

“DAMAGED GOODS”

Tim Paulsen

RAGNAR PRESS

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For Donna,
my brown-eyed girl.

Sister Laurie and
Doug Watson – Thank you!

HAIL RAGNAR!

CHAPTER ONE

The flap of a butterfly's wings? In the hours and days that followed, First Class Constable Ed Bennett figured his life would have taken a different turn if the maintenance department for the Toronto Police had been on schedule. Then again, behind schedule or not, if the streetcar hadn't slowed him down or if he hadn't shaken his head after making the turn...well, maybe not his life, but certainly his evening, would have turned out differently. The search and investigation would have started anyway. Once it got rolling it took a life of its own and caused dramatic changes to many lives, shortening some of them. If it had not started with Bennett, he may have made it home in time for his tenth anniversary dinner. His wife Marsha had begun the planning for the special evening two weeks earlier and started preparations the day before. Bennett was more than five hours late. He hadn't called either. He was in the sub-basement of the marital doghouse and it was locked from the outside.

The snowflakes, large and heavy had been falling in steady swirling patterns for the full twenty minutes since Bennett started his shift at 7:30 that morning. It played havoc with the traffic, but in return, it bestowed upon the city one of those rare days in January when winter in the city could be enjoyable. Bennett was alone in his cruiser, driving west along King Street, just a few blocks from downtown. In the small park on the North side of the street, to his right, the trees, looked like sugar-dusted trolls from a Tolkien novel. There wasn't any sign of the blackened slush and snow left over from a winter storm, followed by warming temperatures on New Year's, two days earlier. Bennett wasn't fooled. It would only be a few days at the most before the dark slush would gradually reappear and begin to spread, like darkened spots of cancer.

Waiting behind a streetcar, Bennett looked through the partially open window of his cruiser and watched a man walking a small dog near the bandshell in the park. The dog, a tri-color beagle, kept pace with the man but never lifted its nose from whatever scent it found so fascinating. As they passed beneath

a tree, a branch, burdened with snow, snapped off above them with the crack of a rifle shot and fell near their feet. The dog barked. The man jumped; his nervous laughter carried easily across the park.

When the light changed, Bennett kept pace behind the streetcar for another block and then signaled and turned left onto Leader Lane. It was a short street, running only for two narrow blocks alongside the fashionable King Edward hotel. There was a parking lot directly opposite the hotel and 'The Tom Jones Steakhouse.' In the second block, the sides of restaurants faced the street from both sides. Halfway down, on Bennett's left, a dead-end alley bisected the second block.

Bennett had been a member of the force for fifteen years and never displayed much imagination or initiative. If the duties were routine and mechanical, as most of them were, that was just fine for Bennett. It also saved him a lot of grief. In a career often fraught with alcoholism, divorce, and even suicide, Bennett was a rarity. He never took his job home with him. On duty, he only thought of it as much as necessary. After a decade and a half on the force, Bennett suffered from none of the severe emotional problems from being a police officer in a large North American city.

An inch under six feet, Bennett sported a mustache a shade darker than his blonde hair. For most of his career, with running and keeping an eye on the scale, he had kept himself in better shape than the average police officer. However, in the last couple of months he'd begun to receive some ribbing from the other cops and some pointed comments from his duty sergeant about the paunch, which now sat comfortably over his belt. It wasn't caused by beer or forays into doughnut shops. Nearly every ounce was directly attributable to his wife's home cooking. Once she had enthusiastically attended several gourmet cooking school courses, Marsha's cooking talents left little to be desired. However, as Marsha's culinary expertise improved and she put out a great deal more in the kitchen, she compensated by putting out less in the bedroom. "The quality ain't so great either," Bennett mumbled aloud, slowly shaking his head as he drove past the alley halfway down Leader Lane.

As simple as a shake of the head and a brief flash of yellow.

For many years, the police cars for the Toronto Force were a distinctive yellow. The color was unusual, but not unique. Some taxicabs were the same color and though not by design, it enabled a number of them to slip past speed traps when the officer on the scene didn't realize until it was too late that it wasn't one of their own cruisers. It worked both ways. There were also the embarrassed officers and tourists when the latter would flag them down, mistaking them for taxis. The final straw was the report of lead in the yellow paint which could prove hazardous when the vehicles were maintained. A brief study showed the color didn't help to identify them as police cars anyway, so the city opened their purse strings and a two-year re-paint program was put into effect. By now, January of 1977, there was only a handful of the yellow cruisers left.

