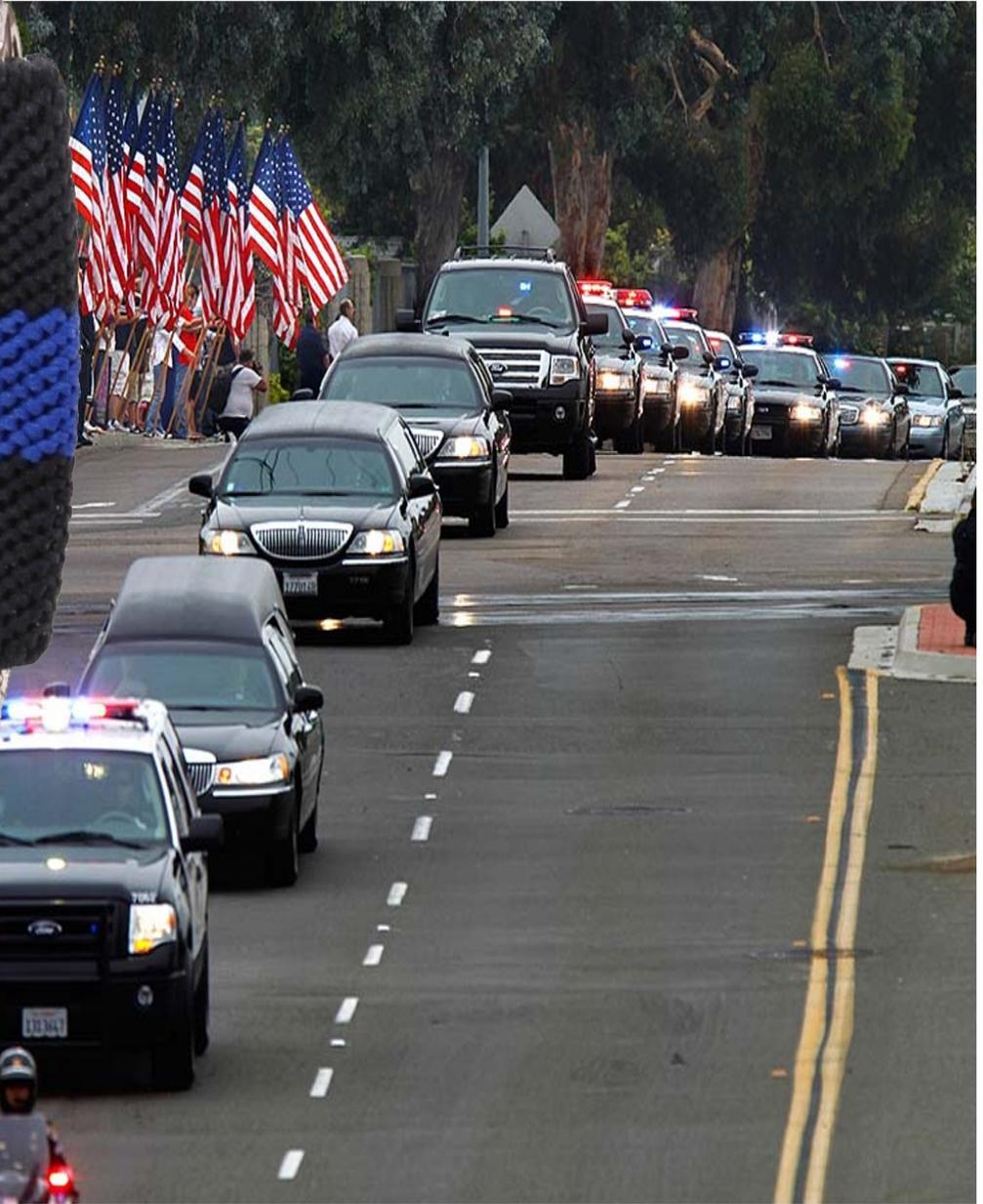


# NO GUTS NO GLORY



a Cooper Wright mystery  
by Rob Steele

# No Guts – No Glory

By Rob Steele

I'd rather not count the number of levels this is wrong on. I'll admit that I didn't know her very well, but no one, especially a cop, should go like this. Sergeant Martina Steindahl worked out of the 37<sup>th</sup> precinct. She'd been on the force almost 15 years. I'd met her a few times but we weren't close or anything. And now, on today, of all days...

