

Dock Street East



Art by Virginia Sky
Story by Bluewolf

It was the self-satisfied smirk on Steven's face as he climbed into the cab beside their father that hurt most.

Hidden from view by the curtain, in the unlikely event that either his father or brother looked back towards the house, Jimmy watched from his bedroom window as the cab drove off taking them to the airport. His thoughts were bitter.

It wasn't even that Jimmy had really wanted to go to Japan, knowing he would have to find some way to fill his time while William Ellison was at his interminable business meetings. He was just as happy left at home - without William there, being left at home was a holiday! But for Steven to be, in effect, 'rewarded' for causing the damage to the Cobra... Damage William had accused Jimmy of causing...

Couldn't William have *seen* that the damage done to it couldn't possibly have been caused by careless driving? If Jimmy could recognize that the damage had been done by something like a crowbar in the hands of a resentful, spiteful boy, why couldn't his father have seen it?

Because although he did play fair by the rules he had set up for us, he was really happier when Steven won, Jimmy realized. He wanted to take Steven on this trip, not me, so he was willing to listen to Steven's lies.

There was a gentle, almost apologetic knock on the door, and he crossed to it. The housekeeper, Sally, stood there - though who else could it have been?

"Breakfast, Jimmy?" He hadn't joined William and Steven for breakfast - which had been earlier than usual, because of the time they had to get to the airport. He had half expected William to call him down, but he hadn't. Well, let them think he was sulking. He didn't care.

But there was no need to take it out on the woman who had been a mother figure to him for fully ten years, since his own mother walked out. "Thanks, Sally."

Over breakfast, he considered his position.

When they were younger, William had treated both boys in much the same way. His idea of punishment had always been to withhold something either of them wanted; after their mother left, he had extended that to giving a treat to the other one. He called it 'encouraging competition'. Had he always wanted to do that, and was discouraged from implementing it by their mother? And once she left, there was no check on his ideas of punishment or reward? It was possible.

The trouble, of course, was that it gave little encouragement for effort - only success counted. Even improvement wasn't rewarded if the other did better, even though it was with less effort.

Thinking back, Jimmy realized that the real change had come after he had claimed to have seen the man who killed Bud Heydash. He had always been able to see and hear quite surprisingly acutely, and had been amazed to learn that Steven couldn't see things as clearly at a distance - or hear, and be able to identify, distant sounds. He had discovered that his classmates thought he was showing off if he said he could read something in the distance that they saw only as a blur. They thought he had checked the thing and memorized what it said. In self-defence, therefore, for the most part he said nothing about how acutely he could see or hear. But after Bud died... after his father had accused him of making up his facts...

What had happened? After that, he discovered that somehow he could no longer see or hear anything any better than... well, than Steven. But the damage had been done; after that, their father had always subtly favored Steven, and Steven had known it. That was when the competition between them that William had created became more cut-throat, at least on Steven's part. Jimmy couldn't forget the affection he had always had for his young brother, but it had begun to be tempered by resentment.

Why did their father like Steven better? Why did he seem to be happier when Steven obtained the reward?

Forgetting for a moment that he was not alone, Jimmy shook his head. He jumped as he felt the gentle hand on his shoulder.

"I know Steven cheated you somehow," Sally said softly. "You didn't betray him, but it was Steven who damaged the car, wasn't it."

"It could have been," Jimmy muttered. "It certainly wasn't me."

"I know," she said. "If you had, you'd have admitted it."

"Why is it that you see that, but Dad doesn't?" Jimmy's voice broke slightly.

"I don't know," she said sadly.

"I can't stay here," Jimmy said after a moment. "Not where my own father doesn't trust me, accuses me of lying when I'm telling the truth... "

"Where will you go?"

Jimmy was glad that Sally apparently accepted his decision, didn't argue that of course he could - should - stay.

"I don't know," he said.

"You don't have to go instantly," Sally said. "Your father won't be back for two weeks."

"I know," Jimmy said. "But now that I've made up my mind, I want to get away as soon as possible. I'll miss you, Sally - you've been good to me."

"If there's anything I can do for you - " she began.

"No, Sally - I won't do anything that might get you into trouble with my father. If I can, I'll let you know where I end up... I think I'll probably join the army, but I can't do that until I'm eighteen. Well, I could, but if he found out, Dad would somehow manage to get me discharged as underage and signing up without his consent." He had no idea if that was possible, but he was well aware that until he was eighteen he was still considered 'a child', needing parental consent to do certain things. And he was also well aware that his father *knew* people, influential people, and wasn't above using those people to get what he wanted.

He finished breakfast then went to his bedroom, where he sat for a while considering his options.

Theoretically, he was quite rich. There were trust funds in his name, set up by his father and his maternal grandfather when he was born, but he wouldn't be able to access either one until he was twenty-one. So in the short term, money was going to be in short supply. He could do day labor, but he didn't want to settle anywhere - his father might not think much of him, but pride would make him try to hunt down and drag his errant son back.

But there was one other thing; he didn't really want to leave Cascade. Not yet; not until he was able to join the army.

So how could he stay in Cascade while keeping under William's radar? The safest way would be to live on the street. Could he do that?

Well, he could try.

Sally would, he knew, be happy to spend the next few days pampering him - and in honesty he wouldn't be averse to a little pampering after the way his father had been treating him - but no. It would make things feel worse when everything went back to normal on William's return. Better to leave now, give himself time to settle into his new identity - and he would have several days when it would be possible to come back, if he found it impossible, without William's ever learning what he had tried to do.

First - change his name. He had been thinking for a while that 'Jimmy' was all very well for a child but he was beginning to feel that it was something of a baby name, even though his father seemed to think that it was manly enough; what if he shortened it to 'Jim'? It was still his own name, but there were plenty of men called Jim, and in that shortened version would be familiar enough that he would remember to answer to it. Yes. What about a second name? He'd need one if he tried to get day labor - say at the docks. He remembered his father saying once how ridiculous it was that there should ever be casual labor available, on demand, to help unload ships.

His eyes fell on his new sports shoes. Doc Martens. Hmm... Martin? Jim Martin? Yes, that would do.

