over to the pump to remove the hose and turned to tell Joe the total owed. Gas was 10 cents higher in downtown Los Angeles at .39 cents a gallon compared to .29-.35 cents a gallon in the suburbs. Joe handed the attendant the exact amount and thanked him.

Afterward, they roamed the streets looking for someplace to eat. It seemed as though everyone in the city had the same idea, for when a restaurant had been found, the parking lot would be overflowing with lingering cars and people standing outside as they waited for a table to open up. Finally, they found a nice restaurant called the Round Robin on Ventura Boulevard in Sherman Oaks. This place hadn't been attacked yet by the rush-hour bug, but cars were swarming around in the parking lot.

As Joe and Gracie walked arm-in-arm to the entrance, they noticed that several other couples and a family with two children were right behind them. Not wanting to wait awhile for a table to open up, Joe only held the door for Gracie and then let it go for the next person to grab. *Selfish, yes, but dammit I'm hungry!* He thought to himself.

A hostess sat them down in a corner table that sported two windows. Each way someone looked, people on the sidewalk went about their own business, entering or exiting shops that lined the street. Both sat wordlessly, as the hustle and bustle continued outside, while they peered at their menus. A large red robin loomed in the middle of the menu, surrounded by a medium-green circle that bared the name of the restaurant. An address with a phone number for reservations sat near the bottom of the cover in smaller print.

It was common to see famous stars from movies and television shows here, for Joe had lunch and dinner several times already at the Round Robin. But at that moment, when looking up from their menus and ordering drinks, glancing around, they didn't see anyone famous. Joe felt like a Crown Royal but knew better because he was driving home and besides, there was plenty at his apartment waiting. Gracie ordered lemonade with a shot of vodka, while he had a Coke with ice.

After they ordered two sirloin steak dinners, the discussion of favorite radio programs came up. Since no large or small screen notables were present, perhaps they might see someone who was in radio not so long ago. But after looking around the restaurant quickly, they could not spot anyone.

“What shows did you listen to growing up?” asked Gracie, after she took sip of her lemonade.

“Oh, let me think now... I just loved listening to *Fibber McGee and Molly*. I'd rush to get my homework and chores done on Tuesday nights for that one. The next evening, after dinner, of course, I religiously listened to *The Great Gildersleeve* and on Thursdays it was *The Aldrich Family*. Remember Henry Aldrich and his comical friend Homer Brown?”

“Yes, I sure do. I’ll never forget the ‘Henryyyyyy, Henry Aldrich!’ cry of his mother, and then his crackling response, ‘Coming Mother!’” replied Gracie, taking another sip. “I listened to the others you mentioned too.”

“My Aunt Mary always listened to *Ma Perkins* every day around lunchtime. She wouldn’t miss that show for anything! She’d get lunch finished and rush into the living room and turn on the radio, just in time for the announcer to pitch *Oxydol*. I know this because if there was a school holiday or I was home sick, I’d sit with her and listen.”

“How sweet,” Gracie chuckled. “I use to listen to *The Shadow*. That one scared me. I would run into my sister’s room and hold onto her, staying close for comfort.”

“*Lights Out* scared the hell out of me as a kid. I remember when I was very young, I used to listen to the console radio in the living room and then run down the hall to my room and throw the covers over my head. I’d be shaking with fear, but my aunt or mother would come in then and tell me that it was just a story on the radio. They had been listening too from the kitchen.”

“I was too afraid to listen to shows like that.”

“I remember I listened to the scary shows as a kid into my teens before I left for the war. After I came home, I didn’t feel like listening to shows like that anymore, even though I knew they weren’t real. So, I stuck to comedies like the ones mentioned and others like *Jack Benny* and *Bob Hope*.”

“Did you listen to crime dramas?”

“Oh sure...sure, they were a laugh riot of course, with the great detective, the ditzy blonde, and dumb cops. On a really bad day or night, we’d wish real life was like that. Most of the time, the case was always solved in a half hour.”

“Did you work nights then when you got back from the war?” Gracie took another drink.

“Yep, I did. I even do now, when I’m scheduled to. Lately, I’ve been on daywatch, as you know, but that could change in a split second.”

“I would never see you if you worked nights.”

“I’d miss you terribly also, but let’s be glad that for now I’m working days.”

By then, their food had arrived and both devoured the meal in silence. Joe didn't want to bring up old haunts of the nights where, at two in the morning, you had to wake up the parents because their teenage son was killed by a hit-and-run driver. Or yank their heads out of the sand when word got around that their "precious little boy" was peddling dope in school. And there was the boyfriend getting the girlfriend to "fit in" with the crowd and do heroin...only to die of an overdose. When someone was murdered and next of kin were located...it was the worst, especially when those involved children and teenagers. The parents would scream, shout, curse, punch a wall, and there wasn't anything you could do to make them feel better. Even though they were taking their emotions out on you, you had to remain calm and collective. Never let your temper get in the way of the job.

Joe wished at that moment he could order a Crown Royal. He didn't like the memories that had been stirred up and it all came about because their favorite radio shows had been brought up. He knew he'd be thinking the current cases once again. It was funny how a single memory could weave a tapestry of emotions and unpleasant recollections. Neither of them spoke as they continued eating.

Joe set down his fork and retrieved the book of matches and a cigarette from his jacket pocket. He paused briefly to light it and after exhaling, he asked Gracie how her day had been.

"Oh, the usual. All I did was answer phones and file a lot of paperwork. I set up a few appointments this afternoon for next week...nothing too exciting."

"I have days like that at my job too. Not too many, but they appear from time to time. The day goes very slow when you're on a stakeout. Those could go on for hours—all day or all night and into the next day. The good thing about today is I got paid."

"We'll have to celebrate," said Gracie, grinning, as Joe nodded in agreement knowing exactly what she was thinking. After all, it was the weekend.

"The bank will be closed by the time we finish here, so I'll have to wait until Monday to deposit the check."

"Do you have enough for this?" she said, pointing to her almost empty plate.

"Oh sure, always do. I don't want to see you paying for anything when I'm around!" He chuckled.

As an old-fashioned rule, Joe felt it was customary for him to pay. It was how he was taught and he wasn't going to change now. Another reason he adored Gracie was that she never took advantage of him when it came to money. In the past, ages ago, he'd dated girls that would bleed him dry before the night was over. When he'd return home with empty pockets and wallet, he knew never to call them again.

Joe knew that Gracie had no desire to tag along with the women's liberation movement these days. Although she was independent, Gracie remained old-fashioned at heart. And there was nothing wrong with that. Not everyone had to be liberated. He felt she was forward enough in bed and that was liberating enough for him. A smile crept across his face at his recent thoughts.

“What are you smiling at?” Gracie asked, finishing her drink.

“Oh...I...I was just thinking of some of those radio programs I used to listen to...”

He was a gentleman and did not divulge on his inner thoughts, especially in public. There were a few more minutes of silence as Joe cleared his plate and drank the rest of his Coke.

“Would you like some dessert or are you too full?” asked Joe.

“I’ll pass on the dessert tonight. I feel so content right now, I don’t want to spoil it by overeating.”

“I’ll do the same,” he replied as the waiter came by and handed them their bill.

On the way home, the radio was turned low with Margaret Whiting serenading Joe and Gracie this time with “It Might As Well Be Spring.” Gracie, who snuggled up close as he drove, murmured that she loved that song and remembered at fifteen, begging her mother to get her the record for her next birthday. With her arms around his waist, she gave him a light squeeze and hummed along with the radio. Her hands began to meander underneath his jacket, running her hand over the handcuffs attached to the belt and then finding the pistol.

“Don’t touch that,” he said in a stern tone, pushing her hand away.

“Is that a pistol in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?” she purred the Mae West line.

Before waiting for any kind of reply, her meandering fingers tenderly massage him.

“Ahhh, you’re happy to see me! Is it okay to touch this?” she said, smiling from ear to ear, giggling.

“*Don’t do that!*” he laughed, although loving every bit of it. “We’ll get into an accident.”

He took her hand away from his zipper and intertwined his fingers with hers.

“That’s the last time I’ll let you have vodka,” he said, not meaning one word. Gracie was so cute when she became amorous. “We’re almost there, Honey,” he leaned over and murmured into her ear, and kissed her, although not inviting his tongue inside due to the stoplight turning green. He let go of her fingers and turned onto a street. This only caused her hands to be right back where they weren’t supposed to, this time her index finger traced the invisible, yet obvious bulge.

“Can you imagine the headlines?” Joe said deeply inhaling at the movement below.

“What headlines?” she whispered as she kissed his cheek.

“What am I going to...tell them when...*oh... stop* that, Honey, I *mean* it.”

“You’re enjoying this too much,” she whispered, while running her hand up and down.

“Oh, please...stop...*stop*...”

