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True Justice

“Why are you here, rookie?”

The commanding voice of Officer Gabriel caused Kingsley to look up from his desk. Posters of George Floyd still littered the police station. The scathing words of I CAN'T BREATHE were attached to every officer's desktop computer, a reminder of the reality of the police force, of what happens when the wrong person is given a badge and a gun.

“Pardon me?” asked Kingsley.

“I said, why are you here? Out of the new recruits this year, I didn’t expect many black applicants. Especially after, well, you know…”

Officer Gabriel’s eyes traveled to the black sticker on Kingsley’s desktop.

“I know. It was a tragic incident, something that shouldn’t have happened. That’s why I joined the force, to change the force in some way and to show others that true justice still exists in our line of work.” said Kingsley with determination.

At the mention of justice, Officer Gabriel started laughing hysterically. It was so off putting that every officer in the room stared at him with a mix of confusion and curiosity, as what could possibly be funny in a police station.

“Rookie, you are so naive. You should know that there is no such thing as true justice in the world.” said Officer Gabriel.

Officer Gabriel returned to his desk. Alex Albright, a rookie detective and Kingsley’s friend, looked up at Kingsley.

“I’d never heard him laugh that hard. What did you tell him?” said Alex

“I just told him the reason I wanted to be an officer was to change the world.” said Kingsley

“And he laughed at that? That’s wild. That’s why the majority of us are here, isn’t it?” said Alex skeptically

“I’d like to think so, but…”

Kingsley trailed off. He hated to admit it, but Officer Gabriel’s words sowed doubt into his soul. If someone older than him in the force reacted that way to his dream, then…

Alex noticed Kingsley’s expression and offered him a cheery smile, hoping to cheer him up.

“Don’t let Officer Gabriel get to you, Kingsley. The world can be changed and we can be its changemakers. Those old timers don’t understand that.” said Alex

Kingsley smiled back.

“You’re right, Alex. Thanks.” said Kingsley

“Anytime, Kingsley.” said Alex

Kingsley turned back to his laptop feeling better. Alex was right. He could still make a difference, no matter what others said.

3 years had passed since Officer Gabriel’s words shook Kingsley and Kingsley had been a part of many cases, from as small as parking tickets to as big as homicide cases. These homicide cases were always difficult for Kingsley and he had spent many sleepless nights praying for the victims and wishing that the killers would be sent to hell. And yet, despite working on these cases with many senior officers and detectives at times, they never seemed to be outwardly affected by the results, good or bad. However, there were always difficult cases that Kingsley felt awful for taking on. One case that he worked on alongside Officer Gabriel and

Alex seemed like a typical theft from a repeat criminal. However, the criminal stole again in order to give medicine that his mother so desperately needed. The pharmacy refused to give him medicine on the grounds that he was a criminal and former drug addict. Despite this discrimination, the criminal was returned back to prison and the mother died 5 days after.

“That wasn’t right! He shouldn’t have had to go to prison.” Kingsley told Officer Gabriel.

“He stole the medicine and he was a former drug addict. The story he told us could have been a lie just to feed his addictions.” said Officer Gabriel.

“But, what if it wasn’t? We found out that his mother passed today. He was crying on the floor after the court sentenced him. Surely, you can’t be this heartless!” Kingsley yelled.

He said that last part without thinking. Officer Gabriel glared at him and shook his head.

“See, Kingsley, this is why you’re not fit at this job. I give you 6 more months before you hand in your badge.” said Officer Gabriel.

Now, Kingsley and Officer Gabriel were in a rush. A hostage situation was taking place at a school and time was of the essence. The blaring sound of the police car's siren drowned out Kingsley’s nerves as they sped through lanes and lanes of cars. When they finally arrived at the school, news helicopters were flying overhead and five more police cars were at the scene. They were all armed in SWAT gear, including Officer Gabriel and Kingsley.

“What’s the situation?” said Officer Gabriel as they got out of the car.

“The 3rd grade kids are all being held hostage. The suspect is claiming that no one would get hurt as long as we do what he asks. But we aren’t taking any chances.” said Senior Officer Oliver.

As soon as he finished talking, the suspect started to walk out of the building with a child in tow. He had on dirty clothes, messed up hair covered in dust, and was clearly on drugs or alcohol of some sort. The child was wearing an Elsa dress and still had her fairy lunch box in her hands. The suspect lifted up the child and placed a pistol in her tiny mouth, her muffled whimpers almost making Kingsley want to shoot the bastard right now.

“Drop your weapons officers and no one has to get hurt,” said the suspect.

“Let go of the girl and we’ll talk!” yelled Officer Gabriel into the megaphone.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that. This is my daughter, Angela, and I’m going to take her home. Whether home is heaven or back to her mommy, it depends on you officers.” said the suspect

“What are your terms?” said Officer Gabriel.

“100,000 dollars in ransom. No more no less. If not provided, every kid in 3rd grade dies.” said the suspect.

Officer Gabriel motioned to Senior Officer Oliver, who got the police in contact with someone who can prepare the ransom money.

“The money is being prepared right now. Now, let the girl go!” said Officer Gabriel.

