The city was always colder than the outskirts even during the hottest of summer days. Indeed, it was a very hot August evening but there was still an indescribable chill in the air. The chill wasn’t the physical sensation of cold temperature per se as much as the general feeling of the place. Anybody with a half functioning brain could sense the despair that hung around like a thick layer of smog. It had been that way since 9/11; the terrorist attack, the economic downturn, the collapse of the housing market...

The common people could feel the cold heaviness but it was the city’s police force that was really starting to be overwhelmed by it. People were becoming more and more desperate. All types of crime increased whether it was simple theft or murder. Domestic disturbances had increased tenfold. Money was usually the reason for most of the domestic disturbance calls that reached Sergeant Carlos Martinez. He was sure the reason for this disturbance in the suburban neighborhood called ‘Sierra Estates’ was due to the stress of strained finances.

Martinez made the call to the dispatcher as he pulled his cruiser up to the house in question. He glanced over at the brand new officer in the passenger seat. His name was Ryan Hazuki, a twenty-four year old still fresh from the academy. Martinez didn’t know specifically what ethnicity Hazuki’s family was but he was obviously Asian. Martinez pulled his cruiser behind another police cruiser that belonged to Sergeant Eric Parcell whom had arrived on the scene just a few moments prior. Martinez could see Parcell talking with an overweight middle-aged woman wearing clothes that certainly didn’t flatter her body type. Sitting on the curb was a man with a cigarette hanging off his lips.
Martinez opened his door, “Alright…already looks like a blast.”

Hazuki grinned nervously and stepped out with Martinez. They closed their doors and headed over to Parcell. Martinez rubbed his forehead as he looked to his fellow sergeant, “What’s going on?”

“From what I can tell the male on the curb over there got drunk and hit his wife,” Parcell said. “The wife says the fight started when she told him to get a job. Her eye is obviously swollen so she definitely got rocked.”

“That’s exactly what happened officer,” the woman said. “It’s the thanks I get for taking care of his drunk and unemployed bee-hind. I tell him to get a job and he punches me? No sir!”

Martinez glanced over at Hazuki, “Alright go talk to the husband. See what he says and be observant alright?”

“Roger sergeant,” Hazuki said.

Martinez droned out the conversation between Parcell and the woman. He turned his attention to Hazuki and carefully observed him as he questioned the intoxicated husband. After a few minutes he took a deep breath and walked over to them. The middle aged man looked at Martinez with a regretful expression as he put out his cigarette, “It’s not my fault I got laid off at the plant!”


Hazuki rubbed his hands together, “Well, the gentleman is obviously intoxicated and combative…his right hand is bruised with a small cut on the middle knuckle…definitely hit his wife I’d say sergeant.”

“She wouldn’t shut HER DIRTY FUCKING MOUTH!” the husband yelled at his wife’s general direction. Martinez sighed and retrieved some handcuffs from his belt, “Sir please stand up and put your hands behind your back.”

“Why am I the bad guy? Is it my fault fucking Chrysler shut the plant down?!”

“Sir…stand up and put your hands behind your back. You’re under arrest for domestic violence, disturbing the peace, and drunk and disorderly conduct. Do you know your rights?”
“I know my fucking rights! I’ve got a right to a fucking job and a right to have a wife that ain’t an ungrateful slut!”

With that final outburst the drunk husband complied and put his hands behind his back wiggling and squirming as Martinez put the cuffs on him. As he clamped the cuffs down he went into his pre programmed Miranda Rights spew that he’d said what seemed like a billion times before. Seeing Martinez cuff the male Parcell walked over to his cruiser and opened the rear passenger door, “You can put him in here. Got a few things I have to take care with the female and I’ll take him down.”

Martinez forcefully guided the husband into the cruiser and looked over to Parcell. “You got this?” he asked.

“Yeah I got it,” Parcell replied, but with a curious look. “Hey, you and your wife going to the ball?”

“Yeah, how about you?”

Parcell laughed, “Yeah. My daughter wants to come too. Don’t know how I feel about my grown up girl wanting to go.”

“Oh screw that dude,” Martinez said with a muffled laugh. “My cherry partner here might try and make a move on her.”

Hazuki’s eyes went wide, “Uh…”

Martinez playfully shoved Hazuki and got into the cruiser. His quiet laughter faded into a tired sigh as he called in what had happened. He put the cruiser back into motion when Hazuki got situated and away they went. As he pulled out of the neighborhood he looked up at the sky and saw the setting sun in the distance. He had only a few more hours on his shift until it was over and he was looking forward to being done. Tomorrow was one of his days off and he really needed it.