Luckily, he had turned into the apartment parking lot just then. Any longer on the road and the results could've been disastrous. He stared straight ahead and felt enormous joy when an empty parking space neared. With Gracie's playfulness, he hadn't been paying attention as to how close he was to the parking block. In seconds, they both knew.

“Now look what you made me do!” His insides suddenly felt disheartened. He hoped no one had seen what just happened for the sky was slowly getting darker.

Thankfully, there was no damage done to the car, for he checked before retrieving Gracie from the passenger side. When Joe opened the door for her, he grabbed her hand and pulled her to her feet. After locking the door, he shut it. Before Gracie could pull anymore stunts, he already had his entrance key out and slid it into the lock. Holding the door open for her, Joe followed her inside, and up the staircase. She stepped aside for him to open his door. Once it was closed behind them, he went to the one drawer and put away the handcuffs, and pistol, while shoving the keys into his pocket. The drawer slammed and he sauntered over to her.

Before she could say anything, he took her head into his hands and bent to kiss her with his tongue ferociously pushing its way into her mouth. She returned the favor, while his fingers ran through her hair. He pushed all of himself to her and continued to kiss her extra hard, circling and swirling trying to feel every inch. The only sounds heard were their moaning at the intensity of it all.

He had to admit, he was a little frightened at his sudden move. But his instincts were crying out, it was the only way to relieve anything that had almost erupted on the way home. His hands automatically tugged at her blouse, his fingers quickly and masterfully unbuttoning the buttons, as his mouth moved from her lips to her neck. He didn't stop when the open blouse revealed perky breasts, with the nipples hardened beneath her bra. He pulled away for only a moment and slid her skirt down. A frown crossed his face at another obstacle of fabric, a satin slip with a lacy hem. As he removed her slip, Gracie unhooked her bra in haste. She now stood in only her garter belt, nylon stockings and underwear.

He dropped to his knees, went to remove her underwear, only to mutter, “How the hell do you get this goddamned thing off!” He had been referring to the garter belt. He watched, with his eyes not leave her mid-section, as she began to slowly unhook the belt.

Joe stood up and waited impatiently, as one stocking fell, then the other with her stepping out of them. He then reached for the elastic of her matching satin underwear and wrenched them loose. As she pushed her clothing aside, he began to take off his jacket, dropping it on the floor next to him. The keys in the pocket made a dull thud as they hit the carpeted floor. While he unbuttoned his shirt, he took a few steps back and glared at Gracie to follow his every move. He'd stop for a second to remove his shirt. When he'd done that, Joe felt her finger's unbuckling his belt, and undoing his pants. Now in his boxers, she took a hold of the swelling that immediately sprung to life, playing with it and teasing some more. Joe took her hands into his and led her into the bedroom.

What he did next even surprised him. His insides were so ready and willing that he pushed Gracie on the bed. While she scrambled toward the middle of the quilt, she gazed at Joe as he removed his boxers and climbed on top of her. With one heaving thrust he entered as she cried out at the abrupt tightness and shock that ran through her. Her gasps grew more intense as he impelled her consistently. His breathing quickened at each continuing plunge when at last he cried out as the rising climax enfolded him. It was as if at that particular moment, he'd been shot in the back, Joe collapsed on her, still breathing heavily.

“Don’t ever do that to me again,” he said in a husky voice. “Get me all worked up like that and then stop....”

All Gracie could do was laugh and give a playful punch in his arm. She ran a hand through his hair. They both lay sideways on the bed, exhausted. Joe was the first to fall asleep.

Chapter 5

The Big Hush
(A *Dragnet* Fan Fiction Story)

By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter Five

Joe felt somewhat rested as he ambled into the office on Monday morning. It appeared as if Bill had not arrived yet, however, as Joe gazed at the mail in his box, in waltzed his partner with two steaming cups of coffee. He slid the mail back into his slot, turned and sat down at the table.

“How was your weekend?” asked Bill, after taking a swallow of coffee.

“It was fine,” Joe replied, carefully drinking from his cup. He then reached into his pocket and found the matchbook and a new pack of cigarettes.

“Did Gracie get her car fixed?”

“Yeah, we picked it up on Saturday,” said Joe, striking a match to light a cigarette.

“What else did you do?”

“Bill, what’s with all the questions?” Joe was getting irritated now. “You do this almost everyday. ‘How was your evening?’ ‘How was your weekend?’ ‘What else did you do?’”

“Well, there’s no reason to get all upset, besides I’ve always asked you about your weekends.”

“And evenings,” chimed Joe.

“And evenings,” Bill replied. “But it’s different now, Joe. Don’t you see?”

“How is it different?” Joe took a drag of his cigarette.

“You’re dating now,” Bill replied.

“Yeah, so?” said Joe.

“You have to admit that your weekends and evenings are more exciting with a woman in your life.”

Joe gave an exasperated sigh. “Bill, if you’re going to mention the word *marriage* in the next few seconds, I’m not listening. I don’t want to hear anything about that right now.”

“Okay, okay,” said Bill. “All I wanted to know is how your weekend went.”

“All right! You *want* to know what we did?” he said, smashing his cup of coffee on the table, only to have some slosh out and spill. Ignoring what had just occurred, before Bill could utter another word, Joe said, “On Saturday, we picked up Gracie’s car at the repair shop. Then, she drove it back home. After that, I showed her where I used to live on Collis Avenue and then we spent the rest of the day at the beach. Are you satisfied or do you want a play-by-play of Sunday as well.”

Joe got up from the table and briskly walked out of the office. He didn’t mean to sound so cross with Bill. It was just that ever since he began dating Gracie almost six months ago, it was question after question. Maybe Bill was more excited about him dating than Joe was. Still, the constant interrogation about his personal life was getting to be overwhelming. Deep down, though, Joe knew the real reason for his outburst.

It was 8:15 when Joe glimpsed at his watch, still puffing away on the *Chesterfield* as he took the elevator to the floor that housed the cafeteria. Since he had missed breakfast this morning, he bought himself a cinnamon roll and another cup of coffee. Only a small number of tables were filled with personnel and uniformed cops. The empty round tables dotted the place. Joe found a table furthest away from anyone and sat down. He pulled the ashtray that had sat in the middle of the table toward him and stubbed out the remains of his cigarette. He then took a sip of coffee and bit into his cinnamon roll.

It had all begun on Saturday when Joe showed Gracie the house on Collis Avenue. While explaining about what the interior looked like when he lived there, a flood of memories about his mother came back to him which caused a lump to develop in his throat. Gracie had put her arm around him and gave him a squeeze, but the mournful hurt inside continued. A feeling of guilt had crept up for not thinking of his mother recently, who had only been gone a month.

As Joe and Gracie went around the neighborhood, he shared memories of his mother with her, even though the despondent feeling did not go away, and pointed out that the neighborhood hadn’t really changed all that much—with the exception of a modern car in the driveway and a few parked on the street. And of course, every household had a TV antenna on the roof. Joe told Gracie that he used to walk the neighborhood alone and think, especially before he left for the service. Back then, as he told her, he would count how many cars had an “A,” “B,” or “C” ration sticker to indicate how many gallons they were allowed each week.

Children’s bikes littered the driveways of many houses. They saw a woman in a cotton housedress planting flowers in her garden. A tri-colored beagle, hooked to a chain that was tied around a tree, lay lazily on the grass. When Joe and Gracie neared the dog’s territory, it automatically sat up and gave them a bark of intrusion. While passing other houses, they came across a man sitting in his driveway sharpening up the blades on his reel push mower, as the smell of freshly manicured grass filled the air. He looked up from what he had been doing and waved to Joe and Gracie. Once, a woman sitting in the swing on the front porch said “hello” to them as they walked by. *If you close your eyes*, Joe thought to himself, *you could feel yourself go back thirty-five years.*

Later that afternoon, while sunbathing on the beach, he still felt wistful about his mother. But that horrid guilt didn't want to leave either. When Gracie suggested that they take a stroll, Joe obliged and took her hand. To him, the beach was such a fun, romantic place to be. They walked near the water and passed by kids building sand castles with buckets, other sunbathers, and saw a young girl collecting seashells.

"I used to do that," said Gracie. "Collect seashells like she's doing. I once found these two shells that were so beautiful. I set them on the windowsill in my bedroom and when it was too cold to go to the beach that day, I'd pick one up, put it to my ear and hear the ocean."

Joe turned and smiled at her, picturing her as a child, like the one they walked by, holding a seashell up to her ear.

"So many bikinis," Gracie remarked, as they passed by a few couples sunbathing and dozing in the sand. "They're so risqué. I had a bikini once, but didn't care for it. To me, it was very uncomfortable and I felt so exposed when I went to the beach with it on."

"I love you in your one-piece red bathing suit," he said, then lowered his voice, "I love you out of it, too."

"Joe!" Gracie laughed, giving him a playful punch in the arm. "I bought that suit shortly before I met you. Soon, after I met you, I found out your favorite color was red."

