

LAST ASSIGNMENT



LES WILLIAMS

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Dedication

For Phyllis, without whose love and support my stories seeing the light of day would not be possible.

Last Assignment

"My name is Dallas Lowe, and the life of a law enforcement officer is never easy, but it is rewarding. Then receiving our gold detective shields and working together fulfills a childhood dream for me and my best friend Brian. We live on top of the world – until the day comes all policemen dread – the day when things go wrong and someone has to die."

Chapter 1

Brian Mathew and I were members of the recent class of the Lancaster Nebraska Police Academy. Mathew, was twenty-six years old, two years my senior. He outweighed me by ten pounds and was two inches taller than my five-foot-eleven. His good looks, wavy brown hair and brown eyes, drew girls to him like bees to honey. My black crew-cut and gray eyes were not as attractive to the girls. No bees buzzed around me when I was in Mathew's company. Inseparable since childhood, we were as close as two men can be. The years had not diminished this fact.

When I looked at the academy's weekly postings, Mathew was at or near the top in all the physical training courses, and in the upper ten percent of the rest. I was not far behind. At graduation, there were our names – Dallas Lowe, and Brian Mathew.

It was official. We would now 'serve and protect'. We would do our best to make the world a better place, at least in our little corner of it. The department posted us to the same division, but on different shifts.

* * *

Our early years were filled with talk of how well Mathew performed his duties. In one instance, he tackled a suspected bank robber after a six-block chase on foot. Another time, he and his partner were called to a disturbance at a bar. Mathew walked up to the unruly patron, who had thirty pounds on him, and with a wicked right hand, sent the man to the floor. There were other instances when he was the first officer on the scene, and his keen observation enabled the detectives to quickly gather needed evidence. Word in the department had it that he was on a fast track for advancement to a plain-clothes division. This was the one thing we had talked about the most – becoming detectives.

Chapter 2

It was not surprising when Mathew was promoted. Then six months later, I received my gold shield. We were assigned to the same precinct and division. Our childhood dream of working together as detectives and solving the big cases had become reality.

In what turned out to be our last assignment together, we received an anonymous tip about suspicious activity at a deserted warehouse on the north side of town. A man had been seen using bolt cutters to enter the building. From the description the caller gave, we believed this to be the man we wanted for questioning in a series of armed robberies.

* * *

Mathew suggested we should wait in our Crown Vic for the black and white back-up unit before we proceeded.

"You two take the back. I'll give you a couple of minutes. Then we'll go in front," I said.

Light from a full moon filtered in through the bars of broken windows. Ghostly shadows waltzed across the floor. Some crept up the wall and onto the numerous broken wood crates scattered about. A feeling of uneasiness came over me, fraught with its own dangers.

Drug dealers frequented these old abandoned warehouses as they applied their illicit trade. It was always a risky proposition when we entered these buildings. You never knew who, or what, lurked around the next dark corner. Only last week, two officers were gunned down when they stumbled onto a drug buy.

My pulse throbbed as my heart rate went up a few notches. My breathing quickened. *Does the same fate wait for us? Was there only our lone suspect, or did he have an accomplice with him? Was this a set up?*

Our attention was drawn to a noise off to the right.

Mathew threw up his hand, placed his fingers to his lips, and pointed in the direction of what sounded like shuffling feet. We paused, but only heard rodents as they scurried about to their hiding places, anxious to be

out of sight of our intrusion into their territory. Seconds ticked by like a mime moving in slow motion. Then all was quite again.

My beating heart sounded in my ears like a big bass drum.

Chapter 3

Motioning with my head to the right for Mathew to follow, I started in that direction, but he suddenly stepped in front of me. Two shots rang out, sounding like cannon fire. The echo reverberated through the big building. Mathew went down.

I remember I hollered something before I reached his side. The sound of gunfire came from the rear of the building, while voices yelled back and forth. I blocked all that out of my mind. Attending to Mathew was my primary concern.

After turning him over, I pressed my clean handkerchief to his wound to staunch the flow of blood. "Mathew, hold on, help is on the way." I tried to hold my hand steady on the compress, as the white cloth and the shirt surrounding it started to turn crimson. "You're going to be okay. Only a little longer now. I'm not going to leave you."

It was not supposed to be this way. We should be walking out with a cuffed suspect, going downtown for booking, and interrogation. Instead, my partner is lying on a dirty, cold concrete floor, fighting for his life. I should have pulled him back.

Sirens wailed, coming closer until the vehicles screeched to a halt out front.

