

On a beautiful, sunny Sunday morning in 2008 Mack Peters chose a table in a shaded part of the patio at Rick's Cafe on south Beverly Drive. It was a rare occasion when he could enjoy an early morning breakfast with his father, Beverly Hills Police Chief Bill Peters. After he took a bite of his omelet, Mack leaned his six-foot-three frame back in the metal armchair and stretched his long legs.

"Hey, Dad, this is one of those days that just can't get any better, isn't it? Wonderful weather, great food, but most of all a chance to spend time together."

A warm breeze ruffled Chief Peters' unruly head of steel gray hair, and he raked his fingers through it in a combing motion. "You bet, Son. We really have to make time to do this more often. Damn case kept me so tied up, but it's finally over." He cut a bite-size portion of a pancake dripping with thick syrup with the side of his fork and raised it to his mouth.

"I say we quit talking about doing it and just do it, Pop and..." Mack stopped mid-sentence and pointed across the street. "Holy shit! Look at that."

Chief Peters adjusted his glasses, and focused on a striking woman, her sexy body wrapped in a skintight fluorescent green spandex getup that almost looked painted on. She zoomed along effortlessly on inline skates, pulled by a shaggy white dog the size of a small horse. Her long jet-black hair fanned out behind her, lifted by the breeze.

"What the hell is that thing pulling her?" Mack said. "Wait a minute. Isn't that Angelina LaPorte? Sure looks just like her."

Bill chuckled. "That, my son, is a Great Pyrenees Mountain Dog. They're related to St. Bernards, and I think you're right about that being Angelina. I'm a big fan of hers. Did you see *Murder by Design*? She was great in it." He laughed again. "One thing's for sure. You'd never see a sight like that in places like Milwaukee or Oklahoma City. No wonder they call this LaLa Land."

"Yeah, this *is* the land of wackos and strange sights. She's mild, though. Now that I'm out on Metro patrol, I see some pretty weird stuff. Still, I have to admit she's a winner with those skates, that body and that monster of a dog."

His father nodded. "Yep, a body most women would give a fortune for, and probably do if they can afford the nips, tucks, and implants. I'll bet between L.A. and Beverly Hills, we have the wealthiest plastic surgeons in the nation."

"Yeah, that, too. Damn. I should have grabbed my cell phone and taken a video or stills. I could have been like a paparazzo and sold it to a tabloid for the big bucks."

The police chief let out a loud guffaw. "Of course you couldn't have used your own name, you know—after all, you are a police chief's son."

Mack took another sip of coffee, delighted to be able to spend Sunday morning with his father. It had been a long time since they'd been able to steal a few hours together to just yak about guy things. Reluctant to say goodbye, they lingered over the last remnants of breakfast. Bill had been tied up for months on the case of the Beverly Hills Strangler. The serial killer had terrorized the affluent community in his town, but on that perfect Sunday morning in early spring it was just the two of them sitting there having breakfast and trading stories.

Determined to follow in his father's footsteps in law enforcement, Mack had been on the LAPD a little more than two years. Originally he thought he would become a lawyer, but in his third year of college he had announced his intent to drop out and take the exam for the L.A.P.D. Bill tried to dissuade him from leaving school, but when he saw his son's mind was made up, he suggested that Mack apply to Beverly Hills. Determined to rise in the ranks using his own talents—not his father's name—Mack applied to the LAPD instead.

"So," the Chief said as he leaned forward and rested his elbows on the polished gray concrete table, "when the verdict came back guilty at that scumbag's trial, I felt like standing up and applauding. I don't have to tell you that you never know which way it will go, but this time justice was done. My God, they found him guilty in less time than it takes to bar-b-que a steak. My city is safe again, at least from him. The strange thing is that guy just doesn't look like a crazed serial killer. But then, looks aren't everything."

Mack grinned at his father, near hero worship lighting his face. "Don't be so modest, Pop. Your insistence about keeping the chain of evidence clean played a big part in him being convicted. No O.J. fiasco for you. And that District Attorney. Wow, what a powerful case he presented. Frankly, I don't think the jury could have ruled any other way in good conscience."

They high-fived each other.

"More coffee, Chief?" The lively auburn-haired waitress sashayed her way to their table, holding a carafe aloft.

Bill put his hand over his cup. "Not for me, Betsy or I'll float out of here. How about you, Son?"

Mack's answer was wiped out by heavy metal music blasting from a BMW convertible as it cruised Beverly Drive with its top down. The vibrations were so intense, the front windows of the restaurant actually seemed to rattle.

Bill's eyes flashed. "Damn those idiots. Do they think they're the only people around? If I was still a street cop, I'd have ticketed them."

Less than a heartbeat later, a black Hummer with blacked-out windows raced down the street. A window on the passenger side lowered, and a hail of bullets peppered the patio. It sped past before anyone could react or even catch a license plate number. Stunned diners watched in disbelief as the Beverly Hills Police Chief fell off his chair and lay on the ground in a pool of blood. Part of his head was missing. Betsy sprawled across him. She wasn't going to be pouring any more coffee.

One of the bullets grazed Mack's shoulder, but other than that he was unscathed.