

“The Retirement”

Inspector Gripper sat at his desk and watched the frenzied activities of his colleagues through the open door of his office. He was a meticulous man who always wore a blue or white button down shirt that had been sharply pressed; there were never any creases in his clothes, even at the end of the day. His black Marks and Spencer pants had edges ironed into them that were crisp enough to sever body parts. He never tried a new brand of shirt or pants, and he had only eight ties. This regime had been in place for over twenty years and was enforced with calm devotion. Even the white that had invaded his hair in the past ten years came in with what seemed a military fashion. His raincoat hung precisely from its hanger behind the door waiting to be slipped over the broad shoulders of its owner. He hated disorder with a passion that bordered on psychotic. If a sub-ordinate placed paperwork on his desk instead of the labelled bins he had specifically set-up, it would drive him into a fury that had left many fearing for their safety.

Gripper kept himself in top shape. No unsightly fat hung over his belt to disturb the clean lines of his clothes. He had seen many of his fellow officers disintegrate because of the pressures of the job and he despised them for so clearly showing those weaknesses. The day-to-day grind of roadside accidents or informing people about their missing child, wife, or husband wore most officers down. They would just get tired of seeing the darker side of humanity and that was fine, it was just that Gripper thought it sapped the energy of the force. The job was his life, he had once been married, but she had died given birth to their first child. The boy had died a week later. The night she had died he had been investigating a murder at a warehouse. She had died before he could get to the hospital.

His superiors had tried to make him take a leave of absence, but he had refused.

“The Retirement”

“I prefer to stay at work, sir,” he said.

“I know, but I don’t think that’s the best idea, Gripper,” said the Chief. “Go home, you need some time to get over this.”

“There is nothing at home, sir,” he replied, “Now that...she’s not...I mean...”

“Don’t you have any brothers or sisters? Parents?”

Gripper shook his head.

“No sir, I’m an only child and my parents died a few years ago.”

“Jesus Christ Gripper,” said the Chief, “What the hell...”

“Don’t send me home, sir,” he said, “The job helps me keep things together, this is all I have.”

“Shit. I hope I won’t regret this,” said the chief. “But let me warn you, if you look like you are losing it, I’ll put you on leave so fast you’ll be in your slippers and nightgown before the sun goes down. Got it?”

“Yes sir,” replied Gripper. “Thank you.”

“Good.” As Gripper turned to leave the Chief said, “I’m sorry for your loss John.

Gripper nodded without turning back to the Chief and left the office. He had to leave quickly because his eyes had started to water.

That conversation had happened nearly twenty years ago and he still cringed at his moment of weakness. He was just relieved that the Chief had not seen it. Gripper buried his wife and child and went directly back to work. The murder at the warehouse had to be solved. He had to suffer everybody’s sympathies, which made him want to vomit. It was nobody’s business, but his own; they expected him to cry for his wife and child and because he did not, they thought him a monster. Which was

“The Retirement”

fine with him, if it meant they would leave him alone to do his work. Now they were forcing him to retire when there was still work to be done. He had fought to keep his job, but to no avail. It seemed younger fresher officers were a lot cheaper than old bastards like him. He would have done the job for nothing and he had offered to take a pay reduction, but his union had stepped in and prevented it.

The first few months after Kate’s death had been the worst; he either worked himself or drunk himself to sleep. The strength of his emotions had taken him by surprise, like an avalanche they struck and threatened to sweep his life away. It was only the promise he had made upon her grave that had kept him sane. Until that moment he had spent every night with a bottle of scotch in one hand and the German luger in the other; his father had brought it home from the war as a memento.

After Kate’s death, he did not remarry, there had been women who had been interested in him; phrases like “the silent type” or “moody” were used to romantically describe him, but after a few months of dating they left. Generally after some emotional explosion on their part, demanding him to step forward and pronounce undying love. When he did not comply they left with tears of rage, proclaiming him to be abnormal or emotionally dead. Why did women always think they were right? Why did a relationship have to be one that was defined as loving intimate moments where people declared stupid insipid nonsense to each other? Gripper had often thought; Kate had not demanded such banality from him, she had understood him completely and he had respected her for her solid pragmatism. Gripper did not have time for emotions; he ignored them or avoided situations that might induce them. So, he stopped dating and re-directed all his energies into his job, but now, after to day, he no longer had a job.

“The Retirement”

Why should a man be made to retire? There was not a man in the precinct that could do the job better than him. Anger turned his stomach to acid, he was afraid, afraid of being useless and alone, but anger kept his fear at bay. Determination not to become redundant and die as a hopeless old fart, who needed his ass wiped by some teenage girl in an old peoples home. Most of all he knew he could not stop now, because he still had his promise to keep.

A young officer who had just recently been promoted to inspector, disturbed him,

“Joe Jones has been refused bail, sir. The finger prints on the iron are his, it looks like he slipped up and did this one himself.”