Shaking his head as he drove past the alley, Bennett saw the distinctive yellow that could be the rear end of a police car. If it had been a newly painted patrol car, he would have kept on driving. Bennett checked the rear-view mirror first before he stepped on the brakes. Turning and looking over his shoulder to ensure there were no cars behind him, Bennett reversed until he was back at the alley entrance. He rolled his window fully down and stuck his head out to peer through the falling snow. Bennett could just make out the numbers, '52', on the trunk of the car, definitely one of theirs. The cruiser had been pulled into a parking space next to the rear of one of the restaurants, and the rear door of the car, facing Bennett, was slightly ajar. He couldn't see into the front of the car without walking into the alley.

He pulled his head back in the cruiser, dusted some of the snowflakes off and took a good look around in all directions. There was no indication of an officer or anybody else in any trouble. In his rear-view mirror, he saw a car had pulled in behind him and the driver was waiting patiently. It was a matter of time before the driver would screw up the courage and beep his horn behind a police car. Bennett pulled his cruiser up on the sidewalk and waved the driver to pass. He rolled up the window and mulled over the recent radio traffic. Except for a false alarm about a half hour before, he was fairly certain there hadn't been any unusual reports. There certainly hadn't been any call for assistance. He sighed, checked to see the traffic was clear and then opened the door and slid out. Glancing around once more, Bennett pulled his nightstick out and held it loosely

in his left hand. With his right hand, he took a gentle grip on his revolver and walked across the street to the alley.

The snow crunched underfoot as Bennett, walking at a slow pace entered the alley far enough in order to see there was nobody sitting inside the cruiser. He squatted to peer underneath. Nothing. He straightened himself and looked up and around. There were two fire escapes for the upper levels of restaurants, but both of them would require lowering to ground level. Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. The only way in or out was the same as Bennett – walking.

His .38 revolver made no sound as Bennett slowly pulled it from its holster. There had been some bad press for the Toronto force in recent months from what the press called 'questionable tactics', including simply drawing a sidearm. Still, Bennett would rather his Sargent asking a few pointed questions rather than solemnly marching at his funeral.

He held the gun against his leg as he began walking slowly toward the cruiser, silently saying the prayer of patrolmen the world over, *Please God, not on my 'shift*. Wiping some of the snow from the trunk, Bennett was able to see the full four digits, 5203. "Phillips," Bennett said aloud and continued walking. He looked first in the back seat and then in the front – floors too. Bennett exhaled slowly. There wasn't an officer down, wounded, or worse. He put the end of his glove in his teeth and pulled out his left hand, placing it on the hood of the car. It wasn't warm, but it wasn't cold either. How long? Bennet guessed it couldn't have been idle for more than twenty minutes.

The front door wasn't locked. Bennet pulled it open. There was a 'leather look' type of briefcase, the type many of them carried to and from their patrol vehicles, on the floor of the passenger side. The briefcase lay on its side, open, with a few papers scattered on the seat and the floor. The keys were missing from the ignition and the radio had been turned off. Pulling himself back out, Bennett took a walk around the car. There were some depressions in the snow, but the only footprints were his.

He holstered his gun and began walking back to his cruiser 'Shit,' he said, shaking his head again. He figured there was only a slim chance that something was truly amiss with Phillips. The odds were much better that Phillips had screwed

up or was screwing someone and no matter which way Bennett turned, some of the shit was going to end up on him. The brass would jump on him if he didn't take what those creeps in Internal Affairs would refer to as 'prompt and prudent' action. His peers, the other cops, the ones that *really* mattered, would be all over him for months and longer if he did something *too* quick, and it got Phillips up on internal charges. It would not matter one little bit whether those charges were warranted or not. Marsha might cut him some slack if he was late for dinner, if he got shot himself. She might. Anything short of that and he figured he would be in trouble. He spared a thought or two in that direction and said, *Shit*, again.

Leaning back on his own car, Bennett reflected on what he knew of Kris Phillips. He'd been a heavy drinker at one time, can't hide a habit like that in their business even if you tried. *Spilled more than I drank*, Bennett thought to himself. However, it occurred to him that he couldn't remember the last time Phillips even picked up a drink, let alone was drunk. They weren't in the same social circles, but at the last couple of retirement parties and union meetings, Phillips only had soft drinks or a coffee. 'Asshole,' Bennett said to Phillips under his breath, 'great time to fall off the wagon!'

