

A nighttime photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, featuring the Freedom Tower. The sky is dark with a full moon in the upper left and several long, horizontal light trails from city lights or traffic. The buildings are illuminated with various colors, including yellow, blue, and red.

**MALLORY AND
GUNNER**

**Night of
the Wolf**

Christopher Ryan

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For Glorious, as everything is.

In tribute to Jeff Rice's *Kolchak the Night Stalker*, the classic that launched so many fiction dreams.

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MALLORY AND GUNNER NIGHT OF THE WOLF

Detectives Mallory and Gunner approached Davy Byrne's Pub not far from Washington Square Park in the Village, debating, as usual.

Mallory shook his elaborately frowning face. "Darryl Hall is a gateway drug?"

Gunner's great bulk shook with amusement. "Was then, is now."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Back when all us whiteboy rockers were only listening to Scott Muni, Allison Steele the Nightbird and Pat St. John on WNEW, Hall and Oates showed up singing Philly Soul and introduced us to black music. Got us hungry for more, so we gave R&B and Soul a try, stumbled across the Ohio Players, Barry White, Al Green, Earth, Wind & Fire, Kool and The Gang, Sly and the Family Stone, etc. Widened our view. Helped us limited Caucasians discover there was more to music than guitar gods and screamed lyrics."

"That's harsh."

"Then with *Live from Darryl's House*, he's did it again, re-introducing gorgeous harmonies to the Pop/Hip-Hop age."

"If you think Hip-Hop fans were watching that show--"

"Some of them did. And these days, thanks to the internet, time no longer exists as we knew it. Anything posted exists forever. Music fans are finding all sorts of stuff to feed their appetite for great grooves."

"And that makes him a hero?"

"He put it out there at a key moment. Any true music fan recognizes when good sounds hit his or her or their ear. Even if they stumble across those guys jamming with somebody, it will hook them. If they catch the Chiddy Bang episode, all the better."

"What are you smoking when you're home alone at night?"

"Love and music, brother. Love and music. And an occasional binge of *Game of Thrones*."

"Thank God for murder."

"We talking cable murder or IRL?"

"IRL, right here, right now. Maybe it will deliver me from your alleged logic."

Major Cases had been called in because two hours before, the rear of Davy Byrne's Pub transformed into the third grisly crime scene in this neighborhood in as many nights, and the "extreme nature of the attacks" called for resources beyond the local detectives.

"Davy Byrne's Pub?" Mallory scowled as they approached the entrance. "Another McSorley's rip-off."

"Actually, this joint is named after the bar Leopold Bloom visits in *Ulyssess* by the fine Irish literary maniac James Joyce."

"You read *Ulyssess*?"

"Last summer. *All* last summer." Gunner shrugged, opening the bar's door. "Took me two months, three editions of the book, two sets of study guides, and an audio copy of the novel."

"Jayzzus."

"You complain when I listen to music, when I watch TV, when I read... I think you miss me at night."

"Damn right, honey," Mallory smirked. They entered the crime scene.

The detectives knew they'd be walking into chaos. If Lieutenant Dan chose to involve their special squad, that also meant it was probably the worst of the worst - Major Cases' specialty. And if Mallory and Gunner in particular were called in, that meant the crimes were weird. The Lieu always called them into the odd ones. And both their fellow squad members and local detectives knew it.

The ball-breaking started immediately.

As they turned the corner toward a back "dinner" room, a short, round, gray detective cracked, "FBI in the house."

Another nodded his chin at the detectives, "Mulder. Scully."

A third tipped his head to the back room, intoned in a mock TV baritone, "The truth is *in* there."

Mallory's frown almost extended down beyond his face. Gunner paused their progress, smiled, and extended an arm toward the back. "After you, gents. Anyone can claim lead on this one. We're fine with returning to the office and doing paperwork. Nice, boring paperwork. Anyone? No? How about you fine detectives leaning by bar? No? Then don't act like bitches when my partner and I get stuck with this crap."

One of the other detectives, a short, thickly muscular firebrand known as Tizzy, shot forward in full fury, "*Bitches?* Who you calling--?"

Gunner towered over him. "You want the case?"

Tizzy clamped his mouth shut.

"Thought not, be-otch."

Two corpses. Both male. Jugular veins torn out. Blood flooded the cracks in the old wood floor and Jackson Pollacked one wall. On the places where the vics' shirts and pants were not drenched in blood, steaks of white powder covered them, as if the blood bath had started out as a baby powder fight.

Mallory tended to look for logical answers first. "Attack dogs?"

The Ghoul, one of New York City's best and creepiest medical examiners, was all angles and anger. This spitting image of the cartoon teacher from Pink Floyd's *The Wall* didn't even look up. "Wrong. The bites would be lower and more numerous."

