

WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND

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Published: 5-10-09 - Completed: 5-12-09

Prequel to Of Sorrow And Honor. Pete Malloy remembers the night his partner prior to Jim Reed was murdered in a warehouse burglary.



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I was cleaning out my desk when I came across the envelope with my name written on the back, along with the date of 1968. I was going to toss it into the box of personal stuff that I was taking with me, figuring I'd open the envelope later on. Humidity had sealed it shut, and after today, I was going to have all the time in the world to discover its contents. But just as I started to toss the envelope into the box, Jim Reed came into my office, plunking himself down in a chair across from me.

"Whatcha got?" he asked me.

"Dunno." I went ahead and pitched the envelope into the box. I continued my survey of the contents of my desk, not really paying much attention to Reed. I didn't see him snatch up the envelope.

"Malloy, 1968." He smoothed it out. "Pete, there's something kinda bulky in here...aren't you the slightest bit curious?"

"Not really." I looked up at him as I shut the final desk drawer.

"Well, I am," he said, taking the letter opener to it.

"Hey, have you no respect for privacy?" I snapped at him as he shook the item in the envelope out onto my desk. For a long moment we both just stared at the loop of black elastic that laid there.

Reed cleared his throat. "Sorry, Pete, I didn't mean to bring back a bad memory for you."

Picking up the piece of elastic, I cradled it in the palm of my hand. Surprisingly, it was still in pretty good shape. I guess being sealed away an envelope, even all those years ago, had preserved it.

"You know, I never really heard from you what happened that night." Reed said. "I mean, I've heard bits and pieces from the other guys, and I read the official report, but I've never caught your side of the story."

I laid the elastic back down on the desktop between us. "There's really not much to tell."

"But maybe now is the time to let it go." Reed's tone was gentle. "You can't carry it around with you forever. Fact is, life has gone on."

I leaned back in my chair. "Yeah, you're right. It is time to let it go." And for me, as I told my story to Jim, that horrible night came crashing back to me.

Howie Parker was my partner. He'd transferred in to our division two years ago from an outlying division, tired of his commute, and I liked working with him. He'd never prattle on about himself, nor was he cocky about his job as a police officer. He had a wife and a baby girl that he absolutely adored. I've often wondered if Sergeant MacDonald had changed the car plan that shift, pairing Parker up with someone else, the outcome would've been different. But, you can play with the could've, should've, would've's all you want, fate has its own plans.

It was raining that night, in fact it had been raining all shift, and showed no sign of stopping. Cold, hard, driving rain, that makes you shudder every time you have to get out of the squad car. Luckily for us, the most action we'd caught that night were two minor car wrecks, a tree limb down from the wind, and a driver who was lost in the maze of Los Angeles. The rain must have been keeping the criminals inside.

Howie sneezed. "I hate rain, it's making me catch a cold." He sneezed again, fumbling in his pocket for a handkerchief.

"Hey, you're dripping water on the floor, Howie," I said to him as we came up to a stop sign.

"Yeah, I'm thinking of turning Adam-12 into an ark."

"I just wish they'd put decent heaters into some of these older cars." I swiped at the windshield. "Ain't even taking the moisture away enough to see."

He laughed. "Be happy we even have windshield wipers." He pointed to a lighted church marquee. "Sunday's sermon: What You Leave Behind." He sneezed again, snuffling. "Sounds pretty dull to me."

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

"How wise, Pete. The great sage of Adam-12." But he shot me a wry grin, his comment meaning no harm.

I grinned back at him. "For that, maybe I oughta turn around and leave you behind at that church, let you get a little bit of preaching."

"Nah, I'd just give the poor folks a cold." He coughed. "God, I hate colds, and the rain, and this stupid car with the worthless heater, and a partner who isn't feeling sorry for me."

I patted him on the shoulder. "Poor old Howie. I feel even sorer for your wife."

"Why?"

