

Cops & Hitmen

By

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Cops & Hitmen

“Platteville nine-one-one, what’s your emergency?”

Officer Stuart Thompson had just delivered coffee to his dispatcher, Angie Black when the emergency line rang. He stood looking over her shoulder at the computer screen. The call came from a landline phone in a neighborhood filled with new homes, some still under construction. Address information and a map popped up on the screen as soon as she answered the call.

Angie leaned forward, "Sir, did you say you shot and killed someone?"

Stu did not wait to hear more; he was already running towards his squad car. “P-27 to all city cars. Start heading for Oak Haven Court. Angie is on nine-one-one with a caller, something about a shooting.” The voices of three other officers working on shift came over Stu’s shoulder microphone showing their acknowledgment of his message.

Jumping in the squad car, Stu turned over the engine and flipped on the light bar. After he pulled out of his parking stall, Stu then activated the siren. It was an odd little quirk he had developed. He never put on the siren when parked, only after a vehicle was in motion. He did not have time to ponder such a quirk.

Ten-thirty on a Wednesday night, the traffic was light. In a college town such as Platteville, Wisconsin people always seemed out doing something. There was never a time the city streets were empty. The darkened sky made the flashing red and blue lights stand out. Cars yielded to his squad speeding past them toward the shooting scene.

An extra strobe light that flashed white sat in the middle of the patrol car's light bar. When the sensor mounted on traffic lights registered the flashing strobe, the stop lights cycled to halt the cross traffic. Green lights looked at Stu as he raced down Water Street. A

different squad car was about hundred yards ahead of him pulling off a side street onto Water Street.

Thompson wondered when the dispatcher would give an update. Part of him wanted to ask for information, but the logical part of him knew not to. Angie was a superb dispatcher who knew her job well.

A crackle came from the police radio speaker mounted between the front seats of the car. "This is a page for Platteville EMS." Stu stole a look at the screen of the police radio. The display read Simulcast, the radio channel for fire and ambulance pagers. "We need you to respond to 1701 Oak Haven Court for a person with two gunshot wounds to the chest. EMS, we need an ambulance to Oak Haven court for a gunshot wound. Officers are on their way to the scene and will advise when it's safe to enter."

A slight bit of pressure lifted from Thompson's shoulders. EMS was on the way and already knew to keep back. "P-27 to Platteville"

Angie's voice came over the police channel. "Go for P-27."

"Can I get a status update on what this call is?"

"Caller reports being the homeowner who shot an intruder on the stairs leading up to the second floor. The caller says he is too scared to approach the person shot. No update on the extent of injuries. Currently, the caller is in the master bedroom hiding in fear the of the intruder being only injured."

"Understood. Do you still have the caller on the line?"

"10-4."

Stu's mind was racing. He was the Officer In Charge (OIC) for the shift. He was the decision maker tonight, the person the younger or less-experienced cops would look to and have a plan. "Is he willing to step outside the bedroom and look to see if the person is still there or has moved?"

“Stand by P-27.”

It took only seconds, but to Stu, it felt like hours before Angie answered.

“Caller is too afraid to leave the master bedroom. He advises now that the intruder had something in his hand that looked like a gun.”

Stu punched his steering wheel, saying a string of profanities. The squad in front of him pulled onto Knollwood Drive and turned off the siren. Thompson clicked off his siren also as he turned onto the side street. Two blocks later both squad cars were at the entrance to Oak Haven Court.

"P-27 to Platteville, mark us as 10-60," old school police code for being close to a call but not on the scene.

Thompson stood outside his car looking up the street. The house they were interested in was three homes away. Less than a minute later two more squad cars showed up and parked.

All the officers looked at Thompson waiting for a plan. "P-27 to Platteville... Tell the caller we are approaching the house. Have him stay in the bedroom."

"10-4."

The four cops had their weapons out as they walked up to the house. With simple hand signals, Thompson told the officers to wait at the front door as he walked around the house.

Walking into the backyard, Stu peeked into windows looking at the kitchen, living room, and a home office. His view of the living room allowed him to see the bottom of a staircase. A human body lying on the steps was visible.

Back at the front door, Thompson told the other officers what he saw. Reaching out, he checked to see if someone locked the door. Basic cop adage, “Try before you pry,” sure enough, the door was unlocked.