Gunner mocked his partner's deadpan delivery. "Pet lion?"

"Incorrect."

"Alcoholic panther?"

"You are once again wasting precious air, Gunner."

"Super-sized sewer gators?"

"Erroneous."

"Did the Mayor order budget cuts to their necks?"

That got The Ghoul to look up, squinting disapproval at the large, messy detective. "How did you even become a detective, son?"

Gunner grinned. "Exactly that way; I told them you are my father."

"Lord, take me now," Ghoul sighed, bending closer to the bloodier of the corpses. "For your information, and this is preliminary at best, I am fairly sure these were done by human teeth."

Gunner made a face. "Here we go."

Mallory crouched beside The Ghoul for a closer look. The Ghoul immediately pointed to the wounds in question.

The tall, lanky detective sighed. "The jokes are going to be relentless. 'Where's your Wolfman, detectives?'"

Gunner turned to a uniformed officer. "Get me a Manhattan phone book. We look under 'Chaney, Lon' and we're done."

The uniform paled, "A phone book? Now, sir?"

"Immediately, if not sooner. Check also 'Wolf, Were' just to be thorough."

The officer pressed his lips together, went in search of something called a phone book.

Mallory bit back a smirk. "Doc, are the wounds consistent with the two other crime scenes?"

The Ghoul smiled a rictus grin. "Yes. Throat, face, and/or ears deeply lacerated via wild clawing or human teeth."

Gunner joined in, "Same exact teeth?"

The Ghoul's expression withered to icy disdain. "What show do you think we are on, *CSI* or *Criminal Minds*?"

"I was going for *Kolchak the Night Stalker*."

The Ghoul just glowered at him. Mallory did too. Gunner gave his best Oliver Hardy fingers wiggle. "I'll be perusing the remainder of this fine alehouse for additional clues," he said, stepping away.

The Ghoul turned his gaze to Mallory, "I fail to see why you endure your partner's frivolity."

"Tax write-off."

The Ghoul actually chuckled. The foreign sound was brief, dry, and void of encouragement. Mallory decided it was best to move on. "Any theories as to why a human would regress to animal savagery, Doc?"

"Insanity, most likely," the doc mused, returning his myopic stare to the vics' wounds. "Clinical or chemical, I cannot say."

"Will you eventually be able to?"

The Ghoul shrugged his bony shoulders, his sallow skin wrinkling in a full-faced wince. "Should there be saliva traces in the wounds, and should they show considerable amounts of regulated substances, perhaps that will suggest some ailment or abuse. But don't hold

up your investigation waiting for such an unlikely needle in the haystack. If I do luck out in that arena, I will call you.”

From out of site, Gunner called, “Mal.”

“Appreciate it, Doc.” Mallory stepped away from the corpses, found Gunner by a rear storeroom. Gunner swept his arm, showcasing the contents like a game show host displaying what Mallory had just won. “It appears that Dead and Deader were old school chefs.”

Indeed, the corpses had been cooking crack. All the tools and steps were present: Bunson burners, torched mini-pans, bulbous crack pipes, many of which had been shattered during some kind of struggle.

“Explains the powder on the vics,” Gunner suggested.

Mallory nodded his head. “Fight started here.”

“Maybe some mutant crackhead came through the open window, tried to rip them off here, and the fight spilled out to the bar’s dining area.”

“Do we have a bloody shoe or sneaker prints to follow? Security tapes? Eyewitnesses?”

Gunner grinned. “We definitely got some bar owners who just lost their liquor license and will be wanting to avoid doing time. Maybe they ‘just innocently rented out’ the back room.”

The uniformed officer approached Gunner with a thick, dilapidated phone book from 1988. “Four Chaney’s, sir, but no ‘Lon’ as a first name. There is one ‘L.’ though.”

Gunner nodded sagely, struggling to hold back his laughter. He took the book, studied the names the officer indicated, then smiled at him. “Great job, Officer...”

“Michael’s, sir. Officer Steve Michael’s, sir.”

Gunner’s face was stern, but his eyes glittered with mirth. “Solid work, Officer Michael’s. We thank you and will include you in our reports. Now, can you ask Detective Tizzy to come back here?”

“Detective Tizzy, sir?”

“Vertically challenged steroid case. Probably having a beer in clear violation of NYPD protocols. Make sure you pronounce his name correctly. *Tizzy*. He’s particular about people respecting his heritage.”

“On it, sir.” And he was.

Mallory shook his head. “That’s cruel.”

Gunner smirked. “The kid magically found me an almost thirty-year-old phonebook to help crack the case. Doesn’t he deserve some fun?”