"She has to take care of you when you get sick, not me." I steered the car down an alley that ran in back of a warehouse. "Think we'll take a run down the alley, then we'll call it a night."

We surprised the guy who was trying to pry open one of the office doors to the warehouse. He dropped the crowbar he was using with a metallic clang, but oddly enough, he didn't try to run from us, he just stood there.

Parker snagged up the radio mike. "Dispatch, this is One-Adam-12. We have a 459 suspect in the alleyway behind Polley's Warehouse at 4500 Clearwater Drive. Request a back-up unit." We both got out of the car and approached the guy. "Okay, pal, hands where we can see them..." was the last thing Parker ever said as the suspect suddenly decided to run. Parker splashed down the alleyway after him as I ran back to the car, to call out we were in pursuit.

Then I heard the blast of a shotgun and turned to see Parker fall heavily to the ground. I grabbed the mike, yelling out that we were under fire, officer down. The guy continued running down the alleyway, rounding the corner. There was the screech of tires, yells, gunfire.

Water dripped off of my coat as I knelt down next to Parker. Bright red blossomed viciously on his rain coat, running in rivulets onto the wet pavement. I put my hand to his chest, horrified at the sticky crimson that covered my palm.

And, as lightning flashed and thunder rumbled overhead, Howie Parker, husband, father, police officer, and friend, left his life behind in that filthy little alley; the cold, harsh rain washing his blood away.

Other police officers came in to the alley, I didn't pay the slightest attention to them. Hell, I didn't even care if they'd gotten the suspect. I could hear the babble of their voices, back and forth, as I stared into the dead eyes of my partner. I didn't even look up as Sergeant MacDonald and Lieutenant Moore knelt down next to me.

"Pete, we're gonna need you to come with us," Mac said.

I didn't move. "Could someone put a blanket over Howie? He hates the rain."

"Pete, he's dead." Moore's voice was gentle.

I looked up then, not at my commanding officers, nor at my fellow officers, but at the pouring sky. For just a second, I hated Howie Parker for dying. It quickly turned to anguish. I shivered as the rain hit my face, mixing with tears. "That should be me lying there, Howie's got a family to take care of..." my voice trailed off into a hoarse whisper. "It should be me."

"Pete..." Mac's voice sounded desperate. "Things happen. You couldn't have stopped it."

"We never should've taken that run down the alley," I sputtered. Coughing, I looked back down at Parker's body. "I should've waited for our back-up but we figured the guy was unarmed...I didn't even shoot back at him."

"Look, Pete, every shift is different, you roll the dice and take a chance." Mac grabbed me by one arm as Moore grabbed me by the other.

"Yeah," I half-sobbed. "Only this time we rolled the dice and my partner is dead."

Somehow, they got me to my feet. They walked me to MacDonald's station wagon, parked at the same alley entrance we had gone down. Men I knew and worked with acknowledged me with sad murmurs. "Sorry, Malloy, so sorry, Pete," until that alleyway seemed like a mile to Mac's car, and I wanted to scream as their words bounced off of me. Shock and fatigue hit me as they settled me into the front seat of Mac's wagon. My teeth chattered and I was chilled and soaked to the very core.

"Get him over to Central Receiving." Moore gestured to his own car. "Homicide's here, they'll take over, so I'll follow you in."

MacDonald hurried around to the driver's side. "Got it." He glanced over at me as he flicked on the lights and siren to his car. He didn't say a word as we left that horrific scene, a dead officer, a dead suspect in the wake of all. I shivered and shook in the seat next to him, silent. I couldn't admit to him, or myself that we had made rookie-assed, stupid mistakes in the way Parker and I handled the whole incident. We train for such things, and both of us were seasoned officers. But all the training, all of the manuals never prepares someone for seeing their partner die. No one tells you that you're going to leave a piece of your heart, your innocence behind in a dirty little alleyway on a routine shift.

And still the rain poured down.