She suddenly stopped talking and inconspicuously pointed out the "May-December" romance as a couple went passed them.

"Would you look at *that*? He's old enough to be her *father*!" Gracie said, as Joe nodded in agreement.

"I'm too old for that shit," he said, then apologized for his use of stronger language. "Sorry, there's a lot on my mind lately." He gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "I can't understand what someone around my age would see in a young thing like that—other than the obvious," Joe smirked. "You know *he's* getting a thrill out of it. The girl probably wants his money and succumbs to him anyway." *All he really wants and cares about is getting a good lay with the girl that's old enough to be his daughter.* Joe said to himself.

"Joe! Stop! That's disgusting, thinking of that man and that young girl that way."

"It happens," he replied. "Some people can't help themselves I guess. One day, hopefully, they'll realize that they absolutely have nothing in common besides the one thing and the girl can live a decent life."

When Saturday came to an end, the melancholic mood and guilt followed Joe into Sunday. Early that morning, around four, Joe found himself sitting in the kitchen with a Crown Royal in his hand, trying to justify or understand his current feelings. Gracie had appeared in the kitchen and sat with him. He finally explained what had been on his mind and apologized for his foul mood.

It was Gracie who let him realize that his mother would be so happy for him, that he found someone to share his life with and it wasn't just a fling. For he always told her how his mother would want him to settle down one day. Joe knew all of this of course, but couldn't shake that guilty feeling.

While talking, as daylight peeked through the thin curtains in the living room, Joe poured out his heart to Gracie, sharing more memories about his mother, and finally got around to what else had been bothering him. He explained that he was having a wonderful time with her and had never been this happy with anyone else in his life. Joe went on to say that he enjoyed their common interests and conservatism. How they agreed a lot of the same old fashioned morals and values. After half an hour, he finally confessed what he was leading up to.

"I need my sleep," Joe said. "This is very hard for me to say because as you know, talking about it in any kind of detail is so difficult. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is...we both need to get proper sleep during the week. We can have our...fun on the weekends. These past weeks have been so awful for me. I want you, but I need my sleep. Do you understand?"

"Oh Joe," she replied, taking his hand into hers. "Sure I understand. While I enjoyed our times together during the week, I've been so exhausted too. We probably should just be together on the weekends. I know how important it is for you to remain alert at all times in your job. And I wouldn't want to be the cause of anything drastic happening to you."

"Oh, thank you so much, you're a darling," he said, breathing a sigh of relief. "I will admit this...I'll miss you dreadfully during the week."

"Don't worry, we can still see one another in the evenings, watch television or—"

"You know damn well what I mean," he said, grinning.

"I know. I'll miss you too," she replied, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

Joe brought himself back to the present and took the last bite of his cinnamon roll. It was so difficult to get to sleep last night that he kept wondering if Gracie felt the same way. His body gave other signals that he tried to ignore, but that was next to impossible. He had thought about calling her, but decided against it because he didn't want to go back on his word. And he really needed his slumber.

Downing his cooled coffee, Joe made his way back to the office.

"Joe! Are you all right? Where did you go?" asked Bill.

"I'll be okay, Bill. Sorry for the outburst earlier. A lot's been on my mind."

"Oh, I *know* it has."

"Bill, that's enough!"

"I'm keeping quiet."

The two of them sat down at the table and the phone rang.

“Homicide, Friday talking,” he said and then paused for a few seconds to retrieve a piece of paper and pencil. He scribbled down a phone number. “We’ll be right there!”

Joe explained that Dorothy Richmond, the girl they had seen on Friday in the dorm was alive and awake, but couldn’t see too many visitors. Joe and Bill were an exception of course. The doctor who had called relayed him the phone number and number of Dorothy’s room. Hopefully, she’ll be able to remember the events that landed her in the hospital and not the morgue like the cases before her. This could be a break of some kind.

Even though the code of conduct and procedure required Joe and Bill to arrive at work a little before eight in the morning, after that phone call, it appeared as if their day would officially begin once they entered the hospital.

Chapter 6

The Big Hush
(A *Dragnet* Fan Fiction Story)

By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter Six

The doctor had given Joe and Bill only a few minutes to talk with Dorothy Richmond. The entire time they stood by her bed asking the most relevant questions, Joe noticed that she didn't look at them at all. Her eyes were fixated on the ceiling and arms lay limp at her sides, one wrist sporting a hospital I.D. bracelet whereas the other was punctured with an I.V.

The girl's insolent attitude pierced through the room. She couldn't understand why she was there instead of her dorm room. After hearing about how she nearly died from excessive hemorrhaging, and that her roommate had brought her here, all she could do was snap at them, "Why don't you ask Donna? She knows all the answers. Leave me alone." She then gave a laugh and kept the smirk on her face.

"We decided to talk to you first," said Bill. "Do you know the address of the apartment building you went to on Thursday night?"

She shook her head no and then spoke.

"I didn't think I was almost going to die," she said. "The girl told me it was going to be easy."

"Who told you that?" asked Joe.

"A girl in the dorm told me about that place, where I could get rid of my baby. She said it was safe. That'll teach that bastard Danny before he ever—"

"All right, that's enough from you!" It was Joe's turn to snap. "You say you didn't think. Well, let me tell you something. Neither did the other victims. Only they aren't in a hospital bed. They're at the morgue. You would've been there too if it hadn't been for your roommate, Donna."

"Well, I told you to go talk to her."

"Is that all you can say? I don't think you realize how lucky you are to be alive. Because of Donna, we're able to track down who did this to you and others," Joe retorted.

"She's such a baby, so naive," Dorothy said, not listening to a word Joe was saying.

"When you get out of that bed I want you to look in the mirror," Joe stared at her, remembering what Donna had told them on Friday. "You'll see a *truly* naïve girl staring back."

Joe stalked out of the room. Bill walked beside him as they left the entrance of the hospital. Just then, Joe stopped to light a cigarette. After taking the first drag, he continued, nearing the space where Bill had parked.

About twenty minutes later, they found themselves sitting on the sofa near the entrance of the girls' dorm. When the girl at the desk phoned Donna's room, there was no answer.

"She might be in class," the girl replied after hanging up the phone. "You can wait here. Classes should be letting out soon. I've got one in an hour."

So, they waited. A half hour went by. Several girls came into the dorm and went down the hall to the cafeteria. An hour floated by and finally they saw Donna walking toward them, hugging a few textbooks.

"How's Dorothy? Is she okay?" Donna asked before even saying hello.

"She's fine, Donna. We spoke with her this morning," answered Joe. "What we need from you is the address of the apartment you went to on Thursday. Dorothy didn't remember the address."

"Oh, I'll get that for you. I saw her put the address into her pocket after she called for a cab from the payphone in the lobby. I think the paper is still there. Let me go get it."

Before Joe or Bill could reply, Donna, with her books pressed to her chest, ran up to her and Dorothy's room. Several minutes later, she returned, waving the evidence in her hand, stretching her arm out as far as it could go, as she dashed toward them.

"Here it is!" she said. "Right where I thought it was. In her dress pocket. Luckily, we hadn't done a load of laundry yet."

"Thank you, Donna, this is a great help to us," said Joe.

"Would you like me to go along to show you which apartment it was?"

"I think we can handle it from here," said Bill.

"When will Dorothy come back?" Donna asked.

"In a few days," replied Joe.

"Oh, okay. The whole floor's asking about her. She always was popular, she told me."

"She may be popular, but not for the right reasons," said Joe.

"I know what you mean," Donna said. "I've learned a lot in these past few days."

While in the car riding back to Parker Center, Joe suggested that after they brief the captain on their lead, he thought it would be a good idea if policewoman Dorothy Miller accompanied them. Since there had been a secretary, she may have additional information to provide about her so-called employers.

Before either of them could enter the captain's office, they found an irate couple waiting. The minute they saw Joe and Bill, they sprung from their chairs and demanded if one of them was Sergeant Joe Friday.

"Yes, I'm Sergeant Joe Friday," Joe replied, flashing his badge and I.D. as proof.

"What is the meaning of this?" A brown curly haired man in a navy blue suit commanded. "My wife and I just flew in from our vacation. The hotel clerk said we had several messages from you!"

"Yes, sir. If you please tell me your name, maybe I can help you," said Joe.

"My wife and I hadn't been on a vacation in ten years! The minute we go away—" the man retorted.

"Sir, please! What is your name?" asked Joe.

"I'm Frank Forrester and this is my wife, Marjorie. I want to know what the hell's going on!"

"Frank!" cried Mrs. Forrester, who stood beside him, in a crumpled skirt and blouse. Her hair was in a headband. Several loose strands clung to her face and hung in her eyes. It was obvious that they had been traveling.

