**PART ONE**

“I’ve seen dead. And it’s nothing like the movies.”

- Vince McNulty

**ONE**

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“The thing about superhero movies is nobody ever dies.”

“Of course people die.”

Larry Unger gave an exasperated shrug. “Yeah, but they never stay dead. They just come up with some anti-Kryptonite gizmo and bang, they’re alive again. I mean, look at Spock in that Star Trek movie.”

Vince McNulty laughed. “Star Trek isn’t superheroes.”

“Same principal though. In real movies. When you’re dead you’re dead.”

McNulty looked at his producer and couldn’t help stating the obvious. “You don’t make real movies Larry.”

Unger looked offended. “More real than all that sci-fi bullshit.”

McNulty shook his head. “I’ve seen dead. And it’s nothing like the movies.”

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Titanic Productions didn’t plan on filming dead people at the Chester Brook Orphanage but that’s the way it turned out. McNulty hadn’t planned on giving technical advice about dead people either. The ex-cop had already turned Alfonse Bayard into a credible movie detective, so much so that Larry Unger quickly put the sequel into production. *Dead Naked*. Larry wanted to call it *The Naked And The Dead* until McNulty told him they’d already made a war movie with that title. Next choice had been *The Naked Dead* but Leslie Neilson ruined starting the title with naked unless it was a spoof. Larry didn’t make spoofs. Not intentionally.

“This is my chance to go legit.” The producer looked at his technical adviser. “Anyone can get lucky once. We get a franchise. We’re McDonalds.”

McNulty let out a long slow breath. “McDonalds makes the same shit with zero taste everywhere.”

Larry ignored the implied put down. “McDonalds makes big money.” He raised an eyebrow. “And everybody loves a beefy hunk.”

McNulty snorted a laugh. “Alfonse isn’t a beefy hunk.”

Larry tapped the side of his head then pointed at McNulty. “He could be. With your help.”

The bustle of activity grew louder. The crew were almost ready. Chester Brook Orphanage had let them use the west wing and Titanic Productions had transformed it into a courthouse. The real District Court building further along Linden Street refused to let them film there but the architecture was close enough to make no difference. A bit part player wearing a judge’s gown walked down the corridor. Bright lights came on in the next room. Amy Moore applied a last minute brush to Alfonse Bayard’s makeup. Larry turned to the Yorkshire cop.

“The auto body shop knows to stop working. Right?”

McNulty glanced at the actor playing the hero detective but mainly at the makeup lady kneeling beside him. Amy Moore paused and looked at McNulty. She smiled and McNulty smiled back, gave her a little nod, then looked back at Larry and stood to his full height. He towered over the diminutive movie producer.

“I’ll go make sure.”

He didn’t like being around the camera when they were filming. It made him feel self conscious and mildly embarrassed. This wasn’t what being a cop was all about and he couldn’t help thinking of himself as still being a cop. All ex-cops did. He walked along the corridor and through a side door into the clean bright Massachusetts air, looking for all the world like a cop walking his beat.

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McNulty’s beat today was a two-block stretch of Linden Street, Waltham MA. Twelve miles west of Boston in Middlesex County. Fifty yards either side of the Chester Brook Orphanage. He still wasn’t sure what constituted two blocks in America, whether it was intersections or buildings, but in the small town of Waltham it was walking distance. Just as well on a sweltering June afternoon.

Linden Street had temporary roadblocks at the fifty-yard limit. Men with walky-talkies let the traffic flow until they got the message that filming was about to start. The message had been sent. The street was empty. A dark grey panel van pulled into a side street just beyond the western barrier. The assistant spoke into the walky-talky. McNulty nodded his approval and crossed the street. Abko Auto Body was part of the car sales and auto spares strip heading out of town. Along with Ace Motor Cars, Accel Automotive and Aston Martin of NE they had all been asked to keep the noise down during shooting. There was no need to remind them but when Larry got a bug up his ass it was easier to agree than explain. McNulty ignored Abko Auto Body and spoke to a sharp suited salesman on the Aston Martin forecourt.

“You expecting James Bond?”

The sales manager proved he had a sense of humour. “Not unless Titanic Productions has upped its budget.”

McNulty smiled. “You’ve heard about us then.”

The sales manager stood with one hand in his pocket. Looking cool. “This is Middlesex County. We hear about everything.”

McNulty nodded. “Close knit community, huh?”

The manager raised his eyebrows. “In a small town even a small movie company makes a big impression.”

McNulty looked at the specialist cars in the showroom window. “Well, thanks for helping out. Recording dialogue on location saves having to loop it later.”

The manager jerked a thumb towards the auto body shop. “Without a lot of banging and screeching in the background I guess.”

McNulty waved at an Aston Martin DBS through the window. “Or a throaty roar and ejector seat.”

The manager was about to make an ejector seat joke when a throaty roar sounded from the side street along the road. There was a screech of tyres then a series of gunshots. The manager looked towards the orphanage. “I didn’t know you were doing action today.”

McNulty didn’t answer as more gunshots ripped through the quiet. He was already sprinting across the forecourt and along Linden Street. The gunfire wasn’t special effects. And the screaming wasn’t acting.