

LA. COP

PEACEMAKER IN BLUE



SAMPLE CHAPTER 1

Copyright 2021 by Three Sixteen Publishing Inc. All rights reserved. This work is protected under United States copyright law.

This free chapter of L.A. Cop: Peacemaker in Blue is courtesy of Three Sixteen Publishing. Visit 316publishing.com to discover other free resources and to order L.A. Cop.

Please feel free to download and print this material providing you agree to the following conditions:

No altering to the wording, layout, or electronic format is permitted in any way. Selling this document in any form, in part or in whole, printed or electronic is also prohibited. Any exceptions must be approved by Three Sixteen Publishing Inc.

Further inquiries can be made at info@316publishing.com.

ISBN: 978-1-63664-000-6



1

HOW DO YOU SAY DEAD?

“11L75, 11L75. Meet the fire department, 695 Maniton, possible D.B.”

“Roger.”

I wrote the address on the scratch pad secured to my metal log-sheet holder. After the address, I wrote “D.B.,” police jargon for *dead body*. As I said the words to myself, they sounded as morbid as the first time I had heard them.

The radio call had interrupted the quietness of Sunday morning patrol. The streets were deserted except for an occasional well-washed family driving to an early religious service.

Only a few moments before I had been complaining to myself about working the Sunday day watch. I missed going to church with my family. Sunday calls, especially the morning ones, were always depressing. Usually it was family disputes; husbands and wives fighting about the happenings at a party the night before, or what to watch on TV.

I spun a U-turn in my black-and-white radio car and headed to Maniton. A few blocks and several turns later I saw a fireman disconnecting hoses from a hydrant. I pointed to the hoses ahead of me; he motioned me on. Down the street stood the smoldering frame of a house; a total loss. Although the walls were still standing, they would be leveled by wreckers. A hose from a pumper truck was still in use.

Across the street, a score of neighbors were clumped together. Some wore robes, others in pajamas huddled in blankets to keep out the morning chill. Two helmeted firemen with oxygen tanks on their backs were draping blankets around two young children standing next to the battalion chief's red car. Another fireman held a baby in his arms.

The scene was oppressively quiet. Grim. No one was smiling. In fact, no one was even talking. The only sounds were an occasional hissing as the spray from the nozzle of one of the mopping-up hoses hit live coals. As I stepped out of my car, a tall fireman with silver trumpets on his collar walked toward me. I supposed he was the chief.

"Morning," he said politely. "I'm afraid we have a D.B. in the front bedroom. We haven't disturbed anything in there except to spray in some water to knock down the fire. A couple of the men saw the body from the living room. I'm afraid it's the kids' mother."

"Only one body?" I asked.

"That's all we've seen so far."

"Well, let's have a look," I said. We walked toward the house. The chief continued, "She evidently thought one of the kids was still in there and went back in, but all three of them got out."

"Are there witnesses to her running in and not coming out?"

"Yeah, several in fact. We've detained them over by the pumper."

We walked through the safer portions of the smoldering shell. The smell of scorched furniture, wet rugs, and burnt paint

stung my nostrils. We crossed what was once the living room and stopped at the doorway.

"You can see her from here," the chief said. He pointed through the purple haze to a steel-frame bed. On the blackened mattress was a form that reminded me of farm animal carcasses in barn and stable fires. The legs were bent sharply at the knees. The skin stretched tight, blackened and split in some areas. Her hair was gone.

"I've seen enough for now, chief. I'll call for the detectives and coroner. Don't let anyone in the room." Then the odor of burned flesh hit me and I backed away.

"Your first burn D.B.?" the chief asked.

"Yeah. Not a very pretty sight, huh?"

"No. She didn't feel much, though. She probably passed out from a lack of oxygen, or she inhaled super-heated air. From that point on, she didn't know what was happening."

"Maybe so, but it's still a bad way to go."

As we made our way across the front yard, I asked, "Do you have any idea how the fire started?"

"Yes, it's almost certain that someone threw a baby blanket over an open gas heater in the front room, probably to dry it out. It caught fire and spread to the curtains. Then the whole house went up."

"It doesn't sound like arson?"

"No, not at all. A paperboy saw the smoke and roused the people next door. They said that when they arrived, the occupants were asleep and the door was locked from the inside. But I've called the arson squad out anyhow."

I went to the squad car and radioed for detectives and the coroner. Now my job was only to preserve the scene and try to identify as many witnesses as possible. I had another task I was quite reluctant to tackle; it was my duty to make certain the children had someone to stay with.

I walked toward the three children. The older ones were sitting

on the back seat of the chief's car and the fireman still held the little one. As I came up, he said in a low voice, "The kids want to know where their mommy is."

"They don't know yet?" I said, praying to myself that somebody had already told them.

"No, but I think the oldest suspects the worst. He wants to cry."

"Well, who's going to tell them?"