“Don’t jump to conclusions, Smith. Jones has probably ten people who will swear under oath that he was nowhere near Camden market when the murder happened.”

“But sir, the finger prints?”

“I’m not saying he didn’t do it Smith, I’m just letting you know it’s not going to be that easy. I’ve been trying to get Jones for twenty years. He knows all the tricks and he seems to have help in the most unlikely places. Where is the murder weapon now?”

“Down in the evidence room.”

“Good, tell them to keep a close eye on it.”

“Don’t worry sir, nothing is disappearing this time. You can bet on it, after the last mess up.”

“I told you to go do something Smith, I didn’t ask for your opinion.”

“Yes, sir,” he said as he disappeared quickly back into the hive of activity outside the office.

“The Retirement”

Gripper resented the new guy. He craved the man's youth and hated himself for wanting and needing it. Also, Smith represented the anonymous beaucractic body that forced him into retirement; he was the youth brought in to replace him.

The only person he had let in was Kate; he had been a young policeman, new to his beat, he had brought in a drunk to the emergency room where she had worked. Young and beautiful she had been, but what made him desire her was her cool confident, professional manner. There had been no need for him to stay, she had the drunk completely under her control, but he remained under the guise of being concerned for her safety. The reason for his staying had been completely transparent to her, but after taking a closer look at him, she had been happy to play along.

Gripper walked over to his office door to watch the work going on in the Control room. There had been a murder at Camden Market and the Steam Iron gang had committed it. There had been some unrest between the North Canal crew and them. It seemed a message had been sent. The gang's calling card was to kill their rivals by bashing their heads in with an iron and that had been the murder weapon.

Officers working the case caught his eye and smiled at him. One officer went as far as to give him a thumbs up sign. He ignored them all. If it had not been his last day they would not have dared be so friendly. An overwhelming urge to pound the thumbs up guy's face into his computer screen had to be repressed. Everybody knew he had been chasing this gang and especially Jones, for twenty years. Nobody knew the real reason he chased Jones so vehemently. It truly could be called his one great passion. Gripper had been there the night Jones' criminal career at rocketed into the big time with his first murders. Everybody knew Jones had committed the crime, but

“The Retirement”

they had lacked the evidence to convict him. His pursuit of Jones, had been organized and calm, but now he had run out of time, and he could not leave the business between them left unfinished. Luckily, he had been able to arrange a way to wrap everything up nicely.

In many ways Gripper, respected Jones, or Joe “Steam Iron” Jones, to his friends. Jones’ career had begun when he had killed a couple of blokes who owed his boss some money. He had taken care of them by using a steam iron, which he found at the warehouse where the men had worked. Jones was a ruthless man and dedicated. In another lifetime they could have been friends.

Gripper took his raincoat from the hook at the back of the door and put it on. He knew Jones would not get bail and be detained another couple of days; Gripper had come prepared. His coat hung heavily on his strong shoulders and he turned to look at his reflection in his office window. There was a slight bulge in the coat’s right pocket and the outline of the iron bar he slipped into the coat lining the night before was faintly visible, but not so anybody would notice. Reassured Gripper left his office for the last time.

He did not ask Kate out that night and he left taking the drunk with him, freshly stitched. As he left he turned and found her looking at him with her open frank eyes that were made gentle by her lopsided grin. Her face haunted him as he walked past her hospital a thousand times whilst on his beat. It was the first time he had felt the need to have anybody in his life. Being forced to confront his emotions had not made him happy.

Once he had accepted his foible, he had set out to conquer it; he invited Kate out for drinks and their courtship began. Gripper was a single-minded man, and once

“The Retirement”

he had decided his course, he was hard to move. She had to be his wife so he could have his brain back. Kate had been very thorough and had made him jump through a few hoops to prove his love before she was willing to accept his proposal.

As he walked through the Control room people came up to him and said, “Don’t worry we’ll get the bastard this time,” or “Better than a gold watch ah Gripper.”

The station was on a mission it seemed to give Gripper a retirement present he would not forget. He nodded acknowledgement, but kept walking. All of this attention made him uncomfortable. Over the years he had perfected a frown that indicated deep dissatisfaction that intimidated people, simply because he liked to keep a low profile and be left alone.

Gripper stopped at the desk sergeant who was on duty, “Hi Phil, What room is Jones in?”

“Room six,” replied Phil.

“Is anybody in there with him right now?”

“No, why aren’t you upstairs getting ready for your retirement party?” asked Phil.

“You know me Phil,” replied Gripper, “I’ve never been one for parties.”

“What do you want with Jones?” asked Phil, “I didn’t think he’d be one of the people you’d want to see on your last day.”

“I just want to say goodbye,” Gripper replied, “I’ve been chasing him for so long it feels like he’s one of my rotten relatives that keeps turning up on Christmas to drink all my beer.”