He looked through his wardrobe, and picked out some clothes - not many, not things that would look 'good' or new; some underwear, one or two almost outgrown t-shirts, an old sweater and a spare pair of jeans that had seen better days, but that he had kept for when he did the odd gardening chore for a neighbor - two of them, for whom gardening was something of a hobby so they didn't employ a gardener, sometimes paid him a few dollars to cut their grass, a mundane task that in their eyes was too routine to be worth their time. William had provided him with an expensive sports bag to hold his football kit when he was in the school team, and then, more recently, his surfing kit; he ignored it in favor of the nondescript canvas bag he used to carry his gardening clothes, and packed his chosen garments into it. He added a tattered copy of *The Jungle Book* that he had kept carefully hidden behind the brand-new-looking books on his bookshelf - few of them read more than once, one or two - Christmas presents from his father - still unread; classic titles that looked good sitting on the shelf, but were totally boring for a teenager. William would have been horrified at its condition and insisted that if he really wanted to keep one of his childhood favorites, he should buy a new copy... but his mother had given it to him the Christmas before she left, so this copy, tattered through frequent rereading, had sentimental value that he was sure his father wouldn't understand.

The last thing was money.

William gave him - and Steven - what he called an allowance, but it was a very small one. When he was seven, \$5 a week had seemed like riches - by the time he was seventeen, with the amount never increased, he recognized it as the pittance it now was, especially since he had been expected to buy the obligatory birthday and Christmas presents for his family and Sally from it. However, Jim had saved as much as possible of his allowance for the last ten years, spending nothing on himself, and adding to his savings the money that the neighbors paid him for cutting their grass. He had, he reckoned, the best part of five hundred dollars saved.

Five hundred dollars... for ten years' saving. Fifty dollars a year. It wasn't much.

He would have to be careful that nobody realized he had any money, he knew, or he wouldn't have it for long; he would be attacked, beaten up, his money stolen. No, he would have to be seen to be living from hand to mouth, maybe picking up the odd day's work at the docks where casual labor would be paid a few dollars at the end of the day, and immediately spending at least some of that money on a substantial meal.

Jim kept the money in small quantities hidden in different parts of his bedroom - quite frankly he hadn't trusted Steven not to steal at least some of it if he could, even though it seemed to him that any time Steven actually wanted something all he had to do was ask William for it. Another reason for Jim to resent his brother; if Jim asked for something extra, he was told to buy it out of his allowance. He could appreciate that his father possibly had the idea that it would teach him the value of money, but if so why didn't William bother giving Steven the same lesson?

Why, why, *why* did William treat the pair of them so differently?

A horrified thought occurred to him - what if he wasn't actually William's son? Or that William believed he wasn't? It would explain a lot...

No. It would make more sense to assume that the reason lay in something more... more subtle? Jim had no interest in business, had shown no wish to learn anything about Ellison Enterprises. Steven might or might not be genuinely interested, but even at fifteen he was asking questions about how the business ran. It was more likely that William favored the son whose interests mirrored his own.

Even as he thought, Jim was tucking the money away in small amounts in various parts of his clothes; some notes were tucked away between pages in the book, or slipped in behind the spine.

Then, his preparations finished, he reached for a sheet of paper and a pen. He could vanish, leaving Sally to explain it as best she could; but that would not be fair to her. No, he would leave a letter...

He deliberately chose not to start with 'Dear Dad'. That would be a lie. At the moment, 'Dad' was in no way dear to him.

'It seems that no matter what I do, you will never accept me, never believe me even when I tell you the truth. I say to you again, I did not damage the Cobra. But your reluctance to believe me, your decision to punish me for something I did not do, is the last straw.

'I'm leaving.

'Don't blame Sally for this; she doesn't know what I'm planning.

'In a few months I'll be eighteen and won't have to get your permission to do anything. But I don't want to wait those few months. I want away now. I want to start living the life that your pride would deny me, feeling it beneath my dignity as an Ellison.'

Well, that's not the exact truth, he thought, *but it's near enough*.

'Feel free to disown me. I don't care. I want nothing from you, now or in the future. I can - and will - make my own life.'

He read through what he had written, wondering if he should add more, decided against it, and for the last time used the name 'Jimmy' to sign it.

He folded the sheet of paper, put it in an envelope and sealed it.

He glanced at his watch; with something of a shock he realized that he had spent far longer than he had thought getting ready for his departure. Then he also realized that this watch wouldn't exactly fit the image he planned to project, and without regret he took it off and laid it on his bedside cabinet. The only reason he had been given an expensive watch on his seventeenth birthday was to show off his father's wealth.

Just one last thing to do.

He stripped and put on his second oldest jeans - a pair in slightly better condition than the ones he'd packed - a t-shirt that had been a gag gift from one of his few friends at school, and that (in his opinion) nobody with any choice in the matter would ever wear. He topped that with a jacket with a ripped seam that he'd conveniently forgotten to give Sally to mend - and that was when he realized that he'd had this departure in the back of his mind for several months. He pulled on a pair of Nikes that had also seen better days and glanced at himself in the mirror.

Yes; nobody seeing him now would suspect that he was William Ellison's runaway older son.

He picked up the letter and left his bedroom, detouring by way of William's office to leave it on the desk there, then went back downstairs.

Sally was in the kitchen and looked round as he entered. Jim could see the sadness in her eyes as well as the understanding, and again had a flash of insight. She was loyal to her employer, possibly even quite fond of him; but she liked him far more than she liked Steven. Indeed, he had once or twice prevented Steven from playing childish tricks on her, tricks that he couldn't persuade himself were meant to be anything other than spiteful. Suddenly, Jim knew that Sally herself knew that.

"You'll have lunch before you go?" she asked.

It wouldn't be kind to refuse. He nodded. "Thanks."

He insisted that she sit and eat with him. They ate in silence for a few minutes then she said, "Where are you going right now?"

"I'm not sure," Jim said. "No, that's the truth, though even if I did know I wouldn't tell you, so that you can truthfully tell my father you don't know. As it is, he'll be angry that you somehow didn't stop me."

"Easy enough for me to say I didn't know, when you went out today, that you wouldn't be back," Sally said. "It's not entirely a lie; for all I know you'll decide you made a mistake and come back in a day or two." She smiled. "I've covered for you a few times, you know."

"I wondered, once or twice... Times I expected to get into trouble but didn't."

"I'll miss you," she said.

"And I'll miss you," Jim replied. "You've been like a mother to me, this last ten years... Sally - do you know why Mom left?"

Sally shook her head. "Not for certain, though... I know she suspected your father of... of seeing more of his then secretary than was proper. That could be accounted for by the

demands of his work. Whether he did or not, I don't know. Maybe she discovered it was true. What I do know - soon after your mother left, so did the secretary."

"As if she'd maybe hoped to be the next Mrs. Ellison, and left when he didn't play ball?"