"Watch your language!" she said as an embarrassed yet tense look fell across her face. "Officer, we're a little surprised here. We got all of those messages at the hotel. We're on our way home, so we decided to stop in and see what's going on. Is anything wrong?"

"I'm afraid so, Ma'am," said Joe.

Upon hearing the name Forrester, he immediately realized that they had finally gotten in contact with the deceased daughter's parents.

"What happened?" asked Mrs. Forrester, with a hint of terseness in her voice.

"Why don't the three of us go into a room down the hall. We'll talk there. Please follow me," said Joe.

Joe left Bill in the office, while the couple followed him into an empty interrogation room.

"Sit down," Joe said, motioning to the two empty chairs and pulled one out on the other side of the table for himself.

"Those messages I left with the hotel clerk concern your daughter, Shelly," he began, only to be interrupted by Mr. Forrester.

"What? What's wrong with Shelly? Did she get into trouble?"

"Yes," replied Joe.

“That can’t be. She’s always been a good girl. She’d never do—“ Mrs. Forrester said only to be interrupted by Joe this time.

“Ma’am, *please*, if you let me finish,” Joe said with a sigh. “I wish I didn’t have to be the one to tell you this, but...your daughter Shelly is dead.”

A heavy, thick cloud of silence filled the air as the news sank in.

“Are you...are you sure about that?” whispered Mrs. Forrester.

“Her boyfriend, Larry Watson, found her,” continued Joe.

“Found her? What do you mean?” said Mrs. Forrester.

“Marjorie, shut up!” exclaimed Mr. Forrester.

“Listen, *both* of you,” said Joe. “Your daughter’s boyfriend found her in the apartment. Apparently, she had died from hemorrhaging.”

“*What?!*” cried Mrs. Forrester.

“She hemorrhaged to death due to an abortion.”

“No!” she cried, flinging her hand over her mouth, gasping. “She didn’t...she never told me she was—“

“You mean to tell me that that son-of-a-bitch Larry got my daughter pregnant?” demanded Mr. Forrester.

“Yes. And she didn’t even tell Larry about her condition or the abortion,” said Joe.

“Frank, please!” Mrs. Forrester was sobbing now. “Why? Why did she *do* this?”

“Larry asked that very same question,” he replied softly, then explaining that whoever performed the abortion on Shelly had done this to other girls as well.

He informed and reassured them that the police were doing their best to find the murderers. It wasn't the right time to ask, but Joe needed the parents to sign a few papers.

So, he had them follow him back to the office. The three of them, somber, walked single-file down the hall back to where Bill was sitting at his desk. When the necessary paperwork was taken care of, Joe went to the file cabinet and pulled out one of the drawers once again. The bag that contained Shelly’s belongings was snatched up by him, who then turned around to present it to the parents.

“This is for you,” said Joe quietly.

“What’s that?” Mr. Forrester asked, pointing near the bottom of the bag.

“What’s what, Mr. Forrester,” asked Joe who was puzzled at the father's abrupt question.

“That shiny thing there. What is it?”

Joe dug into the bag and retrieved Larry’s class ring, still on a gold chain.

“This is Larry’s class ring,” Joe replied, about to hand it over to Mr. Forrester. “He gave it to Shelly and she put it on a chain.”

Instead, of taking the ring, Mr. Forrester grabbed the chain and yanked it from Joe’s grasp. In a spurt of rage, he threw it against the wall. The room fell silent as the ring cracked against the wall and landed with a heavy *clink* on the floor.

“I don’t ever want to see that ring again!” the man hollered, his face showing two shades of crimson. “Come on, Marjorie, let’s go claim our daughter.”

Joe watched as Mr. Forrester tightly gripped his wife’s arm and led her out of the office. Slowly, he walked over to where the ring had landed. He bent down and slipped the gold chain on his hand. The ring swung back and forth. It appeared that it had not been damaged from being hurled against the wall. He gave it a closer look and to his amazement, from what he could see, no scratches or cracks dotted the gold or stone in the middle. Silently, he got out another bag, labeled it and set the ring inside, only to close it in the file cabinet once again.

There was no time to think or analyze the couple’s behavior. Joe knew they were in shock and stunned about the death of their daughter. But what continued to perplex him was the fact that they didn’t get a hold of him sooner. He watched as Bill got up from his seat and headed to the captain’s office.

Joe was right behind him as his partner rapped on the door. When Captain Hugh Brown called, “Come in!” he pushed it open.

In the next fifteen minutes, the two of them informed their captain about everything that had happened since Friday, all the way up to getting the address to the apartment and the conversation with Shelly’s parents. Joe brought up the idea of policewoman Dorothy Miller tagging along since there was at least one woman in the operation. He agreed to let her go along. To cover all of the bases, a search warrant was rendered. The captain wished them luck on their endeavor as they exited his office.

Joe, Bill and policewoman Dorothy Miller, who sat in the back of the unmarked gold 1967 Ford Fairlane rode silently to their destination. After slowly crawling down the street, passing one apartment building after another, Joe announced that the one before them was the correct address.

Like all of others they had passed, this one had been standing for quite some time. It looked as though the brick hadn’t been cleaned in several decades. The cement steps leading to the entrance were all cracked from badly poured concrete. A sign on the front door read *No Vacancies* in shaky writing.

Joe wrenched open the front door. A musty smell of grease, alcohol and mothballs greeted them. The floor creaked loudly underneath them. Stains dotted the wearily and thinly threaded carpet in the hallway. A single, naked light bulb hung above them, slowly swinging back and forth from the door opening just then. There were eight apartments in the building and the one they wanted was on the second floor, number four. The three of them trudged up the ancient staircase, the floor whining with each step until they found themselves standing in front of number four.

Joe pressed his ear to the door but didn't hear anything on the other side, so he knocked. After tapping a second time, he circled his hand around the doorknob and turned. Part of him was surprised that it opened, whereas the smarter side of him realized the truth. With his other hand, holding his pistol, he pushed open the door so hard that it banged against the wall.

The three of them peered around the living room, half in disbelief that the entire apartment was...empty. Joe watched as Bill and policewoman Dorothy Miller went down the hallway, and checked out the bathroom and two bedrooms. He went into the kitchen. A forlorn refrigerator stood in the corner, and a rusted white stove sat against the other wall. The floor was cracked and very dirty, just as Donna had described it. When he found himself back in the living room, he saw that the carpet was indented where furniture had been. Joe could see the four marks a chair with metal legs would've made when people sat down. Besides the carpet was as threadbare, or worse than downstairs in the entryway. A longer rectangular indentation was found across from the row of invisible chairs. He imagined the secretary's desk there. Both Bill and policewoman Dorothy Miller found similar markings in each of the bedrooms, where supposedly a bed had stood. It was clear that the operation had fled quickly.

"What are you three doing here?" Joe heard a man say near the door. "What's with the guns? Are you cops or something?"

"Police officers," said Joe, putting away his pistol to show his badge and I.D. to the balding man with horn-rimmed glasses. "I'm Sergeant Joe Friday. My partner's Officer Bill Gannon and this is Policewoman Dorothy Miller. Are you the landlord?"

"Yes, I am. Did you want to rent this place?" he asked, with a fat cigar hanging from his mouth.

"No. You see, we were tipped that an abortion ring was held in this apartment."

"What? Abortion ring? You've got to be kidding."

"Do you have an application or any other records indicating you had tenants here in the past month?" asked Joe.

"Well, no. You see, I don't deal with applications and such. As long as the tenants pay their rent on time, I don't care what they do behind closed doors."

"Even if it's murder?" asked Joe flatly.

"Now, wait a minute. How can you be so sure an abortion ring was going on up here?"

“We have witnesses,” said Joe. “Your address was written down by someone who was here on Thursday night. Would you know anything about the people that lived here?”

“Well, the only thing I remember is that this man came up to me about a month and a half ago. He needed an apartment and so this one was available. He told me he was the only one who needed it. I just told him that he had to pay the rent on time or else he was out. He agreed and that was the last I saw of him.”

“What did he look like?” asked Bill, with his pencil poised and ready.

“He was about as tall as you,” the landlord said, pointing to Joe. “He had dark brown hair. Very clean cut. But I didn’t know there were others living with him. He told me it was just for him. Boy, if I ever see him, I’m going to tell him...is he going to be in trouble!”

“That’s the understatement of the year,” replied Joe.

Chapter 7

The Big Hush
(A *Dragnet* Fan Fiction Story)

By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter Seven

Three weeks passed since the empty apartment had been found. In that time, one girl was found dead from a self-induced abortion—very similar to the other one in early May. It seemed as though the abortion ring was quiet or perhaps they were seeking a new place to set up business.

In the past few weeks, Joe and Bill worked on other cases. One dealt with a husband who was a psychiatrist and ended up chasing his wife around the house with a cleaver. The wife ended up locking herself inside the basement, only to crawl out of the window and run to a neighbor. At an interrogation, it turned out that the man himself was seeing his *own* psychiatrist. Joe suggested that the husband find another profession if the one he was in was too stressful for him to handle. Attempted murder was not the way out.