“The Retirement”

Phil laughed at the rare joke from Gripper and said, “Sign in,” before letting him past.

Gripper walked past Phil disguising his disgust for the man. People were so gullible. He had not asked him if he had permission from the officer in charge of the case all because of a little small talk, pathetic.

They made the decision not to have children straight away. They wanted to save up so they could buy a house; Kate continued working as a nurse and Gripper applied himself and was soon made inspector. He was one of the youngest men ever to reach the rank. A short four years later they moved into their beautiful new house in a nice middle class neighbourhood. He could have given a damn about the house or the area, but Kate had insisted and he could see the practicality of her wish.

Gripper entered room six to find Jones sitting at the mandatory desk with the two chairs that were in every interrogation room. Closing the door he kept his back to Jones and pulled the iron bar from the lining of his coat.

“What’s the matter, Gripper,” Jones asked, “Can’t bear to look at me?”

Gripper ignored him while he pulled the metal bar from his coat lining. Once it was out he stepped back and with two quick blows, knocked the door handle off the door, which left an open gaping wound. Using the metal bar for its second purpose, he jammed it between the floor and the opening that had been left to stop anybody from entering the room.

“What the fuck?” said Jones.

“The Retirement”

“I’m just making sure we won’t be disturbed. Why don’t you sit back down?” Gripper said to Jones who had risen from his seat in shock at Gripper’s violence on the door.

“What is going on here?” asked Jones, “Where’s my lawyer?”

Gripper pulled the second chair away from the table and sat down and said, “Sit down Jones we have a lot to talk about.”

“I have nothing to say to you until my lawyer gets here,” answered Jones.

“Jones, this is not about lawyers. There is something personal between us, something we have to clear up before I leave,” he replied.

“Personal? There’s nothing between us.”

“You killed my wife.”

“What! I didn’t even know you had a wife and why would I want her dead,” said Jones. “What are you trying to pin on me? I never been anywhere near your wife.”

“You are right, you never met my wife, but you killed her none-the-less.”

Gripper and Jones stopped their conversation when they heard the door handle on the outside being tried.

“Fuck,” said Phil the desk sergeant, reacting to the door handle coming off in his hand. After a couple of moments, Phil, started to bang on the door. The door moved a little from his blows, but then the iron bar dug in deeper and the door stopped moving.

“Inspector Gripper,” called Phil, “Inspector, they are asking for you upstairs, they want to start your party. Are you all right in there? Gripper, I can’t open the door, are you all right?”

“The Retirement”

Jones made a move towards the door shouting, “He’s gone crazy Sergeant...”

With speed defying his age, Gripper stood up and placed himself between Jones and the door and pulled out the German luger from his coat pocket.

“Don’t try it Jones,” said Gripper, “You won’t make it.”

“He’s got a gun! He’s got a gun!”

“Shut up and sit down or I’ll kill you where you stand,” Gripper said.

Jones raised his hands in the air in the universal sign of surrender and made his way slowly back to his seat.

“Take it easy, Gripper. What’s your beef with me? I’ve done nothing to you.”

“Sir, open this door, open this door,” shouted Phil.

Suddenly the door was hit with a shuddering blow, but the iron bar held. Phil had thrown himself physically against the door. He could be heard yelling to somebody to get help.

“I want you to know why I’m going to kill you, Jones,” said Gripper. “I have chased you for twenty years. Twenty years I have tried to put you behind bars so you would pay for her murder, but you have always eluded me.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“The night my wife died was the night you murdered those two warehouse workers.”

“Look, you tried to pin that one on me twenty years ago and you couldn’t. Anyway, if I was killing those two men how the hell could I be knocking off your wife?”

“How? I’ll tell you how Jones?” said Gripper. “I was called out and I had to leave my wife. It took her too long to get to the hospital when she went into labour. There were complications and she died. Now, if I were there this would not have

“The Retirement”

happened and why wasn't I there? I wasn't there because of you, because of a piece of filth like you. I promised on her grave that I would get you. I've tried so hard, but I've run out of time. So, now I have to do it this way. You understand I can't leave it unresolved. Can I?"

As Gripper talked the door was being pushed inch by slow inch open by the combined force of a number of policeman, who shouted for Gripper not to do it.

“This can't be happening,” muttered Jones, “This can't be happening.”

Which were to be his last words as Inspector Gripper unloaded five bullets into him. The bullets tore apart his stomach and chest leaving him sprawled inelegantly dead on the floor.

“I got him Kate,” said Gripper in the silence that descended after the violent noise, “I promised you I'd get him and I did.”

The policemen shocked into inaction recovered and attacked the door with greater energy. A few moments more before they broke into the room, thought Gripper. The sixth and last bullet he had saved for himself, his final feeling as the bullet did its work was one of contentment, there were no loose ends, and his last remaining case was completed, satisfactorily.