* * *

There was no protest from the paramedics when I climbed inside the back of the rescue unit. They worked on Mathew, attaching IVs, relaying his vital signs to the hospital, and keeping pressure on the wound as we raced across town. Once, the emergency vehicle left the pavement as we flew over a hill, only to jar us when it touched ground again.

Mathew let out a groan.

God, don't take his life! I strung together words and phrases that came to my mind that I hoped to the Lord above sounded like a prayer. "Don't let him die," I shouted, startling the two paramedics attending to Mathew. *Why did he have to jump in front of me? That should be me lying there, Lord. It isn't fair. He can't die, he just can't.* We reached the emergency room. Mathew was prepped, and rushed to surgery.

Chapter 4

I sat slumped in a hallway on a short tan couch that felt like a concrete floor, heedless of the noises around me. Voices interrupted what passed for music drifting from the overhead speakers. Medical staff rushed back and forth, and one of the blue-clad cleaning crew pushed his loaded cart from room to room.

My mind drifted back to our youth, *when Mathew hit the home run that won the Little Chiefs our only championship*. Other remembrances quickly followed like a power-point presentation. *Our ongoing bet to see who could catch the most Blue Gills, feet dangling in the cool water on a spring day. His eyes twinkling, while he told me that red haired, nine-year-old, pig-tailed, freckled-faced Becky Smith kissed him on the cheek, giggled, then ran to join her friends. Getting sick on too many beers after high school graduation.*

"Detective, detective." A young doctor, clad in green scrubs, was shaking my shoulder. "I'm sorry. Your partner didn't make it. We did all we could, but there was too much internal damage. I'm sorry..."

Stunned, his other words of condolence went unheard.

With my head buried in my hands, my shoulders shook, as the tears flowed freely. I don't recall how long I sat there, or even when I left. For a brief time, I just wandered the hospital grounds, still too numb to think clearly. Part of *me* died on the operating table that night. How can I go back to solving crimes, when the best part of me is gone?

* * *

Mathew's father asked me to serve as one of the pallbearers when he called from his home in Denver. I was honored to do so.

I blamed myself for his death.

The family did not, for they understood the choice he made, and the risk involved with being a police officer.

What could I have done on that fateful night to change the outcome? What should I have done? These questions will forever haunt me.

'To serve and protect,' that is what we were sworn to do. Yet, I could not even protect my partner when it mattered most. Being a cop had lost its luster in that abandoned warehouse. I no longer felt worthy enough to carry the gold shield.

Two days later, my resignation was on the Captain's desk. He tried to talk me into changing my mind, but his efforts fell on deaf ears.

* * *

Mathew was a comrade, partner, and my best friend; but more importantly, the one thing Mathew was to me, and will always be, was my brother. I'm now half the man I once was, just a shadow of my former self.

What can only half a man do, or where does he go?

About the Author:

Retiring in 2006, after 20 years with the U.S. Government, Les Williams found his passion in writing. He attended a writing class in NC at the John C. Campbell Folk Art School.

Les' first short story, *Under Nebraska Skies*, won second place in the 2008 Aspiring Authors Writing Contest. His column, *A Senior Moment*, appeared in the local senior paper 55+. He currently has three Dime Novels published by Western Trail Blazer: *Marquez*, *Under Nebraska Skies*, and *Unwanted Reputation*. These are available in ebook at most online book retailers for only 99 cents each.

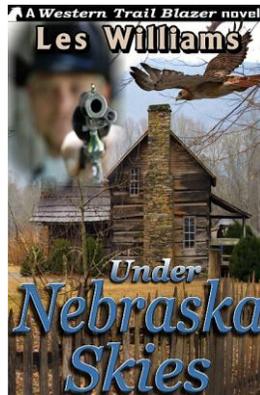
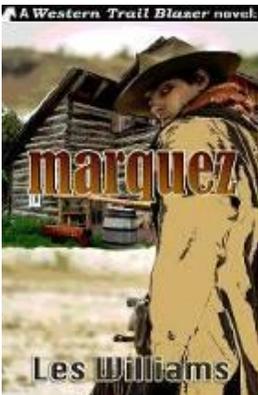
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Introduction to a new series of shorts and a coming novel by Les Williams

Geezer Justice

Most seniors will kick back, relax, and enjoy life – reflecting back on what they did in their misspent youth. They may even feel their best years are in the rearview mirror. Not so with the three you will read about in *Geezer Justice*, the new series and novel coming soon from Publishing by Rebecca J. Vickery.

John Walking Horse is a 62-year-old Lakota. Along with his friends 61-year-old Irish descendant Sean Hagarty and, the youngster of the group at 59, Asian American Jackie Kwon, they find themselves in situations least expected from a group qualified for senior discounts.