“You look tired,” Hazuki said.

“Yeah, well…dealing with drunken bozos hitting their wives can start to wear on you after a while. How about you? You likin’ this gig?”

Hazuki grinned and nodded with the youthful motivation that Martinez had possessed earlier in his career. Martinez didn’t hate his career and in fact he loved it.
Sometimes though the daily grind would start to get to him. All he wanted to do at the end of the day was relax with his pretty young wife and do the things that made him feel like he was living the American Dream. He wanted to wash his car, he wanted to mow his lawn, and he wanted to take his wife out to see a movie.

His thoughts were interrupted by a call over the scanner that sent a chill down his spine. There was a report of a shooting outside of a cemetery located only a few miles away. The report also stated that there were multiple civilian casualties. Being the only car free to respond at the moment he flipped on his lights and sirens. He put his foot to the floor of his cruiser and the high powered machine took off. He blew past several intersections before he came to the area in question.

He slowed down and approached the cemetery entrance when he saw what appeared to be a lone soldier in a dress uniform flagging him down. Martinez slowed the car and rolled his window down, “What’s going on?”

The soldier obviously looked panicked, “Shit’s fucked up officer. Me and my guys are just here on the funeral detail for a soldier being laid to rest. There were those fucking protestors in the parking lot making a ruckus when one of the people from the funeral group got up and started arguing with them. Then, these two guys punched the guy and when he was on the ground they kicked him a few times before one of them pissed on the guy!”

“The hell?” Hazuki said with wide blinking eyes. “Yeah, the other protestors pulled the dudes off of him and then they start arguing amongst themselves. Dude on the ground? Yeah…he goes to his car, gets a pistol and pops the two dudes! They’ve got to be dead officer.”

Martinez grimaced, “Where is everyone? Is anybody else hurt?”

“Nah, everyone is ok I think. Me and my guys got everyone including the protestors hiding down by the reception center. We don’t have guns or anything so we can’t really do shit if that guy wants to shoot some more.”

“Alright go back there and help will be there shortly,” Martinez said and quickly accelerated to the scene. In the visitor parking lot he saw a lone man standing over
the bodies of the two victims the soldier had told him about; in the man’s hand was a black modern pistol (Colt M1911). There were several derogatory signs resting near the lifeless bodies.

Martinez stopped the car just shy of the scene of carnage. He and Hazuki opened their doors, drew their department issued handguns and pointed the muzzles of their guns at the suspect. In a stressed, but forceful voice Martinez yelled out, “Police! Drop your weapon and get on the ground!”

He watched as the man whom seemed to have an altered mental state turn and point the pistol at his own temple. The man was wearing a disheveled suit and had a messy beard. Martinez narrowed his eyes, “Drop the gun! Now!”

“Or what? You’ll shoot me?” the man asked. “I’ll do it for you! I’ve got nothing to fucking live for anymore man!”

Martinez quickly called for backup on his hand mic and stepped out from behind the door. He looked to the two bodies on the ground and saw that both had been killed by two shots to the chest and one to the brain. There was no use calling in EMS. They were dead. A bead of sweat dripped down Martinez’ face as he focused on the suspect’s pistol again. Martinez actually owned a 1911 so he knew that if six shots had been fired then that meant that the suspect had possibly two more rounds in the weapon.

“Stay back officer!”

Martinez glanced over at Hazuki, “Cover me…”

Hazuki’s arms trembled due to the sudden rush of adrenaline, but followed the order and kept his weapon aimed on the suspect. Then, Martinez slightly lowered his handgun and took a couple cautious steps toward the man, “Sir…put the gun down.”

The man’s bottom lip trembled as tears began to stream down his face. He looked as though he might collapse at any second but he still kept the muzzle of his pistol pressed against his head. He looked to Martinez and sobbed, “These fucking assholes…I didn’t want to do it. They fucking made me!”
Martinez saw the man’s white undershirt had been stained by urine just as the soldier had described. He tried to suppress his nervousness. He had to find a way to connect with the suspect and subdue him peacefully. There were already two victims and there didn’t need to be a third. This man needed to be arrested and tried by the courts, not him.

The unstable man trembled violently, “I came here to pay my respects to my old team leader from Bragg…and these fucking Bible thumping douche bags start protesting me and him! Saying that, ‘God killed him’ and that, ‘All soldiers deserve to die,’ and shit like that!”

Martinez frowned, “Sir…”

“Jeremy,” the man sobbed. “My name is Jeremy.”

“Jeremy put the gun down alright?”

