

COP SHOT

A SHORT STORY

DAVID DELEE

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COP SHOT

Manhattan, Lower East Side

Under the Brooklyn Bridge

Saturday, 12:42 a.m.

DETECTIVE FRANK FLYNN pulled his unmarked car beside the concrete jersey barriers running along South Street and between the massive iron support girders of the elevated FDR Drive, where it intersected with the Brooklyn Bridge overhead. He checked his watch: twelve-forty-two in the morning. *A new day...for some of us.*

The second week of March and winter had yet to relinquish its icy grip on the city. A misty rain hung in the air, cold, a crystallized vapor fog. Brown, road-sand-encrusted piles of snow clung to the street gutters, the sloped sides of the jersey barriers and the iron-and-concrete uprights supporting the raised roadway—hard as granite now. Cars whizzed past on the wet pavement. Overhead, vehicles hit steel road plates with a thunderous, echoing bang.

Flynn stepped out into the weather, then popped the collar of his overcoat, thankful for what little shelter the roadways above provided from the rain. An icy breeze blew in off the East River, and Flynn shivered.

Several patrol cars were already on site, parked at angles inside the area walled off by the jersey barriers, their emergency lights flashing. Radios squawked, reverberating under the elevated roadways. Since the spot was used as a staging area for city-contracted construction companies, two yellow backhoes and a flatbed truck with a green cab were parked there beside bundles of rebar, steel fence posts and rolls of chain link fencing. Under blue tarps sat piles of lumber, brick and cinder blocks, alongside stacks of wooden pallets.

Flynn walked toward a gathering of uniform cops milling around one police cruiser, this one parked further in the shadows than the rest, its emergency lights dark and the driver-side door open. He held his shield in the air. “Flynn,” he announced as he got closer. “Homicide.”

The officers shuffled to the side, making room for him. At their feet lay a dead man.

Jet-black hair, silver at the temples, mid-to-late forties, the deceased had a weatherworn face, tanned, but now taking on a grayish death pallor. His eyes remained open, hazel in life, now they stared unseeing through a cloudy grey film. His hat had been knocked off his head, most likely as he fell. A uniformed cop, the victim had sergeant stripes on the sleeve of his open, department-issued leather coat. He didn't wear a vest.

Flynn stuck his hands in his pockets. It helped him resist the urge to touch anything as he squatted down beside the dead cop. The victim had been shot twice. The chest wound came first, followed by a bullet to the groin. The *coup-de-grâce*.

Flynn glanced up at the ring of officers watching him, looking to him for answers. He said, "For the record, this man is Sergeant Tom McNulty."

"Yeah, that's McNulty," one officer said.

"Weapon's still holstered," Flynn observed. "Whoever did this, McNulty knew, or at least he didn't consider to be a threat."

"McNulty didn't think anybody was a threat. Not to him," another officer offered. "Had a fucking Superman complex. Looks like it got 'em killed, too."

"But, they shot him in the balls," a third officer chimed in. "That's gotta mean something."

"Means it's personal," said a female voice.

The semicircle of cops parted to make room for this new arrival. Flynn stood up.

A striking woman in a black trench coat strolled through the opening made by the officers. She had long, straight, black hair; a runway model's walk and a gold detective shield pinned to the belt cinched tightly around her slender waist. Her hands remained buried in her coat pockets. "Christine Levy. Internal Affairs."

The uniformed cops backed away from Levy, as if she were contagious, had something they were afraid to catch.

Yeah, IA's attention. Flynn actually smiled.

"Something amusing, detective?" Christine Levy asked.

"Not really. But I'm curious. What's IA's interest in my homicide?"

"We have an open file on Sergeant Thomas McNulty. A big, open file."

"Well, I'd say someone just closed it for you."

A siren interrupted them as an ambulance pulled into the area, followed closely by a crime scene unit truck and the coroner's wagon. Flynn waved over one of the uniformed cops. Reading his name tag Flynn said, "Jones, you were the first on the scene, right?"

Jones nodded.

"Then this is your crime scene to protect. Better get started on establishing a perimeter. Get tape strung up..." Flynn pointed. "...There. There. And there."

"Yes, sir."

"You can cut the ambulance loose. Designate someone to log people in. Assign personnel to hold back spectators and media types when they arrive. The brass will be here soon, too, so make sure everyone stays sharp."

"Yes, sir."

Flynn handed the officer a hundred-dollar bill. "Send someone out for coffee, enough for everyone who's working the scene, for as long as the scene is active. Then organize a neighborhood canvas. Door to door, every building for a three-block radius. If that turns up nothing, expand it to five. A cop's been shot. I want actionable intelligence, no stone unturned, got it?"

"Yes, Detective." Officer Jones hurried off.

Flynn turned to Detective Levy, took her by the arm and led her out of earshot of the arriving crime scene techs now swarming the area. "First things, first. I'm the lead on this. It's my case. My collar."

With the crook of her finger, Levy pulled at a long strand of wet hair plastered to the side of her angular face and hooked it behind her ear. She blinked droplets of rain from her blue eyes. "No argument from me."