“P-27 to Platteville... tell the caller we are coming in. Order him to drop his weapon as we will shoot anyone pointing a gun at us.”

A few long seconds go by. "Platteville to P-27... caller has been told to drop his weapon and be kneeling in the master bedroom on the second floor."

Without a word, the four cops rushed into the house. Thompson pointed for two of the officers to clear the main floor as he approached the victim with one officer covering him. A crumpled mass laid at the bottom of the foyer stairs with a pool of blood staining the surrounding floor. A gun sat about four feet away from the body. Thompson ignored the firearm and took the time to inspect the body.

A hole in the neck seemed to be the source of a massive amount of blood on the bottom few steps and foyer floor. Standing back from the body with his weapon still pointed at the man, Stu spied a dark stain on the guy's chest. It looked like the first shot hit the center of mass and the second just a tad higher.

"Sir, I am a police officer. Can you hear me?" There was no sound or movement from the man, "Sir, I am here to help you... if you can understand but can't speak, wiggle your fingers." Again no movement. Stu was not surprised. That gaping hole in his neck and the blood loss was something few people would survive.

Holstering his weapon, the officer slipped on latex gloves and pulled a trauma dressing from the cargo pocket on his leg. "Keep him covered as I check his injuries." Crouching, Stu checked for signs of life. No breathing and no pulse.

The other officers came back to the foyer. "Get up there and secure the homeowner. Don't let him out of that room till after I say so... okay..."

Both cops nodded then jumped over the body and rushed up the steps. Stu listened to them order someone to keep kneeling. Stu could hear movement he could only assume was an officer checking the other bedrooms for people. Then the echo of a voice. "Sir you are not under arrest. We, however, need to handcuff you for safety till we establish the identity of both you and the guy downstairs."

Thompson forced himself to ignore the officers upstairs and focus on the body in front of him. The cops upstairs were competent and capable of doing their jobs. Cognizant of the body camera he wore, Stu panned the lens over the body and the surrounding area. "P-27 to Platteville, the scene is secure. Tell EMS to get in here. Have a male with two gunshot wounds in the upper body, PNB." Pulseless Non Breathing.

"10-4 EMS is staged close, they should be with you in a second."

Placing the trauma dressing on the chest and neck was just for show. Thompson had seen enough dead people to know when someone had a look being beyond help.

Two paramedics came into the room less than a minute later. They had a gurney loaded with multiple gear bags and a big hard yellow plastic backboard. "Guys this is a crime scene. Load and go. Get him on a backboard and get him outside. Play doctor all you want on the front lawn or in the back of your rig but not here."

Platteville was the kind of town that did not get many shootings. The medics did a double take, looking at the body and then at Officer Thompson's face. After a beat, one said, "Sure thing Stu."

The Paramedics got the man onto the yellow board and then placed it onto the cot. Outside the medics loaded the cot into the ambulance. Stu directed the fourth officer to remain with the patient in the ambulance.

Back inside Stu called up the stairs, asking to have the other man walked down. The officers helped him down the stairs while Stu pointed out places covered in blood to avoid stepping. Once on the main floor, Thompson directed the three towards what looked to be a family room.

This man was in his mid to late forties, Overweight carrying all his mass right in the middle. He was dressed in sweatpants and a yellow polo shirt. Stu guessed the guy worked in computers or some other geeky technology desk job.

“Sir, I would like to take the handcuffs off of you. If we do that will you sit on the couch here?”

"Yes, officer."

Cuffs removed, the man sat on the gray leather sofa. Stu had picked the couch, so the man had his back was to the bloody mess in the other room. Thompson sat on the dark wood coffee table facing toward the male. "I assume this is your house. Do you by chance have identification with you?"

The man told them his wallet was on a shelf in the kitchen near the entrance to the garage. Stu motioned for an officer to get it.

"Did I kill that man?" The man had a fearful and hopeless look in his eyes.

"I am not a medical expert. The EMTs took him to the ambulance so he could still make it." Thompson hated lying to the guy, but he needed the man to keep talking. Killing someone was shocking to most ordinary people even if in self-defense. Learning he had, in fact, taken a life might cause the guy to clam up or request a lawyer.

Looking at the driver license, the name showed as Matt Baker, and the address matched the house they were at. Officer Thompson called the information into dispatch. Seconds later, Angie radioed back that Mr. Baker's information was in order, and he was free of a criminal history besides some parking tickets.