"Your parents didn't actually divorce until over a year later. Your father wouldn't have wanted it known that he was having an affair, which would have been obvious if the secretary had moved in with him."

"The appearance of respectability..." Jim sighed.

They finished eating.

"Can I help you with the dishes?" Jim asked.

"No, but thanks for the offer. You get yourself off, get to wherever you plan to reach tonight. Let me know, if you can, how you're managing. And... good luck."

"If I can, I will." Jim smiled and kissed her cheek. "Thanks, Sally... Mom."

He picked up his bag and walked out.

Jim didn't, in fact, have any real idea of where he wanted to go. As the son of a rich businessman, he didn't really have more than a vague knowledge of Cascade outside the wealthy part, and of course what he wanted was the part where the homeless people lived. Or maybe 'existed' was a better word? For he had no illusions; life for the homeless would be far from easy. Was he foolish for wanting to adopt it? Maybe. He had two weeks to find out, though if he did change his mind he would have to return to William's house - impossible, really, to think of it as 'home' - at least a day before his father and brother were due back.

He would, he decided, give it ten days.

Slinging his bag over his shoulder, he headed down the street, heading for the docks.

Once there, he paused, watching the activity. A recently-berthed boat was being unloaded, and Jim thought he could distinguish between the regular dock hands and the employed-for-a-day ones. Some of the men definitely looked scruffier than the others. Hmm... he would have to spend two or three nights sleeping rough to get something of that scruffy look...

He waited, watching, until early evening, when the boat was fully unloaded. Some of the men - the ones he had thought were the day laborers - gathered in a loose group. They were joined fairly quickly by an obvious office worker, who handed out money to them, and as each one was paid he headed away. Jim pinpointed one who didn't look much older than himself and followed him.

The young man made his way to what looked like an abandoned warehouse, glanced around and then climbed inside through a window where the wood nailed over it was broken.

Jim watched for some minutes, but nobody else approached the building. Mentally crossing his fingers that he had made the right choice of 'mentor' for this new life, he too climbed through the window.

Inside it was quite dark, but there was enough light from the entry point that he could see stairs a few yards away. He headed up them. Above him he could hear movement but no voices.

He went up a flight of stairs, along a short landing and up another flight of stairs. This third story was slightly better lit - some of the windows still had glass in them and weren't boarded over. There was a shadow in one corner.

"Hello?" he said.

The young man he had followed whirled and advanced threateningly. "Who the hell are you?"

"My name's Jim," he said. "I've just lost my home - my father kicked me out." Not quite the truth, but near enough. "I saw you climbing in here and followed you - I don't know anything about living on the streets, and I could use some advice."

Jim tried to relax as the other man studied him. "All right," he said. "But don't try anything - I'm maybe living on the streets, but I'm well able to defend myself."

That was undoubtedly true. If he was strong enough to do laboring work at the docks, he probably was able to defend himself.

"I'm just looking for a little help, a little advice."

"All right. There's nobody else living here at the moment, so just pick yourself a corner. Is that bag all you have?"

Jim nodded. "I was lucky I was able to grab it," he said. "Couple of t-shirts, sweater, another pair of jeans - I did a bit of gardening for pocket money, kept the bag packed with the clothes I wore for that."

"You didn't manage to grab a blanket, anything like that?"

"No."

"Okay. We'll have to get you some old newspapers and a cardboard box or two." He hesitated. "Picked up a casual job today - came home first, but I'm heading out soon to get something to eat with the money I earned. That's going to be your hardest job - finding enough to eat."

"I was hoping to pick up some day labor," Jim admitted. "Enough to let me eat."

"Though it's amazing what you can pick up from where the supermarkets dump their unsold out-of-date food. A day or two past the date, it's still perfectly edible. Though you have to be careful; they don't want it, they've dumped it, but they object to anyone taking any of it."

"Figures," Jim muttered. "I thought... maybe restaurant dumpsters?"

"Can be worth a look," his new acquaintance said. "Better where there are outside tables, though - often customers will leave quite a lot of food on their plates and if you're quick you can shove it into a plastic bag and be away again before a member of staff comes to clear the table. You can get plastic bags easily enough from the fruit and veg part of a supermarket," he added. "Go in, any time you have a spare dollar or two, buy a couple of apples to show you're a customer - they never know you've nicked some of the plastic bags as well."

Jim registered that in this new life it wouldn't do to be in any way fastidious.

"Right - thanks for the advice. Er - what do I call you?"

"Dave."

Jim 'claimed' a corner, leaving his bag in it, and followed Dave back down the stairs. Dave paused at the window, listening, then nodded. "Nobody around," he murmured, and climbed out. Jim followed. "This way," Dave went on, and headed off further down the road.

A few minutes later saw them close to a Wonderburger. "Best value around," Dave said, "if you've got five dollars to spend."

Jim nodded. "I do have the money I earned from my last stint gardening."

And so Jim was introduced to Wonderburger. His father had never considered hamburgers in any shape or form 'proper' food, so this was an experience totally new to him; and he was surprised how much he enjoyed it.

"S good," he mumbled around his first mouthful.

"Never had Wonderburger before?" Dave asked.

Jim shook his head. "M' father always said burgers weren't healthy eating." He took another big bite.

"Healthy or not, they're filling and they taste good," Dave said, "and that's what you need on the street. Something that'll keep your belly filled."

After they'd finished, Dave said, "This way." Jim followed. Dave led him to the back of a supermarket, and pointed to a dumpster. "That's where they chuck the out of date stuff. Come on." He handed Jim one of two plastic bags he pulled from his pocket. "Just grab anything. We can sort it out later."

Jim followed Dave's lead. The dumpster was nearly full - it was easy enough to reach up and grab two or three plastic trays, push them into his plastic bag and grab another handful.

With their bags full, Dave led them back to the abandoned warehouse by way of another dumpster, from which he pulled a couple of large cardboard boxes and some smaller ones. "Bedding for you," he said. They split the cardboard between them, and carried on to the warehouse.

When they checked the plastic bags, it was to find that they had a reasonable haul of trays of pre-cooked meat, as well as one or two trays of uncooked meat. Dave made a face at those. "No way to cook that," he said.

"You can eat steak raw," Jim said. "Blue or rare - the chefs just brown the outside and the inside is raw - depending on how it's cooked, the inside can be warm or cold."

"Can't say I like the idea of eating raw meat," Dave muttered. "No matter how hungry I am. My Mom always said it needed to be well cooked to destroy any germs."