Joe also saw Larry Watson again, shortly after the brief encounter with Shelly Forrester's parents. He felt it would be proper if Larry was given his school ring back. He'll never forget the day when the boy came to the office.

"I wish I wasn't the one giving this back to you," said Joe, handing him the gold chain that held his class ring. "The truth is that Shelly's parents didn't want her daughter to have it."

"I know. I tried calling them, but they wouldn't talk to me," Larry said softly. "They think it was my fault."

"You and I both know it wasn't your fault," replied Joe. "But one day, perhaps, you'll feel the same way for another girl, as you did Shelly. I know I have. And when that day comes, you can give *her* your class ring."

An image of young Sadie flashed into Joe's mind. She had been his childhood sweetheart who suddenly died of polio the summer both of them were eight years old. Still, he knew that Larry's situation was different. He also knew that one day Larry would be happy again, like Joe was with Gracie now.

"I didn't think I was going to get it back. I wouldn't have minded though because I knew Shelly would always have it with her."

"It belongs to *you*, Larry. You're still here and you should have it until the time is right."

The boy clasped the ring in his hand, turned away from Joe and walked out of the room. He stood there and watched as Larry took a white handkerchief from his pants pocket to dab his watery eyes. He stood there until Larry rounded the corridor and his frame was out of sight.

It was on Thursday, May 29th when Joe came up with an idea. He thought of the many times throughout his years as sergeant at how often the policewomen assisted with a case by becoming decoys. He remembered one particular case that had landed on his desk not long after his first partner, Sergeant Ben Romero, unexpectedly died of a heart attack.

Back in 1952, it was a commonplace for housewives to leave their infants in the baby carriage while they went into the supermarket to do their shopping. Other times, babies were left alone in the car with a window rolled down. Even going through neighborhoods then, Joe remembered seeing baby carriages right outside the house on the front porch. There was a time when a mother didn't think anything would be wrong with doing these things.

But soon, someone went around stealing babies from unattended carriages and cars...only to return them twenty-four hours later. A good Samaritan would call the police station, saying they found an abandoned baby in a cardboard box at MacArthur or Echo Park. They were physically unharmed, although they endured exposure from the sun. After four babies were left alone in similar circumstances, Joe and his temporary partner at that time realized a pattern had developed.

The policewomen had been a great help in that case, acting as young mothers going about their daily business, only walking away from the carriage for a second. Lifelike baby dolls laid in place to lure the kidnapper to them. Joe and his temporary partner had soon discovered that a woman who couldn't have children was stealing the babies wishing they were her own.

That case had been a lucky one—no one was seriously wounded or killed. There were plenty of cases that involved decoys that Joe could remember just then while sitting at his desk, catching up on endless paperwork. But the one about the abandoned babies flashed quickly through his mind. *That seems like such a long time ago*, he thought to himself. Today, in 1967 Los Angeles, a mother would not *think* of leaving her baby alone anywhere outside of the home. Times sure have changed in the past fifteen years.

Joe's mind began thinking about how the policewomen could help in this current case. Since word spread around about such things like who was having the next party, where to get drugs, and even where one can obtain an abortion in the colleges across the country, perhaps policewoman Dorothy Miller and others could act as students for a time, and maybe find some leads.

He ran the idea by Bill who agreed with him, and then both traipsed into Captain Hugh Brown's office to discuss it. The captain said the idea could be useful, but he couldn't spare any of the policewomen for a long period of time. He gave them a week for their plan of action. This consisted of the policewomen attending the campus where Dorothy Richmond was found. He firmly repeated that a week was all he could give and mentioned that probably now was the best time to begin this objective since the spring semester ended very soon.

Captain Hugh Brown dialed the Dean and explained the situation. With the Dean's approval, he was then able to call the Admissions Department, academic advisors to help create class schedules, and the college's Housing Authority. All of those with the highest rank or most seniority in these areas knew that four women would only attend college for a week and not even participate in Final Exam Week.

Captain Brown hung up the phone after making several calls; he recommended policewoman Dorothy Miller and three other policewomen to pose as students for the next week, starting tomorrow. He summoned all four into his office, and briefed them on the situation. Joe and Bill agreed to meet at the Student Union building to get a progress report. Since the Student Union building was a public place, it seemed to be the ideal place to meet, rather than the cafeteria at the girls' dormitory.

That afternoon, the captain had the policewomen receive a new identity for the following week. They would obtain a social security card, along with a driver's license with their alias noted. The four policewomen were to report to specific people at the Admissions Department, visit with certain academic advisors, and the Head of the Housing Authority on campus Friday morning--dressed as college students. They were to attend classes during the day, listen to what was said around them, and be on the lookout for parties or dorm floor gatherings in the evening.

Eventually, once they were seen around campus, they could soon mingle with others and drop hints indicating that they were in "trouble." They all hoped that would be enough information to find what they were looking for. Every day at all three of the mealtimes specified, till the Friday of the next week, they were to be in the Student Union to meet with Joe and Bill. Their schedules would be arranged so no one would have a class at eight in the morning, one in the afternoon, or six in the evening.

The four policewomen, along with Joe and Bill went to the college to get an idea of the layout and find the proper buildings they were supposed to be at the next morning. The women also glanced at how college girls dressed these days.

When five o'clock rolled around, Joe said that he would see them just inside the entrance of the Student Union building at eight o'clock tomorrow morning. He reminded them that the academic advisors would schedule their classes to coordinate with the meal meetings. The last thing he said before leaving for the day was that he wanted to meet four nice looking college girls soon. A grin was on his face while the four left the office giggling.

The next morning, Joe and Bill sat at an empty table in the Student Union building near the entrance. When they saw four women approach they knew it had to be policewoman Dorothy Miller and the others. Just before they arrived, both men joked about having four women at their table. They sat down at the same table and gave a report.

According to policewoman Dorothy Miller, they met the assigned people who knew their real identities and soon were supplied with a school I.D., class schedule and dorm rooms. Two rooms in the girls' dorm where Donna Peary and Dorothy Richmond lived were occupied by the policewomen. One room was situated on the same floor as Donna and Dorothy. Policewoman Dorothy Miller had seen Donna in the hall, but did not make eye contact or speak with her. The girl had glanced at her too, but she wasn't recognized. This meant that her appearance must've been well established. Dorothy Miller and her current "roommate" had spent hours that morning trying to get their hair to look just right for their first day of classes.

The other two policewomen were on the floor above. Each had packed a suitcase at home, filled with college-age clothing—a couple of blouses, skirts, dresses, and pajamas. They told Joe and Bill that the Head of the Housing Authority had supplied them with linens for their beds. The verbal report went on

about a girl carrying a textbook and notebook under her arm, who lived on the same floor. She had stopped by policewoman Dorothy Miller and her “roommate’s” room, before heading to her eight o’clock class, asking if they had just transferred here from another school. Policewoman Dorothy Miller supplied the girl with the information that yes, they *had* transferred, but from a different dorm on campus. She hoped that answer would satisfy her, which it had with the girl nodding in response and leaving to go down the hall. And they all explained their class schedules that had been conducted by two of the academic advisors.

It seemed as though the first report of the new plan had gone smoothly. Joe and Bill hoped that the rest of the week would be just as successful. Joe thanked all of them for their time with this case and then told them he’d see them again at one that afternoon.

When they met again in the same spot at lunchtime, an almost identical report from that morning had been given. Joe wondered if meeting three times a day was too much. He would remember to ask the captain about that. Perhaps twice a day would be better—in the mornings and evenings. However, the weekend was approaching fast and since Joe and Bill were off, they would not see the four policewomen until Monday morning. He wondered how their first and only weekend on campus would unfold. Joe hoped that they would have some valuable information the next time he saw them.

Chapter 8

The Big Hush
(A *Dragnet* Fan Fiction Story)

By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter Eight

In one ear, Joe could hear the faint static sounds of the afternoon Dodger game broadcast from someone's transistor radio. That was two chairs from where he and Gracie were sitting by the pool at their apartment complex. In his other ear, he heard another transistor radio straining out the sounds of The Hollies, "Look Through Any Window." Not too far behind him, he heard snippets of Nancy and Frank Sinatra's hit song, "Something Stupid." In the middle of these frequencies, other sunbathers and swimmers voices rang from one end of the kidney bean-shaped pool to the other.

"Watch me dive! Hey Mom, watch me dive!" cried a boy on the diving board.

Within seconds, Joe watched the aspiring young diver with his hands pressed together over his head, while he leaned slightly forward. The boy's body seemed to freeze in that stance, but then descended off the diving board and into the deep end of the pool. The boy's head resurfaced not long after that; still shouting to see if his mother had been paying attention to him. The boy half swam, half doggie-paddled to the nearby ladder. Joe observed all of this as he sat on the lounge chair. He glanced over at Gracie, still immersed in a novel entitled *The Group* by Mary McCarthy. She didn't look up as another page was turned.