“Can I call you Matt?”

"Yes, Officer."

"Please, call me Stu," it was a basic police interview procedure, build a rapport with the other person. First names gave a feeling a friendliness, openness, and helped build a foundation of trust, "I realize your mind is racing right now, so we will keep it simple to start. Were you home alone tonight?"

“Yes. My wife and some of her girlfriends got tickets to a show over in Milwaukee. They are spending the night there. Our two boys are in college. One in Madison, the other in Oshkosh. Why?”

"I just wanted to make sure. We saw no one else in the home and wanted to ensure we don't have someone missing."

“Oh... like if they kidnapped someone?”

"Something like that. Okay, Matt, can you tell me, was he alone or was someone else with him, someone who might have run off?"

"He was alone. I had gone upstairs to get ready for bed. The front door has a squeak, and it echoes up to the master bedroom. Hearing it unnerved me, so I got the pistol I keep in my nightstand out and stepped out onto the landing upstairs. That guy was walking up the steps. His hand was by his side holding something. I yelled out, who are you? He raised his hand. I could see he was holding a gun. I already had my gun pointed at him. So I fired off two shots before he pointed his gun at me. I saw him fall, then I ran back to my bedroom and called you guys."

That was helpful. Matt gave out a bunch of information Stu had not asked about. His first two questions had not been about the act of the incident; they had been about safety for other people. Miranda Rights were still something Thompson needed to worry about if this turned out to be something other than self-defense. Asking about the safety of other people was not a Miranda issue. Matt offering extra information was his own decision, so no one could not accuse Stu of violating rights.

"Matt, anything else we need to talk about should be done back at the department. We will need to transport you down to the PD. Before we go, I want to ask your permission to have officers remain here to process the physical evidence."

“Are you asking if you guys can do all the CSI stuff here in my house?”

"Yes, that is what I am asking."

"Yep no problem, you need to do what you need to do..."

Thompson motioned for one of the other officers to take Matt down to the police department. He then pulled out his cell phone and called the dispatch center. Angie had already called in Detective Cindy Herrisch and notified the police chief of the shooting. Thompson was happy to hear Cindy was coming in. Stu was an evidence technician and could handle all the forensic evidence collection. He was not as good at doing interviews, but Cindy was one of the best in the interview room.

#

By nine in the morning, the dead guy at the hospital still did not have a name. The ER doctor had declared the decedent as dead within seconds of seeing the body rolled into the hospital. The body was then left alone until Stu, and the coroner could deal with him. They had found no wallet or any other identification on him.

After processing all the evidence at the shooting scene, Stu ran out to the hospital to meet with the coroner, Walter Wines. With Walter's help, Stu rolled prints from the body. Now back at the department, Stu was ready to call in a favor from an old college friend who worked at the crime lab.

"Tim, it's Stu Thompson from Platteville PD calling."

"Hey there my friend, how goes it?"

"Things are interesting. Listen I need a little help with a dead John Doe."

"Sure. As long as you want a rapid ID to point you in the right direction for finding out who he is. Nothing I will need to testify in court for right?"

"Exactly."

"Scan the prints and email me."

Stu already had the prints scanned, and the email composed. Clicking send, he said, "They're on the way."

"Nicely done Thompson. Okay, give me like an hour maybe two. I'll call you back if I get something."

After hanging up, Stu walked to the Dispatch Center where people had gathered. Cindy was explaining how Matt had asked to call his lawyer. The attorney requested Matt be allowed to go to the hospital for evaluation for shock or other stress-induced ailments. Cindy had agreed and set an appointment for when the two would return to the PD. The lawyer seemed surprised at her agreement and surprised again when she presented the lawyer with a signature bond.

She had told the lawyer "I don't want to take him to jail, and I can't babysit him at the hospital. So guess what... you're his counsel, and you now get to assure his wellbeing till his family gets home." The lawyer laughed at her con and was touched the detective cared about his client's wellbeing.

Chief Ruiz asked for some details about the case. As they chatted, Stu could not help but listen in on the radio traffic between the dispatcher and a civilian parking enforcement officer. He held up a finger, and everyone stopped talking.

The dispatcher was saying"... No local address on file, just the Milwaukee address. Checked student database and does not appear to be a local college kid. Should I call a tow truck or is the business owner okay with it parked there?"