"Yeah, that's true of things like chicken. But steak that's raw or almost raw is supposed to be a lot more tender than thoroughly cooked steak. I don't know - my father liked his steak medium rare, so it was pink on the inside, not raw, and that's the way we always had it."

"Well, we have enough cooked meat here for a few days," Dave said, "so I don't think we need to worry about the steak."

Jim wasn't over-sure about cooked meat that was a week past its use-by date - on the other hand, it was in an airtight wrapper, and Dave had, presumably, been eating meat like this for a while with no ill effects.

Dave helped Jim rig up a covered area big enough to sleep in, using the two biggest cardboard boxes, and folding the other ones to form a layer under him. "We can try to get some newspaper for blankets tomorrow," Dave said. "There isn't a boat due in or going out tomorrow, so there'll be no day labor. Might be one the next day, though."

"How long have you been living like this?" Jim asked. Though he was curious, he was careful to make the question sound throwaway, a 'make conversation' gambit.

"A little over a year," Dave answered. He was silent for a moment, then went on. "It can get lonely, but I'm not sure I trust many of the others on the street. I did try a homeless shelter once, and they're maybe okay if you're older - but I spent the night fighting off guys who wanted a piece of my ass.

"I'd have slipped away the moment your back was turned if you'd been older," he added. "I don't trust older men."

"Is that common?" Jim asked, a little startled.

"Good question," Dave answered. "Thing is, a lot of the younger men on the street do sell their asses. So do a lot of the women. The going rate is \$10 for a blowjob, \$20 for a fuck. One night can give them enough money to eat for a few days, maybe a week. So I suppose some of the older men think the young ones are used to it. But I didn't run away from home just to let myself be fucked again by anyone who was feeling a bit horny."

"That why you left home?" Jim asked. "Someone was abusing you sexually?"

"My Dad's brother, and my parents wouldn't believe me when I told them. They preferred to believe his lies."

"I know what *that's* like," Jim muttered. "My younger brother is a spoiled brat, and our Dad always believed him, always accused me of being the one who lied. I never knew why Dad

preferred my brother," he added. "Anyway, I'm not planning on staying here long - as soon as I'm eighteen, I'm joining the army."

"They tend to want a home address when you go to sign on," Dave said. "I know - I tried and was turned down. They weren't interested in someone with no home address. I suppose they felt I was unreliable."

Jim frowned thoughtfully. "If you're still interested, I might be able to get around that for you," he said. "However, it'll be easiest to wait till I'm eighteen."

It was surprising how quickly he and Dave became friends. Of course, Jim reflected, Dave had been on his own for a year, afraid to trust anyone, afraid to let anyone get too close; Jim was a little younger, and perhaps that was what made the difference. On Jim's side, Dave, taking him at face value, was teaching him the ins and outs of life on the streets.

Occasionally Jim felt a little guilty over the five hundred dollars still hidden in his things, but they managed well enough, getting occasional work at the docks, raiding the supermarket dumpsters for a regular supply of food - never going to the same one too often and never establishing a pattern - and buying the occasional Wonderburger or apple or banana. So what if it wasn't the properly balanced diet Sally had so carefully fed him? He was surviving, and surviving surprisingly well.

Once or twice, when he was sure Steven would be at school and his father at work, he had phoned Sally, assuring her that he was fine, that yes, he had found work and a friend he was living with. After the first, the hardest, phone call, he had reflected that he hadn't actually told her any lies. He'd stretched the truth a bit, but he hadn't actually lied.

It did surprise Jim that nobody else seemed to be interested in moving into the derelict warehouse; indeed, it surprised him that nobody seemed to be interested in either demolishing it or renovating it. He mentioned that to Dave one day.

"A lot of the homeless guys think that old warehouses will be demolished or renovated one day," he said, "so they don't chance living in one in case they get back one day and find they've lost what few possessions they have. Certainly we could be wakened one morning by a demolition ball hitting the wall, but I reckon we'd get some warning - men coming around checking the place, coming inside, either to see the weakest bits if they plan to demolish it, maybe even set explosives; or check out the state of the building if they plan to renovate. But if we did get back from a day at the docks to find it being worked on, all we'd lose is our beds, because we take our bags with us - we might have an uncomfortable night or two till we find someplace else and get cardboard and paper to make new beds, but we won't lose anything of value."

Jim hadn't really thought about the other homeless until then. "Dave, where do most of the others stay?"

"Well, there are the homeless shelters. Then some sleep in shop doorways, especially if there's some sort of covered entryway - a lot of shop owners don't mind too much because they reckon that with someone sleeping there, nobody will try to break in. Some sleep under bridges - wouldn't care for that, myself, not enough shelter. Some used to go into railway or bus station waiting rooms, as if they were early for a train or a bus and had fallen asleep

while they waited, but more and more of those places are locking the waiting rooms at night and not even legitimate travellers can get into them. I tried a bus station once, and there were buses coming in at different times all through the night, people getting off who were waiting for a connection, and *they* weren't allowed into the waiting room. I heard one woman with a couple of young children complaining, and she was told to find a hotel for what was left of the night."

"What? That's... that's... "

"Reasonable from their point of view. They make a rule, they stick with it."

Life continued like that for several weeks. It was getting close to Jim's birthday, and he began planning...

They had been working that day, and were tired as they headed back to the warehouse. They were almost there when they were intercepted by a man who waved a knife at them. "Hand over your money."

"What money?" Dave growled. "We're homeless! Would we be sleeping rough if we had money?"

"I know you've been working at the docks today. You have what they paid you. Hand it over!" He held up the knife again, the threat obvious.

Dave lunged at him, and staggered back, blood spurting from his neck. Jim tried to take advantage of the man's attention being on Dave, and also lunged forward. The man whirled, hitting out at Jim, who fell back clutching a slashed arm. Then the attacker put the knife to Jim's throat while he groped in Jim's pocket and pulled out the money he had earned that day. Keeping his attention on Jim, continuing to threaten him with the knife, he searched Dave's pockets and took his earnings too; then he grabbed up the bags both men carried, that held all their possessions, backed away for a few steps, then turned and ran.

Jim crawled over to Dave, and knew instantly that it was already too late to do anything. The artery in his neck had been severed, and he had already bled to death.

Jim paused for a few seconds, panting, already feeling weak from the cut on his arm, though he was pretty sure it wasn't as serious as it might have been. He knew, though, that he needed medical attention... and he needed to report the mugging and Dave's murder. Not that he expected the authorities to be particularly concerned, but it did need to be reported...