We started out with a funeral for two young officers, Martin Adams and Phil Olson, who were killed in that drug bust last week. They had a *combined* three years on the force. The service was nice but someone noticed Steindahl wasn't there. A unit was sent to her house out here in the suburbs, and, they found her like this.

It appears as though she was ambushed while getting ready for the funeral. She's wearing her dress uniform, but her medals are missing – ripped off the uniform. Most of her midriff is missing, too. Not quite completely disemboweled, but close enough. Not a great way to go. The blood trail leads from her front door to her bedroom. Looks like she was trying to get to her cell phone in the bedroom but didn't. There are footprints, both hers and what we assume is the assailant. At least, I can't think of anyone else who would walk through her blood and just leave without calling 9-1-1. Dr. Seong-ho Young has collected her body and has moved her to the front of the line at autopsy. CSIs are swarming the scene taking pictures and collecting everything. This just became our top priority case.

Who would want to do this to a cop? I know there are a lot of tensions these days but...

The shoe prints are generic looking to me, but that's why we have CSIs. Why take her medals, too? It's not like a unit citation or a purple shield would get a lot of money on the black market. It seems a bit personal – which means I have to look into her life. That's never really a good thing to look at another cop that way. But it does give me an idea. Not one I like, but it's an idea.

Back at the station, I meet with Jon Ramsey of Internal Affairs, on the off-chance Sgt. Steindahl was being looked into or if she was part of some IA

case. He tells me, nothing recent. There was an incident about three years ago with another officer, Bryan Gull. Gull had been skimming money from his arrests and Steindahl caught him. Turned out to be the tip of the iceberg and that Gull had been taking a lot more than the odd \$20-bill. There was the money, sure, but also drugs, guns, and even the occasional car. Ramsey couldn't remember the length of the prison term Gull got, but he did know that he was still in prison. It's not like cops, even dirty ones, to put out a hit on someone. And if they did, it probably would have been much sooner than today. I keep Gull in mind, but put him on the back burner.

When I enter the homicide department, just about everyone is already there. Looks like the chief called in just about everyone to get this cleared up quick. No, night shift isn't here, but I did see Calvin Glen, Jay Ward and Gabrielle Rosenberger at the funeral – but someone has to work night shift. Detective Manny Vasquez is present, though, and brings me a report.

“We’ve all be looking into Sgt. Steindahl, boss,” he begins, “and we can’t find anyone who’d have it out for her. Most of her arrests were straight up by the book. Even the odd-ball cases didn’t have anything out of the ordinary that would cause someone to do this to her.”

“Should,” I correct. Manny looks thoughtful for a moment before nodding in agreement. “Have we looked at her financials? And does she have a,” I pause looking for the politically correct term, “significant other?” That does bother me a bit. I have nothing against homosexuality and I understand that future generations will be brought up thinking gender neutrally, but I still automatically go to ‘boyfriend’ if our vic is a woman. And if that offends anyone, they should have to get over it.

“Not that we can tell boss,” Manny answers. “Walker was looking at her social media, but he hasn’t found anything recent.” That would be Officer Scott Walker, who I hear is taking his sergeant’s exam soon. He’s good with tech. If there’s anything on her social media, I’m confident he’ll find it. “As for her financials,” Manny continues, “nothing out of the ordinary. She doesn’t have any bills that are *too* outstanding. A bit much on her credit cards, but who doesn’t? Hasn’t borrowed on her retirement or anything. Mortgage is almost paid off. I’m sorry boss, but I don’t think there’s anything here to find.”

“Keep looking, for now,” I nod. I’d gotten the report that there were no eye-witnesses at her house. That’s not terribly surprising. How many people are outside on a Tuesday at ten AM looking at their neighbor’s house? In this case: none. We can’t be at a dead end yet.

Let’s review, here. About nine, Sgt. Steindahl clocks out to go change for the funeral. It takes about fifteen minutes to get to her house and fifteen to get to the cemetery leaving her fifteen to get ready. So, between 9:30 and 9:45, she’s getting ready and it looks like she answered her door and got stabbed by whomever rang the bell, or knocked. Her gun and cell phone were found on her bed so she wasn’t completely ready. That means we can put time of death around 9:35 to 9:40. Who would have known she’d be there then, though, is the question. Certainly, the officers at the 37<sup>th</sup>, but I’m pretty sure they’re all accounted for. None of her cases, open or shut, seem to have a suspect. That leaves, almost anyone who knew there was a police funeral and that she was a cop.