No matter what he tried to focus on, the thoughts of the policewomen at the college were always within reach. Distracting himself from incoming thoughts about work had been accomplished with little success. It was supposed to be a relaxing day for the both of them, but Joe's mind wandered back to the decoys. It was all Gracie's fault anyway.

About two hours had passed since they arrived at the semi-crowded pool and found two empty lounge chairs side-by-side. *If only Gracie hadn't brought that damned book with her!* Joe thought. No, he knew better. It was *his* fault. Out of curiosity he had asked what *The Group* entailed. When she remarked about the women in the story graduating from Vassar in 1933, he immediately wondered if anything had emerged with policewoman Dorothy Miller and the others. He hadn't heard anything else Gracie had said about the book after that. He just gave a nod of approval and then did his best to dodge any work-related thoughts. Otherwise, the weekend had gone smoothly. Joe kept reminding himself that it was Sunday and he would find out what he needed to know the next morning at the Student Union building.

The nagging thoughts about the decoys finally dissipated as Joe's mind turned to Gracie. Their new arrangement was working out well. During the week, the excitement of the weekend and spending time together would slowly mount. Joe knew that even though the sex itself was brilliantly satisfying for each of them, with their age and maturity both also understood that the rising anticipation was sometimes more gratifying and pleasurable. The much needed rest during the week was surely welcomed by Sunday night and then everything would start all over again.

Joe fumbled through Gracie's beach bag for a *Chesterfield*. When he grabbed one from the pack buried underneath the suntan lotion, shirts, towels, snacks and bottles of Coke, he rummaged around some more for the matchbook. Sighing as he pulled both contents out, he carefully lit the cigarette. His nerves began to ease as he took another drag.

After smoking in silence for a few minutes, Joe set the cigarette in the ashtray that sat on the table next to him, where a ribbon of smoke loomed upward. A shadow descended upon them suddenly, blocking their view of the sun.

"I thought I'd find you here," a voice said.

The figure looked out of place to be at a pool with his pressed slacks, button-down white shirt, and tie. A sports jacket hung over his arm. It could have only been one person.

Joe sat up straight and said, "Bill?"

He saw Gracie from the corner of his eye, set her book down on her lap.

"Sorry to have to ruin your weekend, Joe. But they've been trying to get a hold of us at the office. Well, when you couldn't be reached, they phoned me. We have a break, Joe," he said.

That was all he needed to hear. Gracie told him to leave everything and to just go and she would talk with him later. He quickly kissed her goodbye and told Bill he'd meet him at the entrance of the apartment building in fifteen minutes.

In record time, Joe showered and dressed in his pressed slacks, white button-down shirt, and gray sports jacket. He found his pistol in the correct drawer and his badge and I.D. had been on the nightstand. He shoved badge 714 and his I.D. into his breast pocket and ran out the door, almost forgetting to lock it up behind him. He found Bill waiting near the mailboxes in the building and out they went.

Joe followed Bill in his car to Parker Center. There, they would pick up their unmarked vehicle and head over to the Student Union building for the urgent meeting.

About twenty minutes later, both Joe and Bill walked through the doors of the Student Union and found the four policewomen waiting for them.

"What's going on?" asked Joe, as he and Bill approached the table.

"I didn't think we'd have a break this quickly, but so far, so good," said policewoman Dorothy Miller.

"What happened?" asked Joe, as he sat down in an empty chair across from them and Bill sat beside him.

"The floor we were on," policewoman Dorothy Miller began, as she pointed to herself and her college "roommate" who sat next to her—policewoman Enid Brown.

“They had a record party in one of the girl’s rooms. Nothing unusual happened for about an hour, but then we all went upstairs to another girl’s room to see what records she had. We all sat around in the dorm room, just talking about other students, our classes, and then someone brought out a bottle of scotch.

“All four of us declined the invitation, saying we weren’t twenty-one yet. But some of the girls took to the offer and poured it into their Coke bottles. The girl, who this room belonged to, went to change the record on the phonograph when someone had asked her how she was feeling. In short, this girl had gotten herself pregnant by a boy on campus and thanked her friend for telling her what to do about it.”

Policewoman Enid Brown picked up the story from there, explaining that she timidly announced to the group that she was in “trouble.” The one who had changed the record informed her of a place where she can get things taken care of.

“I called them,” said policewoman Enid Brown. “A girl answered the phone, asking me how far along I was and how I got the number. She told me I could come in on Wednesday morning. I asked if she had an earlier time available. She put down the phone and I heard muffled voices. A man and that girl—the receptionist who had answered the phone—were talking. I couldn’t hear what they were saying, but she came back to the phone and asked me if Monday was okay. I wondered if a weekend appointment was open and she dropped the phone again. When she came back, she informed me that they were all booked up on Saturday, and had one opening on Sunday at five in the evening.”

Policewoman Enid Brown pulled a slip of paper from the pocket of her skirt and handed it to Joe.

“This is the address,” she said. “What would you like us to do?”

“Only one of you will come with us,” said Joe. “Neither of them know what you look like, Enid, so we’ll have Dorothy come along since she went to the last apartment. She’ll pretend to be you who had called,” he said.

Joe went on to say that he and Bill, along with two other teams of detectives also working on abortion cases in other parts of the city, would be there to cover the front and rear entrances of the building. The slip of paper read that the operation was situated on the fifth floor of the building.

The men informed the four policewomen that they would spend one more night on campus and then head back to Parker Center Monday morning. Joe told them that he would call the necessary faculty involved once the offices on campus were open. After glancing at his watch, Joe noticed it was after four.

“We better hurry, or you’ll miss your appointment,” replied Joe, looking over at policewoman Dorothy Miller.

It didn’t take long for the three of them to find the apartment building. Ironically, it was in the same neighborhood as before, only down the street a little ways. Before leaving the Student Union building, Joe called Captain Brown from a nearby payphone and briefed him about everything. The superior said that the two other teams of detectives would be on their way as well.

At five minutes to five, everyone was in their proper place. Joe and Bill watched from the hallway as policewoman Dorothy Miller went into the correct apartment. The two of them went closer to the door and Joe pressed his ear against it. He heard a girl speaking, most likely the one who had answered the phone when policewoman Enid Brown called. He heard policewoman Dorothy Miller say that she was here for the appointment at five.

They waited a few more seconds and then walked in.

“I’ll be with you in a minute!” the girl called from down the hall.

Bill and Joe could see the girl leading policewoman Dorothy Miller to one of the rooms. He heard the girl knock on the door and say, “Doctor Belmont, your five o’clock appointment is here.”

The apartment was very much like the other, only the layout was flip-flopped. The desk and metal chairs lined up against the wall were exactly how Donna Peary had described them. Joe went over to the desk and confiscated the appointment book. It had been lying open to the page where Sunday’s appointment was marked in red ink. He quietly rifled through a couple of drawers and came across documents indicating each patient had indeed been pregnant. In another drawer, he found the cash box. It was empty.

When Joe sat down, both he and Bill heard a muffled voice from inside one of the rooms. A door opened. They could see everything from their vantage point, whereas those down the hall could not see who was waiting for them.

“So, you’re my five o’clock appointment,” the man said standing in the doorway of the bedroom, in a white lab coat. “You’re our only patient today. We’re usually closed on Sundays, but you sounded urgent, so we made accommodations for your appointment.”

“I’m afraid you’re going to have to cancel that appointment,” said Joe, walking down the hall, holding his pistol in one hand and producing his badge with the other. Bill was close behind.

“You don’t want to miss this one...police officers...” Joe continued.

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Bill, policewoman Dorothy Miller, the secretary, the man who called himself Dr. Belmont and his young assistant all filed into an empty interrogation room at Parker Center. After Joe changed the card to read “Interview in Progress” he shut the door behind him, placed the two bags of evidence on the table near the window, then went over to the only empty chair in the room and sat down.

“What’s your full name?” barked Joe.

“Doctor Robert Alvin Belmont,” the man in the white lab coat replied.

“How old are you?” continued Joe.

“Thirty-eight,” Dr. Belmont said.

Joe could see that this doctor was beginning to gray around the temples.

“Are you a real doctor?” asked Bill.

“What kind of an idiotic question is that?”

“Well, are you?” asked Joe.

“Of course.”

“Is your real name Robert Alvin Belmont?” asked Bill.

“I just told poker-face over there, yes it was!”

“If you say you’re a doctor, you had to have known what you were doing was illegal,” said Joe.

“Illegal? What was illegal? We were helping these poor girls out,” Dr. Belmont answered. “Besides, your books about the law must be outdated.”