There was a free clinic near the docks that Dave had pointed out to him early on, saying that it was actually pretty good and the staff were compassionate. Jim forced himself to his feet and headed back towards the docks. It took him nearly quarter of an hour to cover the distance that he had done in five minutes just before the attack.

He leaned against the wall of the clinic, steadied himself, and fumbled the door open.

Inside, the receptionist took one look at him, and hurried around the edge of her desk to help him to a seat.

"What happened?" She was already buzzing for one of the medical staff.

"Mugging... my friend was killed... tell the police... " and then he collapsed in a dead faint.

Jim regained consciousness to find himself lying in a bed, with an African American policeman sitting beside him. His arm felt strange. He blinked at the cop. "Hi," he whispered.

"Hello. I'm Detective Banks, Homicide. You told the receptionist at the clinic that your friend had been killed?"

"Yes... guy with a knife... he went after Dave first. When I went to help Dave, the guy slashed my arm... then he stole our bags, the money we earned today, and ran off. He... Dave's throat was cut... he was dead before I reached him."

"You'll be glad to know that we found Dave," Banks said. "Followed the trail of blood you left. The two of you were living on the streets?"

"Yeah. I've only been on the street a few months - Dave helped me. He'd left home at least a year before I did."

"Can you tell me his full name?"

"He said it was Dave Cooper, but I don't know if that was his real name."

"And was he a native of Cascade?"

"He never said."

"And you? Your name?"

"Jim Martin." In the last few months the instinct to say 'Ellison' had faded.

"Are you a native of Cascade?"

Jim hesitated before saying, "Yes."

"I'm assuming you had a good reason for leaving home, and even now don't want to go back?"

"I never want to see my father again."

"Bad as that?" Banks sounded sympathetic.

"I didn't suffer the same kind of abuse that Dave did... but bullying is still abuse, isn't it."

Banks nodded. "Do you have anyone who can help you for a few days? Because you can't really manage on your own with that arm, and the hospital here can only keep you for a couple of days."

"There was just Dave and me," Jim said sadly. "I do have someone who would help, but if I call on her, my father would find out. No, Detective, I'll manage somehow." Assuming the

hospital hadn't thrown out his bloodstained clothes he did have some money in hidden pockets, though he'd lost a lot of his savings with the stolen bag.

"How old are you?"

"I'll be eighteen next week."

"Social services could help you until your birthday," Banks suggested.

Jim shook his head. "I'll manage," he said.

"You're stubborn," Banks muttered. "And independent."

"If I am, it's what my father made me. He thought depending on others made you weak."

"Sometimes depending on others is a sign of strength."

"Dave was afraid to trust," Jim murmured. "It was only because I was younger that he helped me at first. But we had learned to depend on each other." He sighed. "In honesty, though... I think he was maybe glad to die. He knew I mean to join the army as soon as I'm old enough - though I'd guess my arm'll keep me from signing up for a month or two - and although I said I could probably help him to join the army too, I'm not sure he believed that. I think he maybe saw himself back where he was before we met, alone, keeping everyone at arm's length... He'd had a taste of companionship and didn't want to go back to the way he'd been."

"You know, you'd make a good social worker. Not many men your age would have that kind of insight.

"Anyway," Banks went on more briskly, "did you get a good look at the guy who killed Dave?"

"Yes. I'll know him again."

"If I send in a police artist, will you work with him to get a likeness?"

"Yes."

"Meanwhile, can you give me a description?"

"He was white, about six foot, dark hair... "

Two days later, Banks showed up again, with another man. Banks was carrying a canvas bag that Jim instantly recognized.

"Detective?"

Banks grinned at the hopeful note in Jim's voice. "We found this in a dumpster very close to where you were attacked. Recognize it?"

Jim nodded. "There should be an old pair of jeans, a sweater, a couple of t-shirts and a very tattered book in it."

The grin widened. "Glad we can return your property." He opened it and took out a much smaller bag. "And this?"

"That... that was Dave's. I never actually knew what was in it, but I know he treasured it."

"Would you believe, a small teddy bear?"

"A reminder of when he was very young, before his uncle started abusing him?"

"Could be. He was your friend - his only friend, from what you said. Do you want it?" The gentle tone said a lot about Banks' understanding.

"Has he been buried yet?" Jim asked.

"Not yet. But it won't be long. With a positive witness to what happened, we don't need to keep his body indefinitely."

"Then... Can you have it buried with him? A good memory to take onto the afterlife."

Banks nodded. "I'll make sure it is."

"Thanks." Jim took his own bag and looked into it. He took out his tattered copy of *The Jungle Book*, and riffled through it, grinning as he saw that the money hidden between its pages was still there. Banks saw, and looked at him. "Not a very clever thief," Jim went on. "He saw the condition of the book and didn't think it was even worth trying to sell it to a second hand bookshop. But I have a hundred dollars hidden in it - in \$20 notes - and more sewn into the clothes and the bag itself. He didn't think of that."

"Where did you get the money?" The question was very casual.

"Saved it over the last ten years. Now I've got it back, I'll give something to the hospital and the clinic." He gave a wry grin. "This book is my teddy bear."

"I guess most of us have one tucked away somewhere," Banks agreed. "Now - this is Andy; he's one of our artists. Can you work with him to get a picture of the killer?"

Jim nodded, looking at the artist. "He was white, with dark hair... "

Banks let him know when Dave was going to be buried, and accompanied him to the burial - it could hardly be called a funeral. "I had them put the bear in the coffin with him," Banks said quietly as they watched the coffin being lowered into the grave.

"Thanks," Jim replied.

Afterwards, Banks took him back to the small charity hospital, run by the Sisters of Mercy, where Jim had arranged to stay, doing odd jobs around the place, until his arm was fully healed. Once it was, he bade them a grateful farewell, and headed to the army recruiting center in Cascade.

Jim had considered using his assumed name, but at the last minute decided to use his own name. He had contacted Sally to tell her what he now planned, and in the early afternoon, en

route to the recruiting center, visited his father's house, where Sally greeted him tearfully. William was at his office, Steven at school; Sally didn't expect either one back for fully three hours.

He knew the combination for his father's safe, where William kept any papers he considered valuable; in it, Jim knew, was his birth certificate, which he might need as proof of age - unless William had thrown it out when he learned that his older son had walked out. He had never asked Sally what William's reaction had been to that discovery when he returned from Japan.