Well, that didn’t narrow it down at all.

That’s when I hear an expletive from Officer Walker. “You’re not going to get your sergeant’s badge yelling *that* across the department.” He ignores the quip and waves me over to his desk and points at the screen on his computer.

“This just went online,” he says, attracting the attention of several nearby desks. “Someone posted an ‘authentic purple shield medal from a real cop’ on eBay.” I have to admit, I’m a bit surprised. I guess it showed as he says, “On a hunch, I set up an alert for this stuff. Somebody isn’t too bright to try to get rid of this so soon after getting it. Hey, Manny, could you run a,” he checks his screen for a name, “Marty327 on eBay and get a real name?”

It takes Manny all of three minutes to come up with the name Martin Sylvester and an address, about three houses down from Sgt. Steindahl. I send three units and the tactical squad to bring this guy in. I put Walker in charge and give him credit for the bust, seeing as it was his idea that led to him, but I handle the interrogation.

The guy who’s brought in is not what I would have expected. Martin Sylvester is, according to his driver’s license, 17 years old. He’s not very tall,

about five-foot-seven, and almost skin and bones. His complexion is, let's just call him overly pale. The shock of blonde hair on his head isn't helping. If anything, it's reflecting off his skin. Walker leads him in, still cuffed, and attaches those cuffs to the table in interrogation room one. As he leaves, Walker whispers something about Sylvester's mom not being too happy about this. "He lives at home?" Walker looks uncomfortable and nods on his way out. This is not going to go well.

"Right," I sigh, putting the purple shield medal, still in the evidence bag, on the table. "Martin, we need to know where you..."

"All you fucking cops are the same!" he yells. I take a deep breath and rub the bridge of my nose. "Invade our houses! Restrain our rights! How dare you pigs even think that..." That's when I slam my hands on the table and get in the kid's face.

"Look kid," I growl, "I don't care in the slightest about what you think right now. We 'invaded' your house because you were trying to sell something taken from a murder victim that lives three houses down from you. She was a cop, too. And we take it very personally when one of our own is killed. So, I'm going to ask you this again. Where did you get this medal?"

"Off that dead bitch cop! She ruined my life and no one gives a shit about it!"

"Two things, kid. One, that language doesn't do anything for me and just digs a hole for you. Second, and I'm using all my patience right now so keep this short, how did she *ruin your life*?"

I'm not sure if the kid looked like he was going to yell again, or cry. "Three weeks ago, she caught me smoking in my back yard. I wasn't hurting anyone. But she took my stash and told my parents what she saw me doing. They took me to a rehab center for two weeks, and they told my school what happened and they cancelled my scholarship and classes. They said they were making an example out of me! I won't be able to get into any other school now! So, I won't be able to..."

"Hang on a minute, kid. If you're in a university, then you should know that smoking pot is illegal. She was just doing her job."

“It was a Marlboro!” he exploded, trying to stand up but getting caught up in the handcuffs that were still attached to the table and muttering yet another expletive. All this over a cigarette? I leave the kid locked up in the room, with Walker keeping an eye on him. I need to think this through. Something about this doesn’t seem right.

I ask Manny to look this particular incident up, and he draws a blank. There was no report. We check with the rehab center and the kid’s university, and the story checks out. Unfortunately, Manny also reports that officers who were searching the kid’s house, found the knife, bloody shoes and Sgt. Steindahl’s other ribbons.

The kid did it.

Part of me is glad that we found Sgt. Steindahl’s killer, but there’s this other part of me that can’t help but think that this all could have been avoided with a warning or maybe even just a talk. Steindahl’s vigilance was commendable, I suppose. Seventeen is technically too young to legally smoke. But if she knew the kid’s story, or bothered to find out, she’d still be with us and Martin Sylvester’s life wouldn’t be ruined.

It’s not a literal case of shooting first and asking questions later, but the questions are important. Too many cops are shooting first and not caring afterwards. We need to find a way to make that stop before everyone gets hurt.