"Good. Second, I want everything you have on McNulty. No holding back."

"No problem, Frank. What I know, you know."

He didn't buy that for a minute, but inwardly he smiled. This chick was on the ball. He hadn't introduced himself to her, yet she knew who he was. She'd done her homework before coming out. *Probably has a file on me, too*, Flynn figured.

"Okay. Spill. What did Tom McNulty do to get noticed by Internal Affairs and did it get him killed?"

"I can't answer the second part, yet. As for what McNulty's done, it's more a case of what hasn't he done."

"I'm listening."

Reciting from memory, Levy said, “McNulty joined the department twenty-six years ago. His first run-in with IA came during the summer of ninety-three when investigators working for the Mollen Commission suspected him of accepting payoffs from drug dealers in exchange for protection. Fourteen cops were arrested in that case, along with ten drug dealers—”

“But not McNulty?”

“No. His participation couldn’t be independently substantiated.”

“Meaning, nobody rolled on him.”

“McNulty scares people. Since then, no less than seven separate IA investigations have been opened against him, for everything from theft, to accepting bribes, to excessive-force complaints.”

“But nothing’s stuck,” Flynn said, his voice harsh with revulsion. At Levy’s odd expression, he said, “Don’t look so surprised, Detective. The rat squad’s not the only ones on the job who hate dirty cops. Fifteen years I’m on the NYPD and I’m proud of every single one of them. Corrupt cops make us all look bad.” He glanced over at McNulty’s dead body. “Tell me what that dirt bag’s been up to lately.”

“Rape.”

Flynn’s jaw dropped. “Come again?”

“Rape.” Levy tilted her head. “Rape and robbery to be precise.”

“Go on.”

“IA received a complaint from two...hookers alleging Sergeant McNulty and his partner—”

Flynn held up a hand, stopping her. “Hold that thought.” He called out. “Jones?”

“Yes, Detective,” the young cop in charge of the crime scene called back.

“Who’s McNulty’s patrol partner these days?”

“Rookie named James Lance.”

Flynn turned to Levy. “That the same partner on the rape complaint?”

“It is.”

Flynn called out to Jones again. “This Lance. Where is he?”

“Called out sick. McNulty went out on patrol solo tonight.”

Mulrooney’s Saloon

9th Avenue, in Chelsea

Saturday, 2:57 a.m.

DETECTIVES FRANK FLYNN and Christine Levy found James Lance, not at home nursing a cold, but at a cop bar in Chelsea called Mulrooney's Saloon. The place had a long mahogany bar and a lot of brass, wood and neon beer signs. The back wall was a smoked glass mirror behind three shelved rows of liquor bottles. A jukebox played old Irish drinking songs.

At that time of the morning, James Lance had the place all to himself.

Flynn and Levy walked in and moved down the length of the bar until they reached Officer Lance.

Lance watched them approach by way of the smoked mirror behind the bar. A kid barely in his twenties, he had red hair, fair skin, and watery green eyes. Flynn could hardly remember being that young. The two detectives stopped behind him, flanking him. Lance began to get up.

"Don't," Flynn said, putting a hand on the rookie's shoulder to hold him in place. He sat down beside Lance.

Levy held her shield in front of Lance's face. "Police." Then she took the barstool opposite Flynn, boxing Lance in.

The off-duty cop licked his lips. "What's this all about?"

"I think you're going to need another drink." Flynn waved the bartender over. "Two scotches, doubles, straight up." He leaned past Lance to glance at Levy, giving her the opportunity to protest his flagrant violation of department regs against drinking while on duty.

To the bartender, she said, "Make that three."

When the bartender came back with their drinks, Flynn gave Levy an expectant arch of his eyebrow. Looking annoyed, she pulled two twenties from her purse and handed them over.

"Keep the change," Flynn told the bartender. He didn't want any further distractions.

Flynn sipped his drink, then put it down. To Lance, he said, "I'm homicide. She's IA. We're investigating the shooting death of a cop. You want to tell us why you called in sick tonight, because obviously, you're not."

"Hold on. A cop's been shot? Who?"

"Tom McNulty," Levy said.

Shocked, McNulty's partner said, "Tom's been shot? He's dead?"

"Yeah," Flynn said. "Good night to call out sick. He took two bullets. One here," Flynn tapped his chest with two fingers. "And one..." He pointed to his crotch. "...there."

"Can you verify where you were around midnight tonight?" Levy asked.

Lance twisted to look at her. “What? You think I killed him? No way. I was right here. Just ask Pete.” Lance shouted to the bartender. “Pete, I’ve been here all night, right?”

Pete stood at the far end of the bar drying glasses with a wet rag and staring through the rain-streaked window at Ninth Avenue. He paused to glance over. “Yeah. All night. Since around nine, nine-thirty.”

“He could be covering for you,” Levy said.

“Why would he lie? Why would I?”

“Why’d you call in sick? Tonight of all nights?” Flynn asked.