“I can’t officer! I’m not going to go rot in some prison! There’s nowhere left for me to go!”

Martinez’ trained eye spotted that Jeremy’s left leg was completely immobilized as he staggered from side to side. He slowly lowered his Glock to his side and spoke in a calm voice, “Jeremy are you injured?”

“I lost my leg two years ago in Afghanistan…Captain Robinson…he saved my life,” Jeremy said with his face turning to anger. “And these…fucking assholes have the nerve to call this man all this vile crap! To protest him when he’s being laid to rest! When his family is trying to fucking heal?!”

Martinez looked back over his shoulder and spotted several police cruisers pull into the parking lot. He got over his hand mic and told them to set up a perimeter and find the civilians at the reception center. They needed to control this situation before it spiraled out of control. They had to keep other civilians away and they definitely had to keep the press away. Jeremy was obviously becoming more nervous and agitated with the increased police presence. The last thing Jeremy needed was some journalist with a camera which could send him right over the edge. He hobbled in a little circle, but never let his pistol move an inch away from his head.

Martinez took a deep breath, “You said you were
from Fort Bragg? Are you airborne?"
  "SF," Jeremy replied.
  "Ah," Martínez said. "My nephew is at Bragg with the 82nd. I don’t know much about the military, but I know honor is a big deal…you did something really bad Jeremy. You need to put the gun down and turn yourself in."
  "I didn’t do nothing bad, man!"
  "Jeremy you killed these two people!"
  "They killed me!"
Martínez quirked an eyebrow, "Come on Jeremy, put the gun down."
Jeremy’s face twisted in a painful disgusted frown. He looked to Martínez and shook his head, "You don’t know man…you don’t know."
  "Then tell me. We can make this right."
  "Man, I’ve been in the Army for ten years…did two deployments to Iraq with the infantry and a bunch more with my ODA (Operational Detachment-Alpha) team. I saw so much shit man. I saw people bleed out and I saw people get evaporated by EFPs (explosively formed projectile)…only thing keeping me going was my wife and my baby boy…"
Martínez nodded, "Right…you got a family Jeremy. Do the right thing and put your gun down for them alright?"
Jeremy trembled and let out a painful cry. Martínez could see how wet his face was from tears. Jeremy wiped his nose with his sleeve, "My fucking wife…you know how she repaid me? You know how she repaid me for all the bullshit I went through for her? To provide for her and my boy?! She repaid me by sleeping with some shit bag from Fayetteville! Then you know what else?! She divorced me and took everything away from me after I got blown up!"
Martínez winced. All he could see as he looked at Jeremy was his nephew. The sheer possibility of ever seeing his nephew as broken as Jeremy turned this situation into something much more personal unlike anything he had ever experienced before as a police officer. His voice softened, "Jeremy."
  "Then she goes and lives with that asshole she was sleeping with in MY fucking house! The one I bought! Man, my boy calls him daddy! He calls me fucking Jeremy!"
Do you know what it’s like to have to relearn how to live your life with only one fucking leg and nobody there to help you? Everything was taken from me man…”

“Jeremy,” Martinez said sympathetically. “Jeremy for God’s sake put the gun down. You need help. We can get you that help. Just put the gun down.”

Jeremy didn’t even acknowledge what Martinez had said.

“Then when I got my medical discharge I tried to get a job but they’d never hire me. I’m some fucked up vet with disabilities and they’re scared shitless that I’ve got PTSD or some fucking thing! As they turn me away they have the nerve to say ‘thank you for your service’ like it’s not an insult man! I didn’t ask for their ‘thanks’ not that they meant to give it anyway! People just say that shit without thinking about what they’re doing to us man. You wanna thank someone then thank guys like Captain Robinson that gave their lives for this country and not us that just got lucky…”

Martinez cautiously walked toward Jeremy and holstered his Glock. He held his hand out to the Special Forces veteran, “Jeremy give me your gun man.”

Jeremy shook his head, “Then when I finally do get a job at the Chrysler plant they go and shut it down. I’m there living in my fucking shitty ass apartment dealing with the VA that couldn’t give two fucks about us. That’s when I hear about Captain Robinson…I go to pay my last respects to this hero and these fucking assholes…these fucking assholes…why did they make me shoot them man?! I can’t…I can’t…”


Jeremy closed his eyes as the hand that held his pistol began to tremble violently. After a few seconds he looked up at Martinez with a pitiful sob, “I’m so sorry…I didn’t mean to.”