Using the excuse of going to the toilet while Sally prepared a quick meal for him, Jim went into the study, opened the safe, and found that the birth certificate was still there, so he took it. Carefully leaving everything else as he had found it, he relocked the safe, slipped the document into an inside pocket - he had used some of his money to buy clothes from Goodwill - went to the toilet, then returned to the kitchen.

Once again Sally ate with him, and then let him go. He promised to write to her, using her sister's address - he was far from sure what his father's reaction would be if he discovered that Sally was getting letters from him.

As it turned out, he didn't need any proof of age at the recruiting center. His months on the street, relatively stress-free though they had been thanks to Dave, had aged him, maturing his appearance to a level where he actually looked older than his years. However, he did have to spend some time talking to a recruiter, who wanted to make sure he had fully thought through his decision to join the army. One of the questions he asked was, "Do your parents agree with your decision?"

Jim hesitated for a moment before saying, "There's only my father, and he disapproves of everything I want to do. The only way he would agree that I should join the army would be if I told him I didn't want to. Then he would insist that I must, to 'make a man' of me."

"So is this decision of yours an act of rebellion?"

Jim shook his head. "It's an act of survival. He's a businessman who would like to turn me into a clone of himself. I don't resent being given orders, I don't resent obeying orders; I do resent his attitude that no matter what my own interests are, I'm wrong to have any interests that he doesn't say I should have. He forced me to play football at school when I was more interested in basketball, and the main reason he insisted on football was because I made the mistake of saying I preferred basketball. 'That's the easy option,' he said. 'Real men do the thing they don't want to do because it's more of a challenge.' I'm competitive enough that I did reasonably well at football, but I still think I'd have done better playing basketball because that was the game that interested me."

"So the army is the equivalent of basketball, while business is the equivalent of football?"

"Army or police," Jim admitted. "I've always had a sort of instinct to want to - well - protect anyone weaker than myself. Both the army and the police do that, and of the two, the army is my preference. I don't assume it'll be easy; I know it won't be."

The recruiter nodded. "Welcome to the army."

Jim enjoyed army life, although he slowly became disillusioned after the helicopter carrying his squad crashed in Peru. The only survivor, he was beginning the task of burying his dead when some men from the local tribe, alerted by the sound of the crash, arrived.

They were led by the tribe's shaman, Incacha, who immediately told his men to finish burying the dead - although cremation, not burial, was the tribe's custom - while he spoke to the survivor.

It was the start of eighteen months that Jim enjoyed surprisingly well. With the help of the tribe, he was able to carry out the orders he had been given; although by the end of that time he was beginning to feel very tired. And then a rescue group arrived; not, as he had initially thought, his relief, but a rescue. For eighteen months it had been believed that his entire group had been killed. They weren't even in the right place - after contact had been lost with them, a replacement group *had* been sent in... to a point some fifty miles to the east. A satellite image had recently revealed the wreckage of the chopper and a search was mounted. Nobody could explain why the chopper with Jim's squad had been so far off course, and with the pilot dead there was no way of finding out.

The rescue party dug up the seven bodies - reduced to skeletons, only the dog tags Jim had carefully draped on markers beside each grave identified them.

Jim spent some minutes alone with Incacha, who had become a close friend, before he was given an affectionate farewell by the rest of the Chopek and the rescue helicopter took off, taking Jim back to civilization.

His period of enlistment had ended a few weeks before he had been found, and he chose not to re-up. He took a short break, just travelling around, having a brief romantic interlude in Bali, before returning to Cascade, not really sure why he was drawn back. He found a not-too-expensive loft apartment for rent in a reasonable part of the city, and moved into it.

Once there, however, he remembered his original thoughts - army or police - and applied to the police academy. While he attended it, he lived off the savings he had made while he was in the army - he had opened a bank account early in his training, careful to use a rival bank to the one his father used, and put most of his army pay into it; while he was MIA the account was suspended, but reactivated when he returned and went into the branch with proof of identity. Although there was plenty of money in the account he still chose to live frugally; he wanted to have a reasonable reserve of cash, just in case...

He had written Sally after he was rescued from Peru, and now he phoned - again carefully choosing a time when he knew his father would be at his office - to let her know he was back in Cascade, but that he had no interest whatsoever in contacting his father or brother.

"They've changed," Sally said. "When you were reported missing... it really shook them. Steven in particular - I think he realized then, for the first time, just how much his behavior had influenced what you did. Your father was notified when you were found, of course - he locked himself in his study for hours that day instead of going to work."

"Maybe it did shake them," Jim replied, "but I'd doubt it'll really change how Dad behaves towards me, if I did visit, especially since I'm planning on joining the police now. I don't think he'd approve of that. No, Sally. It'll be better if I stay out of touch."

"It's your choice, of course," Sally said, "but... Jim, he does love you. He just doesn't know how to show it. He never did."

Not only didn't he show it, he did a damn good job of hiding it, Jim thought as he put the phone down. No - if he ever did contact his father again, it would be as a successful cop, and one who, despite not earning big bucks through business deals, was financially comfortable. He had already decided that if necessary he might use some of the money in the trust fund his grandfather had set up, but he would never touch the trust fund from his father.

After the Academy, which Jim went through on the accelerated course available for ex-army personnel, he started his police career patrolling the streets.

Some two months after he started working with Patrol, he made contact with the social works department, and volunteered to be a Big Brother for one of the teenagers in their care. Danny Choi, at sixteen, had a lot of potential but seriously needed an older, stable role model after his father lost his job and, unable to get another one, killed himself. His mother had found it almost impossible to cope with life without her husband, and Danny had been very close to joining one of the gangs for the stability that he thought that would represent. Jim soon corrected that impression, suggesting that Danny consider, rather, the army or police for an organization that would give him the stability he sought. He continued working with Danny even after he sat the detective's exam and went into Vice; and had the satisfaction of seeing his 'Little Brother' going to the police academy not long after his twentieth birthday.

After leaving Patrol and going into Vice, Jim quickly discovered that he didn't really like working there.

Part of it was the attitude of the other detectives in the department. Jim suspected that a lot of that attitude was caused by having to remain emotionally detached from many of the things they saw. They were cold; distant; and while they *worked* together, they didn't socialize at all, didn't form friendships. Their attitude was 'get the bad guys off the street' but none of them seemed to have much sympathy for the people who were victimized. All right, some of that - a lot of it - could be the fault of Captain Gregg, whose attitude towards life seemed to be totally misanthropical, and who encouraged misanthropy in his department, apparently thinking that the best way to deal with crime was to think the absolute worst of anyone who was suspected of breaking the law... and almost automatically assuming that anyone who was homeless, living on the streets, was either a prostitute or there because of a drug habit that had swallowed up all his - her - money.