“I...” Lance took a large swallow of his drink. “Something was supposed to happen—”

“Like your partner getting his johnson blown off?” Flynn asked. “And, not in a good way.”

“No. No. Not that. I swear. Look, cards on the table. I’ll tell you...” Lance hesitated, seemed to think the better of it. “Maybe I ought to speak to an attorney first. Get my union rep.”

“Sure, kid,” Flynn said. “You do that.” He made a move to stand up. “And we’ll go ahead and charge you with homicide. Cop killer. That’ll really give your mouthpiece something to work on instead of a simple rape and robbery beef.”

Slack-jawed, Lance stared at him. “Wait. You know about that?”

Levy said, “He just told you, I’m IA. I’m the investigator on what went down between you and those two hookers.”

Flynn flashed a humorless grin. “So, kid, the way I see it, you’ve got two choices. You can either come clean now.” He downed the last of his scotch in one long swallow before banging his glass on the bar. “Or take your chances and hope your lawyer and union rep can keep the DA from filing murder charges against you.”

Levy cut in, not giving Lance time to think. “Why’d you call in sick for your shift, Jimmy?”

“Okay, okay. He...Tom told me he had something planned for tonight. When McNulty says shit like that, you know it’s not something good.”

“What?” Flynn asked. “He have a couple of more prostitutes lined up for you two to rape and rob?”

“No. Nothing like that. He called me this afternoon. Said he’d gotten wind the two girls, the hookers we’d...he said they’d gone to the police. He said tonight we were gonna teach them a lesson, teach them to keep their mouths shut.” Lance wrapped both hands around his empty glass, twisted it in the ring of water formed on the bar. “The guy scared me, you know?”

“Tell me what happened with the girls,” Flynn said. “That night.”

Lance stared down at his glass. “Either of you know McNulty? Met him? He’s a bully, only way to describe him. Anyway, we were nearing the end of our shift, a pretty boring tour, when we came across these two pros working Clinton Street. McNulty sees ’em and decides to hassle ’em. Give ’em a hard time. I’m against it, I swear, but what can I do, you know?”

“Go on,” Flynn urged.

“So, we stop these two beauties—”

“Vera and Rosa,” Levy verified.

“Yeah. Right. Whatever. When the black one—Vera—she starts mouthing off to McNulty, shouting about police harassment, making a scene. McNulty, he grabs her by the arm and squeezes, demands to know where they take their clients. Their love nest, he calls it. He’s manhandling her pretty good, and I’m getting scared, trying to talk him down. That’s when the other one starts in. Now I’ve got no choice but to grab her—and that’s when things went sideways. McNulty’s so mad his eyes are popping out of his head and he’s shaking the black girl like a rag doll. The other one starts screaming and we’ve got a real scene on our hands. Luckily, the Latina she gives up that they’ve got a room above a shuttered boutique and nail salon. Right there, on Clinton.

“We go there. McNulty marches the girl, Vera, upstairs. I follow with Rosa. I didn’t have any idea what he had planned. I swear.”

“Just get on with it,” Flynn said, his stomach sour with disgust.

“Upstairs. The place is a dump. Dingy and dark. Smelled of old cigarette smoke and I don’t know what else. We get in there and McNulty said to me, ‘Toss the place. They’ve gotta have their night’s take stashed here somewhere.’

“Like an idiot, I asked him—‘What’re you gonna do?’

“He said, ‘I’m gonna teach little miss dark chocolate here a lesson.’ He leered at the Latina one and said, ‘You wanna do the same, knock yourself out.’”

“What happened after that?” Flynn asked.

“He pushed his girl into the bathroom. He went in after her, slammed the door shut, and locked it.”

“What’d you do then?” Levy asked.

“Nothing. I swear. I didn’t touch that girl. Just threw her on the bed and let her sit there and cry. She says anything different, she’s lying.”

“And McNulty?” Levy pressed.

“He and the other one, they were in the bathroom awhile. I heard noises. Him yelling, her screaming. And banging, like someone getting hit. I heard McNulty grunting.” Lance shivered. “I won’t ever forget what it sounded like. It sickened me.”

“Apparently, not enough,” Levy said.

“I tried to take my mind off it, to not think about what he was doing...to her. So I start in on the girl, Rosa, demanding she tell me where the money was. She gave it right up. They had it stashed in a hole in the wall behind the bed. When McNulty came out of the bathroom, all sweaty and breathing hard and zipping up his uniform pants with a sickening grin on his face, I handed him the money. A thick wad of bills. McNulty grunted and patted the side of my face, like I was a good dog or something.”

“That it?” Flynn asked.

“Yeah. That’s it.”

“Did you see Vera after that?” Levy wanted to know.

Lance shook his head. “No. We just left.”

“Well, you should have. Maybe if you’d seen her black eye and her bleeding lip and her missing tooth, maybe if you’d seen her lying on the floor of that bathroom with two broken ribs in a puddle of piss because your partner urinated on her, maybe then you might’ve manned up and done the right thing. You’re a piece of shit.” Levy got up, her disdain for the off-duty cop plain on her face.

She marched toward the door and didn’t look back.