"Owner said he will need it towed. This SUV is parked blocking the rear door, and a delivery truck will be here soon." Came the reply over the radio.

Something in Thompson's gut caused him to ask "What's going on?"

"Pizzeria Dos had a vehicle parked behind the building overnight." The day shift dispatcher explained. "It is blocking the back door. They called about it last night, but you all were busy. So now day shift is trying to get it moved."

Pointing towards the city map hanging on the wall Stu said. "Pizzeria Dos is right by our shooting scene. There's even a jogging path that goes from that neighborhood down to all the businesses on along Dubuque Road."

Chief Ruiz tilted his head. "Go on."

"The registered owner has no connection with Platteville. What is the name of the person that car is registered to?"

The dispatcher checked her screen. "A Jonathan Funesto out of Milwaukee."

Thompson and Ruiz at the same time said: "Run that name."

A few clicks on information on her screen and the system showed it was searching. Less than a minute later the screen scrolled with information. Letting out a low whistle, the dispatcher read off the record. "Theft, criminal damage to property, trespass, intimidation of a victim, drunk driving, this guy has one heck of a criminal record."

Chief Ruiz looked pale. He had retired from the New York state police before moving to Wisconsin to take a small town chief job to supplement his pension. "Out East, we would assume a guy with that record was connected to organized crime."

Before anyone could reply, the non-emergency phone line rang. "Platteville Police... just one second." Putting the caller on hold, the dispatcher looked at Stu, "Tim from the crime lab is on line one for you."

Stu grabbed the phone. "Tim, don't tell me. You got a hit, and the name is John Funesto."

"If you knew why did you ask me to run the prints?"

"We just figured it out based on a parking ticket issued close to where he was killed.

Listen I need to go. Will fill you in sometime later."

Stu hung up and explained sending prints to a friend at the crime lab. They had confirmed the identity of the dead guy. Cindy excused herself to call the detective bureau over at Milwaukee PD. Stu told the dispatcher to have the tow truck bring the vehicle up to the Platteville Police Department so he could process it down in the garage.

#

The SUV, a black Ford Expedition, was somewhat clean. Stu found two different iPhones and a wallet containing an ID card for Jonathan Funesto. The wallet had a credit card, a bank debit card, and some cash. Nothing out of the ordinary inside the wallet. The phones were interesting. One phone was in an OtterBox case, the other with no case or protection.

Thompson was getting out his fingerprint kit when Detective Herrisch came into the garage. "You will not believe what Milwaukee PD said about our dead guy."

"Try me."

"The chief was right the guy is a low-level wannabe for a Milwaukee crime family, a suspect in a couple of open cases. Allegedly Jonny Funesto is... well was, trying to make a name for himself as a contract guy."

"Like a hitman?"

Cindy nodded her head. Then Cindy explained she went over to the lawyer's office to talk with Matt. After leaving the hospital, he was resting on a couch in an unoccupied office.

"Now guess what Matt told me when I said the guy he killed was a hit man?"

"Something about the wife and an impending divorce?"

A smile crossed Cindy's face. "Nope." Matt is the senior partner of M & D Engineering. His partner Dave has been talking about wanting to go solo, but the two men can't agree on a price for Dave to buy Matt's half of the company."

Stu knew many violent crimes were a result of family issues or money. If it was not the wife, he assumed it was money and asked. "How much is this engineering company worth?"

“Only about five million dollars. Which is likely more than enough motive to kill your business partner.” Cindy looked at her watch. “The lawyer wanted to talk to Matt for a few minutes. Then was going to bring him back over to the PD. I better get upstairs to meet them.” She paused before exiting the garage. “Find out what is on the phones and let me know ASAP.”

Moving from the garage to the evidence processing workroom, Stu decided to search the phone without a case first. It was a fifty-fifty guess, but something about the naked telephone felt odd. In the Evidence workroom was a computer workstation hooked to a device called a Cellebrite extractor. Plugging in the iPhone and clicking the mouse, Stu started the download process. Ten minutes later the iPhone was in storage, and he was searching a digital copy of the phone cloned to the desktop.

The phone seemed only to be a few days old. It had little on it. Stu saw the only app on the phone was Facebook. Opening the app, Stu surprised by it being logged into Matt's account. He also found a post in draft mode but not yet uploaded. That post read like a suicide message.