One thing you can say about these three, they're not your typical seniors. They all believe in justice – as defined by them, not the law books.

Of all Hagarty's crazy ideas, this one is the most intriguing. Yet it's the most risky. His others have been half-baked compared to this one. But this new one could definitely be life changing, in more ways than one. Once our business here is finished, what changes will this bring? – John Walking Horse

Sneak Peek

Reversal of Fortune



In this, the first story in the *Geezer Justice* shorts, John Walking Horse wants to set right an injustice once done to his father. His long-time friend Sean Hagarty, the idea-man, has just the plan. With the help of their mutual friend Jackie Kwon, the wheels are set in motion.

Will Walking Horse feel that the end justifies the means?

Chapter 1

John Walking Horse is reading the paper at a small table in the dining room of the *Shady Rest Retirement Home* in Lancaster, Nebraska. A lukewarm cup of coffee, a plate smeared with what is left of his eggs, bacon, and toast set off to the side. His salt and pepper hair is tied in a ponytail. Black reading glasses are perched on his hawk nose. A wide-brimmed, high-crowned, smoky gray cowboy hat with an eagle feather in the rattlesnake hatband rests on one of the chairs beside his table.

"Hey Indian, I thought I might find you here."

Looking up, Walking Horse replies, "Sean Hagarty, you old Irish geezer."

"Look who's calling who old, you aged warrior. At sixty-one I'm a year younger than you," the new comer said, pulling back a chair to join his friend. Hagarty at six foot is four inches shorter than the man seated next

to him. Weighing in at one hundred ninety pounds, he also is fifty pounds lighter than his Indian friend. Hagarty's frizzy gray hair looks like that of some cartoon character that stuck his finger in a light socket.

"Then show a little reverence, white eyes. Among my people of the great Sioux Nation, we treat our elders with respect."

Taking a glance around the room to see if anyone is within hearing of him, Hagarty leans forward. In a lowered voice, he says, "What'd you think about my idea?"

Walking Horse places his glasses in the front pocket of his blue chambray shirt. Putting down his paper, he pushes his plate aside and takes a swallow of his coffee. Scrunching up his face, he shakes his head. Placing his hat on his head, he says, "Let's go outside."

Chapter 2

The two men push their chairs back to leave the dining room for the staff to clean up before the noon meal.

They take a seat on a bench facing the front of the red brick building. A massive, gnarled bur oak, one of the numerous shade trees that give the retirement home its name, is behind them.

"How about it?" said Hagarty.

Walking Horse stretches his long legs out in front of him, crossing his arms over his chest. "I'm thinking about it. I like the idea of pay back. My father would be proud. He'd get a good laugh out of it."

Both men are quiet as they watch a few of the residents come and go. It never seems to matter what the residents are waiting for, a doctor's visit, trip to the mall, or going into town. They don't want to be late.

Of all Hagarty's crazy ideas, this one is the most intriguing. Yet it's the most risky. His others have been half-baked compared to this one. There was the time he wanted to get vendor licenses to sell hot dogs on a street corner. Then he thought of becoming taxi drivers, forgetting that having a Class-O Nebraska driver's license would be a prerequisite. The topper was that until this plan, his idea was to take a four-week correspondence course to become realtors with guaranteed sales of six digit figures...yeah

right. But this new one could definitely be life changing, in more ways than one.

"Will it work?" said Hagarty.

His reverie interrupted, Walking Horse said, "We'll need a little planning."

"This isn't like robbing a bank or savings and loan. Heck, we may even be envied. Some of the criminal element will be kicking themselves for not thinking of this themselves," said Hagarty, crossing one leg over the other and scratching his head.

"There is that." Walking Horse shifts to one side so he's facing his friend. He places his arm on the back of the bench. "The best time to pull this off would be Saturday night."

They sit in silence for a moment, watching the small, white bus with *Shady Rest* painted in black block letters fill up and pull away from the entrance.

"Why then?" said Hagarty.

Walking Horse is about to reply when a howling sound comes from his right. They turn in that direction in time to see an orange fur ball flash by shortly followed by a barking mangy gray and white dog. The two men watch until the animals are out of site. The yaps and yowls fade away.

"Think about it. The place is closed for the weekend. With Monday being a holiday, nobody will discover the loss until at least Tuesday," said Walking Horse.

"Why not Friday night?"

"Saturday gives us an extra day to plan. Besides, I need to call Kwon. See if she's driving Saturday night."

"Where and when do you want to meet?"

"Now, in my room."

"Let's go," said Hagarty, rising from the bench.

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