There was another possibility, not much better. He didn't know if Phillips was a '*stickman*' or not. A few of the lads would have a lady or two who lived in their patrol area, or nearby. But it wasn't likely anyone would take the chance to dip their wick on company time, at least not without a partner to cover for them. Phillips never gave any indication that was his style, but you never know. Bennett shook his head again, thinking it was becoming a habit this morning. He returned to his car and sat there for the next five minutes, scanning up and down Leader Lane every few seconds, hoping Phillips would appear, walking nonchalantly down the alley, a cigarette in one hand and a coffee in the other.

"Shit," he said once more, and pulled out the handset for the radio. A division operator might listen in when he called to another cruiser, but it wouldn't be recorded as an official call.

"5209, calling 5207," he said. No answer. He tried twice more at twenty-second intervals and then the division operator broke in, "They're on a break, 5209." Bennett briefly considered

the adjacent patrol areas, and then called 5108. He received an immediate reply.

“5108, Bennett. This is Skies. You lonely, calling everybody up?”

“I was trying to touch base with Phillips, talk about meeting him for a break, have you seen him about?”

“No. We passed him once soon after we came on shift.”

Phillips tried one other cruiser and got a similar negative response. “Division, do you have a record of 5207 taking a break?”

“No, 5209,” the dispatcher said, “I would have told you that when I heard you were looking for him. Anything up?”

“No...nothing really,” Bennett hesitated, and knowing he was stuck between the proverbial rock and something hard, he decided on a compromise. “Is the street sergeant in the division?”

“Yes, that's McDougall. He's patrolling in S1.” Bennett shook his head again, muttering, “Just keeps getting better and better”. Sergeant McDougall was a tough no-nonsense cop, blessed or cursed, depending on one's preference or heritage, with a thick Scottish accent. This was despite the fact he had lived in Toronto since he was two years old and had never set foot back in Scotland. McDougall's parents, who had spent more than half their lives in Glasgow didn't have an accent as thick as his, and McDougall's older sisters, four of them, had no accent at all. He had given up trying to figure out ‘why’, a long time ago.

Bennett had the dispatcher put him through and then, trying too hard, stuttered his way through describing the situation for the Sergeant. McDougall had worked the streets for many years and quickly understood why Bennett hadn't reported through the usual dispatch channels.

“It's not far from the Griffen Tavern,” said Bennett, trying for a bit of levity, “and it should be opening in not much more than an hour. Maybe Phillips's is just lining up for a quick one.”

“Ye know better, lad. Let’s not ha’ none of that on the air,” McDougall said. “Ye sure now about Tha’ radio turned off?”

“Yes, Sergeant.”

“Hang in son. Five minutes.”

Stepping yet again out of his cruiser, Bennett walked a few steps and stood by the alley entrance. Off to the side, almost against a brick wall was a solitary cardboard carton. It appeared empty as Bennett kicked it absentmindedly. He began to stoop down to open the folded flaps when another police cruiser pulled in behind Bennett’s. Lorraine Vanier and her partner Bob Skies stepped out began walking towards him. Vanier appeared to be shapeless in her bulky winter uniform and jacket. Bennett, thinking of a chipmunk chewing on a nut, knew better.

The summer before, St Michael’s sponsored a 10K charity race and a group of anesthesiologists issued a challenge to the officers of 52 Division. There hadn’t been much of a response until Vanier signed up and was seen running around the division streets before or after her regular shift in her lime green shorts and a halter top. Bennett figured the Pope, if he wouldn’t have signed up to run, at the very least would have been willing to discuss lifting the ban on celibacy. Another twenty-three officers in addition to Bennett put down their names for the challenge. They lost badly. Didn’t even come close to beating the doctors as most of the policemen spent the entire race running behind Vanier.

Bennett had visions of lime-green shorts in his mind, covering the cutest little tush he could remember, so he didn’t give a second thought to the carton near his feet. He didn’t put it into any of the voluminous reports he was to fill in later, and didn’t mention it, indeed he couldn’t, as it was completely and utterly forgotten, during any of the long and repetitive interrogations. And now, because it was off to one side near the alley entrance, soon to disappear, no one else was able to give it a second thought either.

The three cops barely had a chance to nod to each other before the arrival of McDougall. The sergeant unfolded his 6’3” frame out of his car and refusing to put a cap over his thatch of

unruly white hair, walked to the waiting officers. He pulled Bennett by the arm over to one side.

“Ye gave me some information on the radio,” McDougall said, keeping his hand on Bennett’s elbow, “I want ya’ to give it to me again, from the beginning, keep it straight an make sure ye’ dinna’ leave anything out.”