The larger part of it, though, was the realization of how he might have ended up when he was seventeen, if he hadn't followed Dave that first evening; if someone like a pimp had found him first. He could have been one of the men - and women - being hunted down by

Vice, purely for the 'crime' of being homeless and trying to survive in one of the very few ways they could earn any money.

It brought back to him his grief when Dave died.

Dave had been his first real friend. *His* mentor, if you could call being shown how to live on the street 'mentoring'; *his* 'Big Brother', and Jim realized that by becoming a Big Brother to Danny - a facet of his life that he kept carefully hidden from his fellow detectives in Vice - he was, in a way, remembering and honoring Dave.

One afternoon, when he was supposed to be checking on details for a case he was working, he went back through the records and discovered that Dave's killer had never been caught. Certainly it would have been difficult for the police to bring a case against the man, because he - the only witness - had disappeared. Jim Martin had vanished when Jim Ellison joined the army.

Detective Banks was still with the Cascade PD, and had moved from Homicide to being the senior detective in Major Crime. Jim debated with himself whether he should contact Banks, but decided against it. Although Banks had made an impression on Jim, he was pretty sure that the older man wouldn't remember him. After all, sympathetic though the detective had been, back then Jim had been only a witness that Banks had spoken to relatively briefly; one of many witnesses that he had interviewed over the years.

As the months passed, Jim found himself adopting much of the 'attitude on two legs' that he had so disliked in his fellow detectives, until the day came when he realized that if he was to retain any of his humanity he had to get the hell out of Vice and into a different department. The only thing that had kept him 'human' had been Danny; once Danny was no longer his 'Little Brother' but had gone to the Academy, there was nothing to keep him from becoming like Gregg... God, like his father! He had long known that William Ellison was misogynistic, but now Jim realized that he was actually misanthropic.

Captain Warren had a reputation for running a tight, but happy, unit. So Jim applied for a position in Major Crime.

He got his transfer, but was unhappy to discover that Warren had just been promoted to Assistant Chief of Police; however, the new Captain of Major Crime was Simon Banks, and he still remembered Banks' understanding with considerable gratitude.

However, it instantly became clear that, as Jim had suspected would be the case, Banks didn't recognize him; and certainly didn't associate the newly-transferred Detective Ellison with Jim Martin, the homeless man whose friend had just been murdered.

Jim found it surprisingly difficult to throw off the persona he had adopted during his time in Vice, until Banks had the wisdom to partner him with Jack Pendergrast. Jack took no nonsense from him, and while Jim understood that the man had his faults - he had a serious gambling problem - he hadn't lost the humanity that made him a good cop.

There was a serial killer in Cascade. When the first body was found, the man's throat slashed, the case went to Homicide, but after the third victim who had bled to death from a

slashed throat was found, roughly a month after the first one, the case was given to Major Crime - specifically to the team of Pendergrast and Ellison.

Jim looked at the photos of the three victims and found that his mind was replacing their faces with Dave's.

"Slick?"

Jim pulled his mind back to the present. "Yeah?"

"You were miles away. You got a problem?"

"No... just remembering something from years ago."

"Something from your time in Vice?"

"Before that. I had a friend who was mugged, and his throat slashed. They never did catch the killer."

"Well, if you concentrate we might catch this one before he kills anyone else."

Jim nodded.

They read through Homicide's reports on the three deaths. "You know," Jack said, "this guy is helluva sure of himself. If he'd spread those killings out over more of the city, they'd have been in different precincts and odds are that nobody would've linked them. But they're all in the one area... "

"Maybe he's just lazy," Jim suggested. "He's found a part of Cascade where he's found easy victims, maybe even quite close to where he lives." He put down the second report and picked up the third. "Oh, God... "

"What's wrong?"

"This one... Dock Street East... that's the street where my friend was killed."

"How long ago was that?"

"About seventeen years ago," Jim said. "But back then... I don't remember hearing about any other murders."

Jack frowned, thinking. "Dock Street East... That's a pretty derelict part of Cascade."

"And pretty quiet at night."

"Why were you in that part of the city?"

"We were living in one of the empty warehouses."

"You were... " Jack's voice trailed off.

"A few weeks later, after I hit my eighteenth birthday, I joined the army." He turned his attention back to Homicide's report. "Okay, this last one sounds like someone killed just for the hell of it. The first two were quickly identified, and their wallets had been stolen. This

one... nobody's come forward to report him missing, and from where he was found, I'd say he was probably homeless."

"Someone might still come forward," Jack said.

"I know that for him it's not been long, but... " Jim shook his head. "Someone might report him missing, but it's more likely that anyone who knew him will just assume that he's moved on. Gone to a different part of Cascade - the dock area isn't the only one where the homeless hang out - or maybe even left Cascade in the hope of doing better elsewhere. This time of year, some of them do go out looking for day labor on the farms, and they don't always come back. But anyway, the homeless don't always trust the police. Wouldn't be the first time someone's been chased away from where he was staying just because a cop didn't like the look of him."

"Want to go and have a look at the place?" There was a tentative note in Jack's voice.

"There won't be anything to find where either of the other two were found," Jim agreed. "This is the best bet to find something - if there's anything to find."

Jack - as always - drove. Jim looked all around as they entered Dock Street East, seeing a few changes but not as many as he might have expected. One or two of the buildings had been demolished, and the ground lay derelict. The old warehouse he had lived in was still there, but more of the upper windows were broken.

Jack stopped a little way from the building Jim suddenly realized he still thought of as 'his', where the outline of a body showed clearly on the sidewalk. Jim took a deep breath and followed his partner.

The pool of blood had dried, but it still brought back too many memories. Jim gritted his teeth and cast around the area, trying to see if there was anything, anything at all, that would help identify the killer.

He came up blank. There weren't even footprints; the killer had been careful not to step in the blood.

"We're not going to find anything," Jack said at last.

"No. This guy knows what he's doing. I wonder if there are any neighboring cities that have had a serial killer that slashed his victims' throats?"

"It's almost certain." Jack sounded very cynical.

They went back to the car, Jack turned it and began to drive back. As they reached 'his' building, Jim said, "Stop!"

Jack stopped and looked at him. "What is it, Slick?"

"Just... This is going to sound crazy, but this is the building we lived in. I... After Dave was killed, I never came back to it. Somehow... I don't know, I'd like to go back in. Does that sound crazy?"

"You want to say goodbye to your life of... what was it you said, seventeen years ago?"

