

THE GOLD SHIELD

written by
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BLACKOUT - AFTERNOON

The sound of tires rolling along a dirt road can be heard. A man is heard talking on his cell phone. This is NICHOLAS VAUGHN, a detective with the New York Police Department.

NICK:

(v.o.)

No, I got promoted last Friday.

(pause). Yeah, the promotion's brand new, I'm hoping for Narc division. (pause) Nah, I gotta work my way up to Homicide.

'Sides, most of the bad ones in my precinct are all high on something at the time. (pause) What? (pause) You're breaking up on me.

Fade in.

INT - CAR - AFTERNOON.

Nick appears to be a few months shy of his 28th birthday. He peers out of his windshield at the road before him.

OUTSIDE - THE ROAD

He's driving a rental car through a back-country road, but a paved street is seen in the background, giving the impression that he's just turned on to the unpaved portion.

BACK TO SCENE

NICK:

It's not you, it's me. I'm in Kentucky this weekend. (pause) Springfield, specifically the outskirts. (pause) Chief's orders. He said I had to go see a former detective, Ted Crawford. He told me it was mandatory before I came into work on Monday. (pause) Well I imagine he'll make you see him when you make detective too. From what I hear, any officer who's made detective since Crawford retired has been required to go see him.

Nick's GPS announces that his destination is on the left.

NICK:
 Hey listen, I better go, I've made
 it to Crawford's house. (pause)
 Talk to you later.

Nick stops the car, turns it off, and gets out. He's dressed in plain clothes and wears sunglasses. He looks around the property. A nice white farm house with a front porch stands before him, as well as a few oak trees. To the left, a fenced in portion of the property provides a grazing area for cattle or horses, although no animals are present.

Nick walks up the front steps and on to the porch. He knocks on the door and takes a step back before turning around to look at the front yard. He sees a sign advertising a business run out of this house.

SIGN

It reads "Ted Crawford, Private Investigator."

BACK TO SCENE.

Nick hears the bolt on the door unlatch and turns back just as the front door swings open. Ted Crawford stands at the door.

TED:
 You must be the new blood.
 (extending his hand) Ted Crawford.

NICK:
 (reciprocating
 and shaking
 hands with
 Ted.)
 Nick Vaughn.

TED:
 (holding the
 door, letting
 Nick pass)
 Hopefully finding the place didn't
 give you too much trouble.

NICK:
 Well it might have, had I not had
 the GPS.

TED:
 Modern conveniences. Can I get you
 something to drink?

NICK:
I'll take water if you don't mind.

TED:
Not at all. Do you think it's too
early for whiskey?

Nick looks at his watch.

NICK:
It's 4:45.

TED:
That's close enough for me. (he
pours himself some whiskey) Why
don't we talk out on my back
porch?

Ted leads Nick out to the back porch, which looks out over a
vast landscape.

NICK:
Your place is amazing, detective.

TED:
Please, call me Ted. And thank
you, it's been in my family for
three generations. It was passed
on to me when I was 47 years old,
after my mother and father had
passed away. At that point, this
place was just a summer home to
me. It was closed up for most of
the year, except when my wife Bev
and I, or another one of my wife's
relatives wanted to rent it out
for a week or two.

NICK:
Where's your wife now?

TED:
At the grocery store in town.

Nick nods.

TED:
Anyway, I'd always talked about
moving down here when I retired.
Bev was all for it. She got a job
at a bank in town, and I got my
private investigation license, and
now here we are, enjoying semi-
retirement.

Ted takes a sip of his drink.

TED:

Now the reason why you're here.
How long have you had the gold
shield?

NICK:

A little over 24 hours.

TED:

Wow, chief's sending you to me
young.

NICK:

I think it's because he think's
I'm impressionable. Whatever the
reason, I'm told that picking your
brain for a few hours is worth at
least ten years of experience.
Maybe the chief thinks sending me
to you now will limit my mistakes.