Checking the text message history, Stu found a dozen text messages between this phone and two other numbers. One number was a Milwaukee phone number, and one was from a Platteville number. The Milwaukee number messages showed someone had paid money, and the job was ready to complete. Texts from the Platteville number had Matt's online user-name and password. Other texts detailed the verbiage to be used in the Facebook suicide post and then instructed where to find the spare key to the house.

Stu printed off all the information and then headed over to the interview rooms. Matt and his lawyer had just arrived. Cindy was walking them towards one of the interview rooms. Stu handed over the printouts.

Cindy read the text messages. "It would be easy for an engineer to figure out a fellow engineer's username and password. I think we are building a good case here. Hopefully, we can get a warrant for this Dave guy's house later today. Right now I am trying to get consent from Matt for a search of their engineering offices."

Before Stu could reply, his radio interrupted, "Platteville to P27, you are needed up at the address on Oak Haven. Someone is trying to gain access to your crime scene."

#

A Sheriff's Office squad car was parked at the end of the driveway to the crime scene. Platteville PD did not have the budget for an officer to stand guard over a crime scene. The Sheriff hired college kids as reserve deputies to work as glorified security guards. Even though Stu had finished processing the scene, they decided to hold it till after Cindy had completed all her interviews with Matt.

Stu had met this deputy before but could not recall the kid's name. "Officer Thompson this lady says she lives here and needs to get into the house."

A woman, early forties with short-cropped, wine colored hair, dressed in yoga pants and a hoodie stood to the side of the squad car. Arms crossed, she hissed "This dumb kid with his toy badge won't let me in my house. I need to get in there. My husband killed himself last night."

Momentarily, taken aback by her statement of suicide Stu asked for her identification; Debbie Baker. She was Matt's wife. "Ma'am, can I ask why you think your husband committed suicide?"

"His post on Facebook saying he was going to end it all and was sorry for the pain he caused. Called and texted him this morning with no answer." She had a panic in her voice. "Be honest with me is Matt dead?"

Stu thought for a second and realized there was an error in what she had said. "Matt had a bit of an incident last night. We have him down at the police department. Because of what took place last night we can't let anyone in the house just yet. If you want, I could find you a comfortable place to wait for Matt at the police station."

Debbie seemed very perplexed about what to say. She looked at her car, then the house, then at Thompson's squad car. "Yeah, I guess so. You sure Matt is downtown?"

"Yes, ma'am," Stu walked back towards his car. Opening the back door, Thompson said. "Why don't you let me give you a ride."

#

Stu had Debbie seated in interview room number three. Matt was down with Cindy in interview room one. Over in the detective's workroom, Stu checked the video feeds. Cindy was talking to Matt and his lawyer. Should he interrupt her or not? Cindy needed to know.

Knocking on the door, Stu opened it and motioned Cindy out. In the hall "This had better be important." She said in a voice with an edge.

"We got a problem."

"What?"

Out in the hall, Stu explained what the wife said. Cindy placed a hand over her mouth to stifle a giggle. "Okay, so how do we play this?"

Five minutes later Stu was standing in the Detective's work area with Cindy, Matt, and the Lawyer. Using the iPhone from the dead hit man, Stu called the unknown Platteville number the texts had come in from. Watching the video feed, Debbie reached into her purse and pulled out two iPhones. She put one back in her bag and held the other up to her face. From the iPhone's speaker in Thompson's hand came "What the fuck are you calling me for! I am at the damn cop shop, and supposedly that fat, dumb shit husband of mine is still alive!" Stu hung up the call.

The lawyer asked to have a few more words with Matt. Two minutes later, the lawyer came out and asked if he could see Debbie. Cindy walked him to the interview room. The attorney motioned for Cindy to enter with him. "Debbie, the police will have some questions for you. Due to a conflict of interest, my firm and I cannot represent you. Matt has expressed a desire for a divorce. Given the reason he wants a divorce, I will file to put a hold on his bank accounts locking out your access."

Debbie looked shocked. "That asshole! If he only sold, we would be rich, and I could be happy."

"Debbie, you may want to wait till you talk a lawyer before saying anything more. Then again, if I were your lawyer, based on what the police have on you, I would ask for a plea deal right at this point."

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