Martinez crouched down slightly and held out his hand. He was close enough to see that Jeremy’s finger was out of the trigger well and that the pistol’s safety was engaged. Martinez spoke with renewed calmness as he saw that he had finally broken through, “Good man. Just give me the gun and we’ll fix this whole situation.”
The next few seconds happened in slow motion for Martinez. Jeremy held the pistol out to him muzzle first. Hazuki’s nerves snapped at what he perceived as a direct threat to his partner. The young officer squeezed off two rounds in rapid succession. One of the 9mm rounds impacted right in the center of Jeremy’s chest while the other tore into his neck. The round that hit his neck ripped open his carotid artery and blood squirted out from it and onto Martinez’ face.

Martinez recoiled and turned away gagging. Within seconds several fellow officers moved forward to his aid fearing that he had been shot. Martinez pushed them away and staggered over to his car in mental shock over what had happened. He pressed his hands against his face and wiped Jeremy’s still warm blood from his skin. His gaze lifted to see Hazuki. The young officer had a stunned and terrified expression as he realized the gravity of what had happened. He had taken a life.

The media descended upon the tiny cemetery and the miserable scene inside like a flock of blood thirsty vultures. Martinez and Hazuki were brought back to the station where they submitted a sworn statement on what had happened. They were given several days of paid leave to decompress over the incident and were told to appear for mandatory psychological evaluations to help them with any issues that might develop.

As they sat waiting for permission to leave Hazuki looked to his partner with obvious regret, “Sergeant…I thought he was going to shoot you. I didn’t know.”

“You were trying to protect me,” Martinez spoke softly. “You did what you thought was right. There’s not much else to say.”

It was hard for Martinez to be the wise and experienced superior since he himself had never been involved in an actual shooting before. When word finally came that they were able to go home Martinez put a hand on Hazuki’s shoulder, “If you need anything call me alright?”

“Alright,” Hazuki replied with a cracked voice.

Martinez then went to gather a few items from his locker before going to his car. He drove an old BMW Z3
sports roadster that was as black as his mood. He started the motor and drove home in silence with no radio or CD playing in the background. He drove carefully through traffic and finally onto the drive way of his comfortable two story house that he bought when he joined the force. Waiting for him on the front porch was his wife, Roxanne.

He gathered his things and climbed out of the car. He walked over to his wife with a face she had never seen on him before. She hugged him tight and looked up at him, “What happened? There’s some story on the news about some crazy vet killing people?”

Martinez gently cupped the side of her head and ran his fingers through her blonde hair, “Yeah, let’s go inside. I really need a shower.”

Being so close to her husband she caught the scent of what was unmistakably blood on his uniform; that horrible iron rich smell. She followed him inside but didn’t follow him up the stairs. She could tell by his body language that he needed at least a few minutes to be alone.

He went immediately to his shower and stood underneath the warm spray. He leaned against the shower wall as tears began to fall from his eyes. He sobbed and ground his teeth. He wanted to know why. He wanted to know why Jeremy had gone through everything he had gone through. Why his country had forgotten him in his time of need. He cried knowing that if only someone had seen the storm coming they could have prevented it.

The country and the people in it had dropped the ball. Everyone was so focused on the real war that they had forgotten about the war a soldier fights within when he or she comes home. Martinez was as guilty as everyone else up until that day. He tried to help Jeremy fight his war but he couldn’t save him. Though he had never served in the military Martinez at least had a slight understanding of the pain Jeremy had suffered.

Martinez was now a veteran. A veteran of Jeremy’s war.

As he got out of the shower and dressed in his loungewear he couldn’t stop thinking about his nephew. He kept having these horrible mental images of his nephew suffering the way Jeremy had; disgusting visions that
perhaps if he were having problems that he too would be ignored or shunned and that he might hurt himself or others. Martinez snagged his cell from off his dresser and headed downstairs. Roxanne was sitting on the couch waiting for him.

Martinez sat down next to her and she took his hand. She kissed his cheek, “I don’t like seeing you hurt. What happened?”

“Just a bad situation and I honestly don’t think I can even begin to tell you about the emotions that are running through my head right now. I just need you to listen ok?”

Roxanne watched curiously as her husband scrolled through the names on his cell before stopping on ‘Domingo.’ She looked up at her husband, “Your nephew?”

Martinez gave a slight nod. His finger hit send and then hit the icon to put the phone into speaker. After a few seconds Domingo answered the phone, “Hello?”

“Hey Ding, it’s your Uncle Carlos.”

“Hey! What’s good? I haven’t heard from you in a while.”

Martinez frowned, “I know. That’s why I’m calling.”