TED:

Well I can tell you right now,
that's not true. No offense.

Nick raises his hand as if to say "none taken."

TED:

Nick, why did you want to be a
cop?

NICK:

I suppose it's the same reason
that all cops choose the
profession. Plus my dad was a
state trooper in his day, then a
state police detective.

TED:

Father was a statie, eh?

NICK:

For almost 40 years.

Ted nods approvingly.

TED:

Whatever your impressions of the
job are right now, let me tell you
this; it doesn't matter what beat
your riding, homicide, missing
persons, cold case, whatever. 90%
of being a detective is sitting at
a desk pushing paperwork, and the
other 10% is deadly. First piece

(MORE)

TED: (CONT'D)
of advice is to get out of the precinct at least twice a week. It'll keep the reality of the deadliness of the job at the forefront of your mind. The desk portion of the work can lull you to sleep. Do you know which division you'll be working yet?

NICK:
Narcotics.

TED:
That's a hard division. You meet people so desperate that they'd kill for a fix. A word to the wise; don't be afraid to work the cold case division.

NICK:
Why's that?

TED:
Those cases have victims and families who have been waiting years, sometimes decades for justice. Sure, you'll meet people who resent you for trying, but you also meet some of the most thankful and appreciative folks that you'll ever encounter.

Pause. Ted takes a sip of his drink.

TED:
And Nick, I'll tell you the same thing that I've told every new detective that's ever walked through my door. Stay away from homicide division for as long as you can.

NICK:
Easier said than done-

TED:
Believe me, every single person who I've talked to has said something to that effect. Every cop, at some point in his or her career, wants to be a detective working homicide. It's glamorized on countless shows where the bad guys all get caught. The hard

(MORE)

TED: (CONT'D)
truth is this; bad people walk,
all the time. It's enough to keep
you up at night, and it was enough
to give me a sleeping problem.

NICK:
Do you still have problems with
it?

TED:
It's better now, but every now and
then I'll find myself pacing
through my living room at one in
the morning.

NICK:
How long did you work homicide?

TED:
Almost from day one. I worked cold
case for about six months before I
moved over, spent my entire career
there. You have to remember, I
didn't have anyone like me to warn
me against it.

NICK:
Any words of wisdom once I do get
assigned homicide?

TED:
Well, certainly don't say no.
Going against the chief won't get
you anywhere, and it may even
force you out of the department.
Last time I checked, cops
protected their pensions like it
was one of their children.

NICK:
They still do.

TED:
Some things never change.

Ted finishes his drink.

TED:
When the time comes, and you do
get assigned homicide, find a
small town in the middle of
America, with a quality bed and
breakfast, a nice main street, and
start vacationing there, every
year.

NICK:

Like you did with Springfield?

TED:

Exactly. Nick, you've got a tough job. Finding people who don't want to be found, forcing them to atone for sins they'd much rather forget. Homicide is the worst of the worse, and it can chip away at your perspective on the world. After years of working the same streets, dealing with the same people, you start to believe that every single person on the face of this planet is rotten, corrupt, and truly evil at their core. When I came to Springfield the first summer after this place was passed down to me, I knew that I wanted to live here some day, because the people were some of the nicest human beings I'd ever met. I'd urge you to find a place like this, and spend as much of your vacation time as possible there. Retire there, and live out your golden years knowing that the shit that you experienced in the slums of the city is just one small cross section of the world. Your sanity, and I'd even go so far as to say your career depends on it.

NICK:

How do you mean?

TED:

When I first started working homicide, there was a detective in the Major Crimes Unit named Frank Collins. He'd made a name for himself in the homicide division, and when the time came, the chief tapped him to head up the force's first major crimes unit in its history. One evening, I'm working this case, on the streets in the Bronx. There had been a double murder, and one of the victims was the mayor's son. Frank comes rolling in with his partner and starts questioning the guy that I had pinned for the job. He calls him out into a dark alleyway and

(MORE)

TED: (CONT'D)
shoots him, in cold blood.
Apparently, he and his partner in
homicide had made a habit of
getting rid of those kinds of
people, and had struck and
unwritten agreement not to rat
each other out. Based on the part
of town, the papers would usually
accept the spin job that the
department put out.

