

Michelle L. Green
123 Writer's Way
Writesylvania, WR 12345
(864) 266-0368
mlgreen@fullsail.edu

Word Count: 634

Beats
by Michelle L. Green

I was sure the man on the other side of the door could hear my heartbeat.

What percentage of door-to-doors went wrong? I distantly remembered it being surprisingly low.

#

"If you're smart," the instructor spoke to a sea of mostly indifferent twenty-somethings. He pointed to the whiteboard behind him. It contained diagrams illustrating the various tactical approaches to homes and apartments.

"If you're smart, you'll never end up in a situation like you see on television."

Most of our classes went the same. A lot of theory, but little practice. I didn't get my real education in keeping the peace until I was partnered with Paul. Paul taught me the gritty stuff, the real stuff. Paul taught me how to interact with the public and how to keep my wits about me.

#

Yet here I was. We'd done everything by the book, but the man on the other side of the door had shot Paul. Paul, who had never been shot in his decade on the force and joked that he felt like a Jehovah's Witness rather than a cop. Paul, who sang the praises of community work. Paul, who looked me in the eye -- tears in his own -- and told me to go.

"Dan, if you don't catch him, he'll do worse. Don't let the fucker kill again."

Again. The word burned in the back of my mind. This man had already killed his family. Shot them where they sat at dinner in a rundown walkup in the Bronx.

Sweat dripped down my back beneath the vest I wore. Normally, I chafed at the precaution - today I thanked God for it. A rustling of boots against a bare wooden floor on the other side of the door gave me pause. I tried to control my breathing so I could focus.

Footsteps. Heavy. The suspect is a tall, heavy-set male.

Swearing. Muttering in a city accent. Suspect is thought to be from Queens.

Something clattered on the other side of the door. I couldn't make out what it was, but I used the noise as a cover to check and cock my gun. The weight was oppressive rather than comforting in my hand.

#

It was supposed to be a routine interview. Most leads turn up little. Another thing the media portrayal gets wrong. They solve the case in a couple of days and every interview is a new, obscure piece of the puzzle. In truth, it's a lot of paperwork and many interviews lead nowhere.

The average person notices little outside of themselves, but loves to talk. This was meant to be a visit to an older woman who claimed to have seen something.

"Likely," Paul told me, "she's just feeling a bit lonely."

Well, the old bat must have seen something. The suspect (based on visual description) was leaving the apartment when we arrived.

Stop, we'd said.

He didn't stop.

Police, we'd said, even though it was obvious.

He ran. We chased. Out onto the street and down an alley. He got held up by a dumpster. He turned.

"Gun!" I shouted the warning too late. Paul had been shot once. Twice. The vest couldn't handle that; the first shot cracks the plate and makes it useless.

#

As I approached the door, I thought of Paul out there. I thought of the backup he was calling. I thought of the chase that led me to this hallway. To this door.

My heartbeat thundered in my ears. I struggled to listen, hovering outside the door that sat cracked open.

I took a deep breath.

Okay, I thought. On the count of three.

One, I thought, tightening my grip on the gun.

Two, I thought, shifting my weight.

Suddenly, those heavy footsteps reversed. They thundered back through the apartment and a woman screamed.

I didn't think anymore.