Bennett told him, keeping to the facts and making no attempt to add any levity. By the time he finished, a patrolman on motorcycle with a sidecar and another cruiser with a single officer had arrived. It was becoming crowded in Leader Lane. Bob Skies, the most senior of the patrol officers walked towards McDougall and Bennett, “What’s up, Sarge?” he asked.

McDougall held up a hand to Skies, then walked up the alley to have a look at Phillips’ cruiser for himself. Like Bennett before him, he looked up and around, hoping to see Phillips, sheepish or otherwise, walking their way. He shook his head and strode quickly to the waiting five officers. He looked at Bennett and said, “The trunk?” From the blank look on Bennett’s face and the other four officers who looked away or down at their feet, McDougall could tell that nobody had checked.

Bennett started walking quickly toward the open door of the cruiser, hesitating slightly when he heard McDougall remind him, ‘glove’. With the cruiser door open and his glove on, Bennett gently lifted the lever on the driver side of the cruiser and the trunk opened with an audible click. He walked slowly to the back of the vehicle where McDougall and the others had walked up. With great relief, Bennett saw the trunk was empty.

That was not an exact description. There was a spare tire, with a jack a tire iron beside it. On the floor were a bundle of evidence bags, fire extinguisher and a couple of reflective rain jackets. There was also what looked like a half bag of dog food. The more experienced officers carried a bag with them, hoping that most of the dogs they would encounter would prefer food to the alternative. Yet, empty of the body of a police officer, or any other body for that matter.

“Bennett,” he barked, “station yourself at the alley entrance an’ stand guard. And you”, he pointed first to the motorcycle patrolman, and then the end of the small block, “get those folks moving along as best ye can.”

Four or five pedestrians were already standing at the end of the Lane, craning their necks in their direction. There were more people heading their way from the small park across the street. Even as he was finishing his short order to the patrolman, McDougal spotted Tommy Dunn, an investigative reporter from the 'Dispatch', walking around the corner towards them. The Scot knew Dunn had good sources and figured he or some of his people listened in on the police frequencies. Wearing a tan overcoat and without a hat over his long blond hair, Dunn walked with an impressive air of belonging, and no doubt would attempt bluffing his way right into the middle of the investigation. McDougall pointed a finger at Dunn but looked and spoke to the patrolman in a loud voice.

"No one....an' I mean absolutely no one, enters this alley till I personally give ye the go ahead." Dunn froze in his tracks, shrugged once and then smiled in the direction of the patrolman. He took a notebook and pen out of an inside coat pocket took a position near the wall at the end of the lane. The big sergeant turned his attention to the remaining officers, assigning them to specific areas within a one block radius. McDougall let them know that he wanted to know if anyone even recalled seeing a police officer in the last hour. "Now, ye got just thirty bloody minutes. Hustle."

They hustled. Meanwhile, McDougall checked the car more thoroughly, called into Division, and heard Bennett's story for the third and then the fourth time. When the officers reported back, all anyone could report with any degree of certainty was the occasional sighting of a white police cruiser. McDougall followed the book and called in to dispatch to report to the Duty Sergeant.

The investigation picked up steam, escalating quickly. Officers were called in from different patrol areas and soon from other divisions. They scoured a five and then a ten-block radius of Leader lane, which by that time had been cordoned off to all traffic. In a nearby parking lot, a command unit was established in a mobile trailer. The Chief of Police had been apprised of the situation and officers of C.I.D., the Criminal Investigation Division, were dispatched to begin interviewing officers, friends and family members.

Bennett's earlier foreboding turned out to be correct. Had he thought about it, he might have figured he was clairvoyant, McDougall's ancestors may have said he was *fey*. It wasn't until well after midnight that an exhausted Bennett pulled into his driveway in suburban Etobicoke. His wife was not totally unsympathetic. A package of wieners and a can of beans had been left on the kitchen counter and a blanket and pillow were stacked neatly on the end of the sofa. Tired and exhausted, Bennett heard the slamming of the upstairs bedroom door as he shuffled down the hallway. He stood for a few moments with his hands on his hips and then hollered up the stairs, "I guess a blow job is out of the question, eh?"

Within twenty-four hours of Bennett turning down the Lane, Internal Affairs quietly began their own investigation. The homicide unit, because of the possible nature of the crime, officially took over the case. Another two days later, the police were no closer to solving the whereabouts of Constable Kris Phillips. No closer, except that a distraught mother, suffering emotional strain and the effects of nearly a half bottle of vodka, managed to pick up a telephone near her bed, mumble to the operator and place a call to Oslo, Norway.