A furious explosion of curse words bounced off the walls. Tizzy burst toward them still yelling. "You told that numb nuts my actual fucking name was--"

"Gotcha back here, didn't it?" Gunner wiggled his eyebrows. "Got something you are gonna love." Gunner showed him the makeshift crack lab. Tizzy smiled, his fury gone. He loved bagging evidence. Tagging it. Racking up overtime writing reports on it. And, of course, taking credit for it.

"Officer Numb Nuts! You're with me! We're bagging this whole room. Today, you learn something!"

The red-faced uniform stormed past the detectives, shooting Gunner a look, then submitted to Tizzy's berating. "Gloves, kid! Let's not taint *all* the evidence we've been gifted here!"

Mallory frowned at his partner, but his eyes confessed their amusement. "Let's go chat with the owners."

There were two of them, one was the real owner, the other was a front for whomever owned the crack dealership. Mallory knew this because the latter had more balls than brains, and the former knew enough to sweat profusely as they sat on a couch crowded with record keeping debris. Keaton and Jones, the squad's numbers guys, had already tossed this room, walking away with two long boxes of pertinent records. This pair were already screwed five ways to Sunday. Only one of them knew it.

"We got nothin' ta do with the murders," The Front said as Mallory and Gunner entered the room. "Some drunk can't hold a few shots of Jaeger got nothin' ta do with us."

Mallory took the seat behind the desk, smiled a cold smile at him. "You are impressively misinformed about your alleged line of work, young man. Tell him, Barkeep."

Barkeep, older and more concerned than the mouth next to him, lowered his head. "Bar owners are responsible for any patron who drinks himself or herself out of control and becomes a danger to himself, herself, themselves, or others. We could lose our liquor license."

The Front was undaunted. "You can't prove Jackie got like that here. Came in like that."

Gunner chuckled. Mallory's smile widened. "Barkeep?"

"Even if we don't serve the patron, we also didn't call authorities when said customer became unmanageable, and we didn't throw the subject out of the bar. We're potentially

culpable.” Barkeep looked at Mallory for the first time. “Detective, this person did come in out of control, never even ordered a drink. Just ran in ranting, heading right to the back, and then all hell broke loose. It happened so quickly we didn’t have a chance to make a call until after the incident.”

Mallory smiled, “And of course, like any legit social establishment, you have plenty of footage from your multiple working cameras to support your story.”

Barkeep looked away.

Gunner clapped, nodding toward The Front. “This guy made you turn ’em off, right? So you wouldn’t be filming his side of the business. What got you in deep with his family? Coke? Hookers? The ponies?”

Barkeep winced at the last one, and the picture was complete. Almost.

The Front seemed pleased. “Waitaminutewaitaminute. What he said, that’s all that happened ‘xactly like that, see? We’re in the clear. Now, we gotta get back to work, so--”

Mallory tossed a bag of the bloody cocaine on the desk. Then a bag of crack.

The Front didn’t miss a beat. “You’re planting evidence!”

Gunner tapped his SmartPhone, showed the pair some pictures of the back room crack factory. “Did we stage all this, too?”

The Front never hesitated. “Probably.”

Mallory grinned now. “The plethora of prints begs to differ.”

“Plethora?” This seemed to hurt The Front’s brain.

Barkeep glanced at him. “‘Wealth of, plentiful.’ They’ve got lots of fingerprints.”

The Front sat back, shaking his head, shrugging his shoulders, his face annoyingly defiant. “Not mine. You should go arrest those guys whose prints youse got. Nothing to do with us honest businessmen.”

Barkeep’s head dropped to his chest.

Mallory leaned toward The Front. “Last time this gets explained: your bar, your store-room, your responsibility.”

Gunner leaned his considerable bulk over The Front on the other side. “Listen genius, when manufacture and sale of illegal narcotics are done on your premises, you’re responsible no matter who owns the drugs. When that activity can be tied to a series of homicides it is so much worse. And now you want to pass it all off on some losers you got cooking for you? You think they are going to do serious time for you? Murder rap time? Do you also actually believe some fire-breathing ADA and a cranky judge are going to let you pin

the drugs on the two stiffs with their throats ripped out? Do you really imagine in your wildest fantasies that anyone is looking to cut your sorry ass a break?"

The detectives both sat back. Mallory laced his fingers behind his head, sighed, and said, "So, let's talk about this guy Jackie..."

Jackie wasn't a guy. She was a one-time body building amazon who somewhere along the line added crack to her creatine regimen. According to the now talkative Front, a royalty check for some long-forgotten body-building DVD she'd worked on financed a hellacious binge about ten days ago. When those funds dried up, her need didn't.

"So, she's robbing drug locations?" Mallory asked.

"With her teeth?" Gunner scoffed.