"I suppose... Yes, I suppose that's it."

"Be careful. Whatever condition it was in back then, it looks pretty ramshackle now."

Jim nodded and got out of the car. He headed for the familiar window; it was still half boarded over, leaving a space an active man could climb through. He had bulked up a bit in the years since he last climbed in - exercise had given him more muscle - but he slipped in easily enough and headed towards the stairs. He was half aware of a shadow behind him and guessed that Jack had followed him and was standing looking in.

He went carefully up the stairs, testing each one carefully before putting his weight on it, but despite the years that had passed, they seemed to be sound. He reached the familiar level and walked towards 'his' corner.

There was still some cardboard and paper there, though the years hadn't been as kind to his old bed as they had been to the building. It smelled of mold. Turning, he headed towards what had been Dave's corner, and stiffened.

There was a newly-constructed nest there, paper and cardboard the same as he and Dave had used.

Someone was staying here!

Jim was reluctant to intrude. This had been his hideaway, his and Dave's; he couldn't deny someone else the same... comfort, he supposed he could call it. He headed back towards the stairs.

He paused at the landing halfway down, glancing back up the stairs... and something hit him hard across the back of the head.

He fell, somehow managing to retain enough awareness that he landed on his back. He peered up through glazed-over eyes, seeing only the shape of the man who stood there - he assumed the current 'tenant'; tall, he thought better dressed than he would have expected... and holding a knife.

"What do you want?" he managed.

"I'll have your wallet, for a start."

There was something familiar about the voice, although it wasn't one he knew.

"And that's a very nice watch you're wearing. I'll have that. too."

Jim struggled to pull himself together, but he was still half stunned. And then -

"Cascade PD. Drop the knife!"

The man whirled, raising the knife, and without hesitation, Jack shot him.

He dropped the knife and staggered back, clutching his shoulder. Jack followed him, and with a move that could have been called brutal, jerked the man's hands behind his back and

handcuffed him. "You are under arrest for attacking a police officer. You have the right to remain silent... "

Without taking his attention from the injured man, he finished reciting the Miranda, then went on, "You all right, Slick?"

Jim took a moment to answer. He rubbed the back of his head. "Ow!" He closed his eyes, tempted to leave them closed, tempted to allow himself to slide into unconsciousness, but the stubborn streak that was so much a part of him forced him to sit up. "I'll be all right. Someone is living in here - I'd guess it's him."

"Not very clever, is he, killing someone so close to where he lives," Jack commented. "Feel up to calling it in? I'll keep an eye on him." Jack nodded towards his prisoner.

Jim scrambled to his feet and headed unsteadily down the stairs.

An ambulance took the prisoner to Cascade General; Jim make the same journey in Jack's car - only one ambulance had been sent because Jim didn't report his own injury. Two Patrol officers accompanied the prisoner as he was checked out; Jack accompanied Jim, who was diagnosed with concussion and to his disgust was kept in overnight.

Next morning, Jim was released when Jack arrived. "Our prisoner is being kept in for another day or two," Jack said. "Feel like having a word with him?"

"Yes," Jim said. "I didn't get a good look at him; my vision was a bit blurred, and in any case his face was in shadow. But there was something about his voice... "

A Patrol officer was guarding the door of the room the prisoner was in. Jack showed him his badge, and they went into the room.

The prisoner was handcuffed to the bed, and glared at them as they entered. Jim took a deep breath.

The man was seventeen years older than when Jim last saw him, but his face was still completely recognizable.

"That's the man who killed Dave," Jim said quietly.

Jack asked the first questions.

The man gave his name as John Smith. Jim and Jack glanced at each other, each seeing the *Yeah, right!* in the other's eyes.

It was no surprise that 'Smith' absolutely denied killing anyone.

"So what was the knife for?" Jack asked mildly.

"Self-defence."

"And you attacked my colleague. Why?"

"I didn't know he was a cop! He was in my space. For all I knew he meant to kill me and make the place his home."

"Threatening him, telling him you wanted his wallet and his watch," Jack said almost absently. "Didn't you stop to think that a homeless man looking for somewhere to stay would have already pawned his watch, and probably wouldn't have enough money to be worth stealing?"

'Smith' just scowled at him.

Jim took over. "When I saw that someone was living there, I was leaving without searching the place, prepared to allow whoever had made a home for himself there his dignity. But after you attacked me, we searched... and found a wallet - "

"You're lying! I dumped them - " 'Smith' broke off, suddenly realizing that he was incriminating himself.

"And there's one other thing," Jim went on. "There's no statute of limitation on murder. Seventeen years ago you murdered a man very near that warehouse, and injured his friend. That friend survived and described you to the police. The drawing that a police artist did back then is still in the files.

"You haven't changed much, Mr. Smith - and even without that picture, I still know you as the man who killed Dave Cooper seventeen years ago."

Jack took over again, and once more recited the Miranda. Then they left and went back to the station.

Once there, they went to see Simon Banks.

"Well, gentlemen?"

"We've got him cold, Cap. Dunno where he's been this past seventeen years, but he's guilty of a murder here in Cascade back then, and we have a witness to that one."

"We do?"

"Me," Jim said. "As soon as I got a good look at him, I knew... "

"You?" Simon stared at him. "Martin?" It was an almost disbelieving whisper.

Jim nodded.

"I've had this feeling I ought to know you," Simon said quietly, "but I remembered seeing the magazine article about you when you were rescued from Peru, and I thought that was why... "

"I owe you for back then," Jim said. "You were very kind to me - I think you were why I joined the police after Peru, rather than re-upping.

"We still need to do a bit of investigation into the current murders, but we have him cold on Dave's. The biggest mistake he made was coming back here."

Simon nodded agreement. "I don't suppose he thought anyone could identify him after so long."

A search of the dumpsters near the docks did produce two empty wallets; fingerprinting proved that they belonged to the first two murdered men, and that both wallets had indeed been handled by 'Smith'.

Jim went home that night via the cemetery. He still remembered where Dave was buried, although he had never been back since the funeral. There was a small, simple stone with Dave's name on it marking the grave, and he guessed that Simon might well have arranged for it, because the surrounding graves were marked only with numbers.

He stood looking at the stone for a moment, before saying quietly, "It's taken a long time, Dave, but we've finally got the guy who killed you.

"Where you are... I'd guess you know that I did join the army, and I'm a cop now. I've had a good life - but I've missed you.

"You were a good friend to me, Dave; I'll never forget you."

He stood for a moment longer, then turned and walked away.