“How do you mean?” asked Joe.

“Come on, cop, you should know! They’ve recently changed the laws about abortion. It’s not illegal like it was.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, pal,” retorted Joe. “Those recent laws indicate that a doctor can perform an abortion legally only if the victim was raped or the fetus is harmful to the mother’s body. Looks like you didn’t study hard enough for your exam.”

“So, the girls we helped, they could’ve been raped,” Dr. Belmont said. “I don’t know, I don’t ask such personal questions.”

He was silent for a few seconds before continuing.

“They didn’t want it. They told me so. I did them a favor.”

“It wasn’t just you,” said Joe, looking at the girl and the young man.

“How did you come into this operation?” Joe asked the young man with the unruly brown hair. He absent-mindedly always pushed it out of his face.

“Well, I...I’m a med student and I needed a job. I met Doctor Belmont here and he gave me a job.”

“Which was?” asked Bill.

“Helping him with his patients.”

“What’s your full name?” asked Joe.

“Gary…Gary Alan Steele.”

"How old are you?" Joe asked.

"Twenty-three."

“What did you mean by when you said, “”helping him with his patients?”” asked Joe.

“Just like it sounds,” Gary said, staring at the table.

“Tell us what your job description was. How did you end up meeting Doctor Belmont?” said Bill.

“Well, I…was looking for a job, something to help me get through school, you know. I met Doctor Belmont at a coffee shop in town. We struck up a conversation; I told him I needed work. He informed me that he was a doctor and needed an assistant for his small practice he was about to set up. He told me that I would learn more with him than I would in any class, that I’d get first-hand experience.”

“Go on,” said Joe.

“I asked him what his practice was and he said it dealt with babies. I…I took the job, it sounded good.”

“When you realized what really went on in the apartments, how did you feel about your new job then?” asked Joe.

“Well, I—uh—I stuck with it. He told me what we were doing was okay…that the laws had just changed. So, it was okay.”

“Now you,” Joe said, as he pointed his pencil at the secretary. “How did you find employment with Doctor Belmont here?”

“It was the same with Gary. I’m in school too and Doctor Belmont needed a secretary,” she answered.

“What’s your full name?” asked Joe, who began a third page in his notepad dedicated to her.

“Debbie Louise Norton.”

“How old are you?” asked Bill.

“Nineteen.”

“How did you feel when you found out what Doctor Belmont did in his practice?” asked Joe.

“I knew what went on, but I just did my job as a secretary.”

“Would you excuse us for a second?” asked Joe, as he tapped Bill on the shoulder to follow him, and winked at policewoman Dorothy Miller to keep an eye on the three suspects.

They both went into the hallway. After shutting the door, Joe asked Bill to run the three names through R&I and get back to him. They parted ways and Joe went back into the Interrogation Room.

“I want to show you all a few things,” Joe said, as he wandered over to the table by the window and picked up both bags.

He set them loudly on the table and sat down. Reaching into the first bag, he pulled out a stack of papers.

“What are these?” asked Joe.

“It’s right on the page, cop, you look at it,” said Dr. Belmont.

“I want **you** to tell me what these papers are!”

“They’re documents from the campus doctor, indicating that each girl was pregnant.”

“How did you obtain them, since they came from the campus doctor?” asked Joe.

“When an appointment was made, I’d call the campus doctor and ask for a Photostat of the paperwork. I’d explain that I’m a new doctor in town and these patients came to me.”

“It looks like some were from other doctors, not associated with the campus,” remarked Joe.

“Yes, some of them brought in their own documentation from another doctor they’d seen.”

Joe tossed the stack on the table and then pulled out a gray metal box.

“What’s this?” he asked, looking directly at Debbie.

“It’s the cash box,” she replied.

“Where is the money you took from the girls?”

“I’d give it to Dr. Belmont at the end of each day. Each week, he’d divide it amongst the three of us.”

“When policewoman Dorothy Miller frisked you, she found the bills she’d handed you before we came in. They were in your pocket,” said Joe.

“I put the money there because I couldn’t just leave the cash box. Anyone could just walk in. You two did.”

“You weren’t planning on spending it yourself?” asked Joe.

“No, I was going to give it to Dr. Belmont after the appointment was over.”

Joe moved to the second bag. He brought out several medical utensils, forceps, and other tools any doctor would recognize. He held up each one and asked Dr. Belmont and then Gary Steele what they used them for. By the time they got to Gary, his face was pale and looked like he was going to be sick.

“You seem to be sick, Gary,” stated Joe.

“Yeah...it’s different when you’re, you know, actually doing it. You get used to it after awhile. But when you talk about it in that much detail....”

A knock sounded on the door. Joe got up and found his partner standing in the hall. Once both of them were in the hallway again, Bill told Joe the news he received at R&I.

“Doctor Belmont, that’s an alias. The man’s real name is Doctor Robert Alan Belford,” said Bill.

“So, he really *is* a doctor?” asked Joe.

“Yes, in Chicago. Once I found out his real name, I called the authorities in Chicago and they informed me that his license was revoked last year.”

“For what?” asked Joe.

“Performing illegal abortions,” replied Bill.

Dr. Belmont, who in turn was really Dr. Belford, wasn’t new at this practice at all. Both men wondered how many other girls he had done this to, who had died soon after. It was going to be a long interrogation.

Chapter 9

The Big Hush
(A *Dragnet* Fan Fiction Story)

By: Kristi N. Zanker

Chapter Nine

For nearly five hours, Joe and Bill grilled the three suspects. Questionings could end in a matter of minutes or lapse into hours or even days at a time. It reminded Joe of troop advancements when he was fighting the war in Europe. Everyone thought or hoped that they would travel several miles each day to their next objective, only to proceed a few yards or a quarter mile if they were lucky. Once the unit had preceded, either a mundane obstacle or surprising enemy artillery attack would cause them to be at a standstill yet again. The progression that was made in one day seemed like it was insignificant and still very far away from the result. This was how Joe felt now. They were slowly inching forward, but still going around in circles.

When it had reached four hours, Joe came up with the idea to read off the names of the girls who had died. After reading three names and receiving the same answer of “I never heard of them,” it was time to move on to the next question. Besides, they were all getting restless.

Gary’s hair kept falling into his face, causing him to sweep it away from his forehead, Debbie couldn’t stop rubbing her nose or biting her fingernails, and Dr. Belmont’s eyes rolled so much that Joe couldn’t believe they weren’t stuck that way already. It was getting warm in the room for Joe noticed that Dr. Belmont had unbuttoned the first two buttons of his shirt and loosened his navy blue tie that peeked out from behind the white lab coat. Debbie’s purse fell with a muffled thud on the floor and she left it there, embarrassed to bend over and retrieve it due to the extreme shortness of her purple mini-skirt. Gary continuously tugged at a dangling button on his green and white striped polo shirt, only to have it give way and fall to the floor, creating a piercing sound throughout the otherwise quiet and sometimes voiceless room.

“Did you ever make house-calls?” asked an exasperated Joe.

“Not that I know of,” answered Gary who paused then started again. “Wait a minute...yeah...twice, I think. Yeah, Dr. Belmont gave me two house-calls.”

“You just went into these houses and—“ said Bill.

“No, it wasn’t like that. I had done enough procedures that Dr. Belmont thought I could handle a house-call or two. So, he gave me a couple of names and addresses,” replied Gary. “I don’t know what happened afterward. I remember telling each one that if they didn’t feel right, they should give the hospital a call.”

“We told all of them that,” said Dr. Belmont. “It’s not our fault that they died.”

Joe ignored Dr. Belmont’s remark and continued.

“Were those the only two house-calls you made, Gary?” Joe asked.

“Yeah, they were the only ones. I didn’t know those girls died though. I really didn’t,” Gary’s voice caught as he spoke.

“Well, Doctor Belmont, you say you don’t remember any of those girls I mentioned a few minutes ago? Shelly Forrester, for instance?” asked Joe.

“That’s right.”

Instead of answering Dr. Belmont right away, in the bag that had held the stack of documents from the campus doctor, Joe pulled out a notebook. He opened it and began to read the girls’ names and the times of their appointment. He noticed that after the time of the appointment had been written down, he read that the majority of patients saw Dr. Belmont and a handful had seen Gary Steele. After he finished reading the entire log of the past month, he closed the notebook and held it in front of him.

“This *is* the notebook you used when taking the appointments, is that right Miss Norton?” Joe asked as he pointed at Debbie, who sat next to policewoman Dorothy Miller.

“Yes, it is.”

“Do either of you recognize this notebook?” asked Joe with his eyes peering right at the two men.

“Dumb broad! I told you not to leave that out where everyone can see it!” cried Dr. Belmont.

“That’s enough!” said Joe. “Answer my question.”

“Yes,” replied a shaken Gary. It looked as though the news of the girls’ deaths had finally gotten to him. His head was down when he spoke again.