"You don't know, bro." The Front was their buddy now, having come to the conclusion that his cooperation would get him off the hook. "She's like one of these storms of the century we get every few months now. Quick. Brutal. Unpredictable. We'll leave her to you. Do what you need to and we're square, alright? Can we just get back to work now?"

Mallory, Gunner, and Barkeep just stared at him.

As it turned out, Officer Michael's phone book came in handy. After a quick Google search of female body builders named Jackie turned up articles on local phenom Jacqueline "Le Body" Bonnacella's rise to the finals of a recent citywide bodybuilding contest, and embarrassing disqualification when mass quantities of illegal steroids were found in her system during routine drug tests. That last name turned up listed at an old address more or less in the middle of the three murder scenes.

"She can't still be there," Gunner insisted. "Had to be her childhood home."

"This is New York City," Mallory countered. "Families rarely give up rent-controlled apartments. Worth checking out."

As they prepared to descend on the apartment building where she lived, loading up on tasers in addition to their Glocks, Officer Michaels approached the detectives. "I want in," he demanded.

Mallory nodded. "You'll be assigned something, Officer."

"I want to go through the door with you."

Gunner waved him off. "Detectives will handle that, kid."

"You humiliated me in front of other cops for no reason. I never did anything to deserve your abuse."

"Well, you did contribute a 1988 phone book. Surprisingly, that proved helpful."

"I understood you were joking, sir, but I do not disobey orders, even if it meant embarrassment. Now you should let me regain some dignity by making me part of the assault team."

Mallory and Gunner glanced at each other.

The officer pressed. "I know about you two. You made your bones doing the right thing no matter what. Breaking cases by refusing to take the easy route. And you don't take crap from the others, don't let them hang a nickname on you, know your value. Me, too. I refuse to be treated as less than I am."

The detectives glanced at each other, nodded. "You're in."

All the drugs may have ruined Jackie's athletic dreams, but not her workout habits. When the detectives smashed through the door, she had 200 pounds lifted over her head. She actually roared as she threw the barbell across the room. In the lead, Gunner ducked to the right, Mallory to the left, and the weights sailed past them, just missing Officer Michaels and shattering Tizzy's shoulder.

Gunner tasered her, darts hitting just below her clavicle, shoulder muscle, and three in her bare, tight abdomen. As the shock ripped through her, instead of dropping in convulsions, Jackie threw her head back and screamed in fury. She yanked the wires off her, tossing them to the ground.

Mallory, Michaels, and another detective hit her with their tasers simultaneously. Jackie staggered, dropped to a knee, then growled, ripping those out as well. When she raised her head, the detectives didn't see human intelligence in her eyes; they burned with pure animal rage.

She sprang forward. Mallory's mind wanted to think of a gazelle, or deer, or some other graceful metaphoric beauty, but no, this was the charge of a rampaging rhino. Massive leg muscles coiled and pushed off with furious power, and Jackie was airborne, altering Mallory's mental imagery in mid-leap, as she raised long, talon-fingernailed hands, bringing them slashing down on Michaels' neck, splattering blood in a wide arc as she sailed over him, this time toward the dazed, injured Tizzy.

Rapid-fire shots rang out from a dozen cops.

Jackie "Le Body" Bonnacella was riddled in mid-air.

She was dead before she hit the linoleum.

So was Michaels.

The investigation found lethal action to be justified.

Michaels was given a hero's funeral.

It didn't help Mallory and Gunner's grief.

"Just five years on the job," Gunner murmured standing next to his partner as part of an honor guard in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"Not even out of his twenties," Mallory murmured back.

"We never should've--"

"But we did."

Tizzy, left arm in a sling to keep it from jostling his healing shoulder, spoke up from his position next to Mallory. "He was a cop, like the rest of us. He lived to do The Job. He did The Job. Made the ultimate sacrifice. Instead of feeling sorry for yourselves, you should give the man the respect he deserves."

It was perfectly timed. The hearse carrying Michaels' flag-draped coffin to a cemetery on Long Island began to move. The blocks-long honor guard of hundreds of uniformed members of the NYPD, including Mallory, Gunner, and a wincing Tizzy, snapped into sharp salute. They remained that way until the procession was out of sight.

As the long blue line broke up, Tizzy stepped in front of the partners. "Both of you, with me." He didn't wait for a response, striding briskly up the block to PJ Moran's on 48th Street. He entered, walked right up to the bar and beckoned the bartender. "Three shots of Scotch. Top shelf. No fucking around."

The bartender delivered McCollum's. Tizzy distributed them, raised his. "To the man."

Mallory and Gunner responded, "To the man."

They drank.

Gunner ordered three more. Mallory made the toast. "To Police Officer Steven Micheals, forever one of New York's Finest."

They drank again.

Tizzy eyed the bartender. "Keep them coming."

And he did.

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