NICK:
Wait a minute. So who took the
fall?

TED:
Usually it was some mid-level
heroin dealer. Narc was usually in
on it too.

NICK:
Did any innocent men ever do time
for one of Collins' hits?

TED:
A few. All of them appealed their
convictions once the shit in the
fan though. A few of Collins'
former partners started the
whispers throughout the precinct
once Collins' started showing up
high to work. Eventually I.A. got
wind of it and set up a sting. He
went down for everything. Lost it
all. He's now a ward of the state
doing life. His parole is up in 25
years.

NICK:
Do you know if the narcotics
division is clean now?

TED:
Not a clue. I've been off the
force for far too long to know.
You'll just have to work to keep
your act clean.

Nick nods.

TED:
If you don't mind me asking,
what's your religion?

NICK:
I'm catholic.

TED:
Do you practice?

NICK:
I go when I can. My wife's better
about it than I am.

TED:
Do yourself a favor and start
going with her, on a regular
basis. In this line of work, you
need a moral cumpas, and working
through the week, you'll have to
fight to keep it.

Nick takes this in for a moment.

NICK:
Do you think people are
fundamentally good, or bad?

Ted takes a moment to think about this.

TED:
I think that, in general, people
are a product of their enviroment.
Keep in mind that there are
exceptions to every rule. I can't
tell you how many rap sheets I've
seen with juvi records. And all of
those rap sheets are associated
with people who come from either
single parent or troubled homes.
Most of those kids never had a
shot to begin with because the
mother and father were poor, and
the moms and dads had records of
their own.

Pause.

TED:
I want to feel like everyone is
fundamentally good, but it's a
feeling that you have to fight to
keep. What about you?

NICK:
It depends on the day.

TED:

Don't let that be the deciding factor. If you judge people's goodness based on your day-to-day interactions with others, you'll end up feeling like humans are the scum of the earth.

Pause. Nick takes this in for a moment.

TED:

I'll tell you what. I've dispensed just about all of the wisdom that I can today, but before you leave, take a spin through town. Down main street, even on some of the other back country roads like mine. I'm pretty sure you'll see what I'm talking about.

EXT. TED'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ted and Nick shake hands as they say goodbye, and Nick walks down Ted's front steps to his car. At the same time, Ted's wife, Martha pulls up. She waves politely at Nick, who reciprocates the gesture. Ted walks down the front steps to help Martha with the groceries, as she gets out of the car.

Ted and Martha watch as Nick drives off. Martha knows the conversation that Ted and Nick just had, and she gives the impression that this has occurred in several years past.

TED:

(to Martha)

Do you think they take me seriously?

MARTHA:

I think they take you about a seriously as a rookie detective should. Would you have taken yourself seriously at that age.

Ted smiles.

TED:

Probably not.

MARTHA:

Exactly. There's nothing that you can say that will come close to experience on the job. They all take you seriously eventually. (pause). When they're ready to retire.

Ted smiles, leans over, and kisses Martha. Martha hits a button on her car key fob and opens the trunk.

MARTHA:

Give me a hand with these, will you?

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Nick has reached main street, as Ted has instructed, and peers out of his windsheild to take in the scene.

MONTAGE

A. A customer helping a shop owner hand an American flag

B. A mother watches as her daughter is handed ice cream from a man in a local ice cream parlor.

C. A barber and his customer laughing inside a small boutique.

D. A young man helping a senior citizen carry groceries to her car.

E. A group of middle aged men and women enjoying coffee at a local coffee shop.

END MONTAGE.

Nick smiles.

FADE TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.

THE END.