“I didn’t want anyone to die. I thought I was doing the right thing. Doctor Belmont told me I’d get better experience away from the classroom.”

“And it looks like it’s an experience you’ll never forget, son,” said Joe.

“Stupid kid! You weak son-of-a-bitch!” seethed Dr. Belmont.

“I *told* you that’s enough, Doctor Belmont! Or should I address you as, *Doctor Belford!*” said Joe.

The thirty-eight year old man’s face went pale as if he’d just discovered he was sitting in the room with a ghost.

“Yes, that’s right. Doctor Robert Alan Belford, from Chicago, whose license got revoked. You’re not new to this game, that’s for sure,” said Joe, staring right at him. “When you felt the heat, you hid until you found a new place to open business.”

“I told you, cop, we were doing them a favor! We don’t like to stay in one place too long. And I’m telling you, I didn’t know they died, honest, I didn’t.”

“I don’t think you know the meaning of the word *honest*,” said Bill.

Joe threw the notebook down on the table in anger as he stalked out of the room. He saw Bill give him a questioning look, but he would report to him later. Right now, it was back to the office to make an important phone call.

The only person alive who would remember one of the men was Dorothy Richmond. Joe didn’t have her number; he had the number to the dorm though. But, since it was so late, who knows who’d be at the front desk now? It would be better to go in person. He sat at his desk, smoking a cigarette and thinking.

Yes, he *could* drive to the girls’ dorm and bring Dorothy Richmond back with him tonight. The idea of having a victim walk past the room where the known suspects were at was nothing new, but in this situation it could work out, if done correctly. Joe threw the girls’ dormitory information into the middle drawer of his desk, stubbed out the rest of his cigarette, and went back to the interrogation room.

He opened the door slightly.

“Bill, could I see you for a minute?” Joe asked.

Seconds later, Bill opened and then closed the door behind him.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

“I thought I’d get Dorothy Richmond over here to identify them in there. She should be able to identify the secretary and one of the men,” Joe said.

“Do you realize what time it is, Joe?” asked Bill. “It’s nearly ten! She could be out.”

“I know. But this is our only chance. The other girls can’t be here and she’s the only one. So, I’ll go pick her up at the dorm right now. Send Dorothy Miller out, will you? She’ll go along with me.”

Bill went back into the interrogation room and told policewoman Dorothy Miller that Joe wanted to see her in the hallway. When she shut the door behind her, Joe briefed his idea and the lady nodded in response. Next, the two of them went to Captain Hugh Brown’s office to get permission to go ahead with this idea. After the captain listened to Joe explain what he had in mind, the superior told them that it was fine to carry this out.

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The sitting area right near the entrance of the girls’ dorm glowed as they pulled into a parking space. The two of them went straight to the front desk and asked if Dorothy Richmond was available. The blonde-haired girl with the high tease in her hair called upstairs. After she hung up the phone, she told the two of them that Dorothy would be down in a few minutes.

Joe and policewoman Dorothy Miller sat down and waited. They heard a door open behind them and someone called Joe's name. It wasn't Dorothy Richmond.

Standing in front of them now, was Donna Peary, her roommate.

"Dorothy's not coming," she said. "She has a lot of studying to do."

"I'm sure she can take a break," said Joe.

"No, she doesn't want anything to do with you or whoever did that to her."

"May we see her?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know."

"Donna, we need her to identify the man that did this to her. We need *both* of you to identify the secretary. Do you think you can tell her that?"

"I know I can identify the secretary...I'll see if she'll go with me."

"Can we see her?" asked policewoman Dorothy Miller. "She doesn't seem to realize how important this is for everyone."

"Okay...follow me."

They followed the girl in the pastel pin-striped sundress through the door, up the stairs and finally to their dorm room.

"What are you doing here?" asked Dorothy Richmond the moment she saw Joe standing in the doorway of her and Donna's room.

"I'm here to help you, Dorothy. And then, I need you to help us," he said.

"What for? I don't want to deal with that anymore. I'm trying to forget what's happened to me. But you coming here just brought it all back. Go away! Both of you!" She sat on her bed with her index finger pointing to the hallway.

The hostility Dorothy promoted in the hospital room weeks ago had disappeared. Only fear and nervousness were left stretched across her face. A textbook laid sprawled open to a page on her lap. She wore a denim colored sleeveless mini-dress with a pleated skirt. Her hair was held back with a white headband.

"This is policewoman Dorothy Miller," said Joe, as the two of them walked in the room. Donna sat on her own bed, across from her roommate's, while Joe shut the door behind him.

“Oh boy, what is everyone going to think when they see *you* in here.” Young Dorothy scowled at Joe’s presence.

“They won’t think anything if you do the right thing,” he told her.

“They already say enough about me behind my back! I’m glad the semester’s almost over.”

“You won’t see these people in about a week, is that right?” asked Joe.

“It’s Finals Week starting tomorrow. Thank you for reminding me. I have to study now.”

“Dorothy why don’t you listen to what they have to say. It really is important,” said Donna. “They want us to identify who did this to you. I can help you by identifying the secretary, but you can identify the person you were with in the back room at the apartment.”

“I told you I want to put all of this behind me and study for my exams!” she said.

“You’ve been on that same page for the last half hour,” replied Donna.

“Oh, go soak your head!”

“All right you two, that’s enough of that!” said Joe and then turning directly to Dorothy Richmond. “You don’t want this to happen to anyone else, do you?”

“Of course not!” she snapped.

“They won’t even know you’re there,” said Joe.

“That’s right,” replied policewoman Dorothy Miller. “Even I’ve done this in the past. All you do is you walk past the room, glance to see if they’re the ones and that’s it.”

“You’ll just walk down the hall like you normally do. You know how you peek into a room if the door’s open. Well, that’s what this is,” said Joe. “You don’t have to worry about anything. Policewoman Dorothy Miller and I will be there in the hall with you,” said Joe.

Dorothy sighed and shut her textbook.

“All right,” she said. “Just as long as I only have to walk down the hall. Are you sure I won’t have to talk to them or anything like that?” she asked.

“Absolutely, you will not speak to them at all,” said policewoman Dorothy Miller.

“Okay Donna,” she said, standing up and retrieved her purse off the back of the chair. “Let’s go and get this over with.”

Donna grabbed her purse as well and the four of them filed out of the room.

When they reached Parker Center and went in the elevator, Joe told both girls that policewoman Dorothy Miller would walk down the hall first and inconspicuously point to the room the suspects were in. She'd then wait at the other end of the hallway, as Donna, and then her roommate would walk down casually. Joe would be the last to walk past the door and the girls would nod or shake their heads if they recognized the suspects in the room once everyone reached the other end of the hall.

Policewoman Dorothy Miller walked slightly ahead of the three of them when they exited the elevator on the third floor. Joe tapped both girls on the shoulder to warn them to stop and wait until she reached the other end and turned around to face them. They all watched as the policewoman pointed to the room and then gave the signal for Donna to begin.

"This is almost like high school graduation or walking down the aisle or something," she whispered, while Dorothy snorted at the comment, and said "Oh, *brother!*"

"Go on now," said Joe. "Remember, take your time, don't run."

It seemed like an eternity before Donna was at policewoman Dorothy Miller's side.

"Okay, it's your turn. You can go now. Remember what you're supposed to do?" asked Joe.

"Yeah, I remember," she said, took a deep breath and sighed before making that first step to an answer.

Joe watched as Dorothy Richmond moved at a relaxed pace and saw when her head turned toward the room. When she stood next to Donna, Joe did the same. When his eyes quickly peered in the doorway, he could see Gary still with his head slightly down and Dr. Belmont saying something. Joe was out of earshot and couldn't hear what had been said by the time he reached the three of them standing there.

"It's her, it's her!" whispered Donna.

"Yeah, it's her all right and that guy in the white coat," said Dorothy, in a choked up voice, as they all walked back toward the office. No one looked at the room this time as they went past it.

"What's going to happen to them now?" asked Donna, when they got back to Joe's desk.

"It'll be up to a judge," said Joe.

"Are you going to tell them all of this?" asked Donna.

"In so many words. We'll tell them what they need to hear," said Joe. "We'll tell them the truth."

"With your help, everything can be done a little sooner," said policewoman Dorothy Miller.

"This is certainly a day I'll never forget. I just hope I never have to do that again. The next place I want to walk down is the aisle at church for my wedding or at graduation. Whichever comes first," said Donna, making everyone chuckle around her, including her roommate.

“No, I think this will stay with you for a long time. Both of you have learned a valuable lesson. But the most important thing is don’t ever let just anyone into your house of any kind. Do you understand what I mean?” asked Joe.

Both girls nodded and Dorothy took out a handkerchief.

“I know I’ll never forget. As much as I wanted to...I’ll never forget what happened to me,” she said quietly. “Not ever.”

The End

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