"That's up to you. They're yours. The neighbors say the father left over a year ago. They're not sure about any other relatives."

"Do you have their correct names and all the technical stuff?"

He pushed his helmet back on his head and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. The eyes of the little one followed his motions with a suggestion of curiosity. "I think the oldest can give you the names all right. Any more than that, I'm afraid you'll have to work up."

I stood in the middle of the street feeling pretty helpless. Three children were in *my* care, their mother burned beyond recognition on a bed a few yards away. Sooner or later, they would have to know, and I was the one who would have to tell them.

I walked toward the car. What could I say? The little girl, no more than three, had her face pressed against the rear window, watching me. The boy, maybe five, had accepted the baby from the fireman and was holding his youngest sibling on his lap.

The little girl retreated to her brother's side when I opened the door. Her eyes reflected uncertainty. She wasn't sure about my uniform. I took off my hat and squatted down beside the open door.

"Hi, I'm Officer Vernon. I'm a policeman. I'm your friend." There was no verbal response, just those big eyes looking at me.

"What's your name?" I asked, placing a hand on the boy's knee.

"Rudy."

"How old are you, Rudy?"

"I'm almost five. I'm going to school next year."

"Rudy, will you please help me? Let's take your sister and the

baby to my car, where it's warm. You can listen to my police radio."

"Okay, but where's my mom? Is she in the house?" Before I could answer, he shot me another question. "Did she get hurt in the house?"

His brown eyes connected with mine. He knew that his mother had met trouble.

"Yes, Rudy. Your mom has been hurt, but let's talk about that later, okay? Right now I need your help. You're the oldest, aren't you? Will you help me?"

"Yep, if you'll help my mom."

I nodded.

He pulled the blanket closer around the baby girl and started climbing out of the car.

"Here, I'll carry the baby. You bring your other sister." I held out my arms and he gently transferred the little one.

"Come on, Lupe," he said, grabbing the older sister's hands. "The policeman is our friend. He's going to help us ... You will help us, won't you?"

"Yes, I sure will."

We walked toward the squad car. The neighbors silently watched us; a policeman awkwardly carrying a baby in his arms, a baby who would grow up never remembering their mother, a small boy holding the policeman's hand on one side and his little sister on the other. A little boy in the crowd called out, "Hey, Rudy, where..." The boy's mother grabbed his arm and pulled him. He had no idea what he had done wrong.

I opened the door to the police car and watched Lupe scramble in. She was so young, so innocent, so trusting. To her, the police car looked like fun. But before Rudy got in, I stooped down next to him. "Look, Rudy, you can't stay in your house any longer. The fire ruined it. I'm going to take you to a nice place where they'll give you breakfast and let you play. But Lupe would get scared if she saw you cry. Then she might not want to go. So, you be big and brave, okay?"

I still hadn't found a good way to tell him about his mother. *Should I?* He was so young, so anxious. He looked back at the house. I knew he was concerned about his mother. "We won't leave her in there," I promised. "She's hurt so bad, some nice people will come and take her in another car."

He climbed onto the rear seat. As I handed him the baby, he looked straight into my eyes and asked, "Is my mommy dead?"

I was stunned. I'd figured he might not even understand the meaning of the word.

"Yes, Rudy, she's dead."

He snapped his head sideways and with his arms squeezed his baby sister as tight as he could.

The coroner and the detectives arrived, and I left with my three young charges. I drove them over to Lathrop Hall, where they would be well cared for. The juvenile people would probably place them in a foster home. I sat down at a desk there and finished the reports.

Well, it's all wrapped up, I said to myself. But, of course, it wasn't all wrapped up. It never is. Before I left, I went and said goodbye to Rudy. I left him standing in the hall, following me with his eyes. I was his friend, yet I had left him with strangers. When I went out the hall door, I could see him still watching me.

I wanted to take him in my arms and say, "Rudy, everything's going to be all right." But police work had brought me face to face with a harsh world that was completely foreign to the secure, happy world that I had known when I was Rudy's age. Somehow, I wasn't sure that everything was going to be all right.

I crawled into the car and radioed in. Before I could pull away, the operator came back on with a call. An older couple had been burglarized during the night and had just discovered it.

I rogered the call and entered the address on the log sheet. I checked the mirror, let out the clutch and moved into the traffic that was now heavy with Sunday morning worshippers returning home.

I wanted to tell those church people about Rudy, Lupe, and their baby sister, along with their young mother who had apparently died trying to see that her children were safe. As I sat alone in that car, I wanted to make some connection between the comfort and safety I had known in church and the stark reality of orphans and burned bodies.

As I hurried to the next call, I shot up a prayer for those three little kids without a mother or father. That was not the first prayer I had prayed while on the job amidst the conflicts I encountered as a peacemaker in blue. I knew the God who had guided me could take care of Rudy, Lupe, and their baby sister too.



Complete book available at 316publishing.com

For bulk discounting, send your inquiry to

info@316publishing.com