The suspect dug the pistol deeper. The officers grip on their weapons grew tighter.

“How do I know you’re going to keep your word? Until the money arrives, I’m not letting her go.” said the suspect.

“This bastard!” mumbled Kingsley under his breath.

“And drop your fucking weapons! Unless you want her to die right now.” yelled the suspect.

The whimpers from Angela grew more panicked. Kingsley grumbled in anger. Senior Officer Oliver commanded everyone to lower their weapons and they did.

Except for one.

What happened next Kingsley could barely register in his own rage, but the next thing he saw was Angela's body covered in blood. Kingsley looked around and saw Officer Gabriel's gun still smoking. His face was in shock. The suspect cradled Angela's body in pure sadness and glared at Officer Gabriel.

"You bastard! I'll-" said the suspect.

He didn't even finish his sentence before he joined his daughter on the floor in blood. Officer Gabriel pocketed his gun as if it was just an everyday occurrence.

"...Call an ambulance," said Senior Officer Oliver.

But no one in the force moved. Senior Officer Oliver turned to them all again with rage in his eyes.

"I SAID ONE OF YOU FUCKERS CALL AN AMBULANCE. THE REST OF YOU, SECURE THE SCHOOL NOW!" yelled Senior Officer Oliver.

The officers all snapped to their senses and Kingsley followed them into the school. Kingsley burst into the 3rd grade classroom, where their eyes looked on in fear.

"Everyone, I'm here to help. Can you please follow me out of the school? The situation is under control." said Kingsley.

The children all looked to their teacher for approval. The teacher nodded their head and they all silently got up and followed Kingsley out of the classroom. Other officers also led lines of children out of the school, but as they walked, Kingsley knew that all of their eyes were looking at the officers' guns. When they finally made it out of the school, the ambulance had arrived and they were loading Angela and the suspect inside. The officers guarded the kids as their parents slowly arrived. But by the way their parents looked at Kingsley, it was hard to tell who was really the bad guy. When Kingsley finally made it back home, he sat in his bed and cried with

anguish until he finally managed to fall asleep. When he woke up, his pillow was stained with tears and he lay there in his bed, missing work for the first time in 3 long years.

The next day, Kingsley walked in and was greeted by Alex with a concerned smile.

“You ok, Kingsley? It must have been a lot.” said Alex

“I’m a bit better, thanks. I haven’t been able to sleep. What’s it been like around here?” asked Kingsley.

“News reporters were all around. Gathering testimonies, submitting bodycam footage, all that stuff. They will probably ask for your testimony at some point.” said Alex.

As the two were talking, Officer Gabriel and Senior Officer Oliver came up to the pair. Officer Gabriel had red, baggy eyes and coffee stains on his shiny gold badge.

“The meeting starts in five. I suggest you two hurry to the meeting room.” said Senior Officer Oliver.

“Yes, sir.” said Alex.

The two men walked straight past them and Alex and Kingsley followed close behind.

“What meeting? I wasn’t told about this.” said Kingsley

“It was in the email that was sent out yesterday. According to the hospital reports, the child that Officer Gabriel shot was Governor Maripola’s daughter.” said Alex.

“You’re joking.” said Kingsley in disbelief.

“I wish I was Kingsley. This information hasn’t been released to the public, but it will be this afternoon in a press conference about the events that will be broadcasted on live television. That’s what the meeting is for. Damage control.” said Alex.

“Governor Maripola has been wanting to defund us since George Floyd,” said Kingsley.

“Exactly, which is why the press conference is so important,” said Alex.

The two arrived at the meeting room, where older and younger officers and detectives were meeting. The tension in the room was heavy on each person. Finally, Chief of Police Harold stepped up to the front and the officers were lulled into silence.

“As you know, today is the press conference about the events that took place at Spring Valley Elementary School and the killing of Angela Maripola. I will be the main one speaking, with Officer Gabriel and Senior Officer Oliver along with me on the stage. The officers that were called to the scene will also be in attendance.” explained Chief Harold.

Chief Harold’s tone changed to be even more intense.

“Now, Officer Gabriel, answer honestly right now: Did the gun misfire when you killed Angela and her father?” said Chief Harold.

Everyone in the room sat up straight, anticipating Gabriel’s answer.

“It did. I swear to you, it did. It was an accident.” said Officer Gabriel

“That’s what I thought, but you have to really convince everyone there. We need to make ourselves look good so Governor Maripola doesn’t take our power away.” said Chief Harold.

“And what are you going to say when they ask if this was a racially motivated crime?” asked Kingsley.

The whole room turned to him. Alex gave him a look that screamed: “Careful what you say”

“Firstly, rookie, speak only after you raise your hand. Secondly, this wasn’t racially motivated at all. Why would you even think of that?” said Chief Harold.

The younger officers were trying their hardest to cringe subtly. Fueled by emotion, Kingsley stood up.

“Seriously?! After what happened with Floyd, you think people wouldn’t ask that question? That’s probably the only question people are going to have. I’ve worked with Officer Gabriel for a long time and we all know his character. We know that he would never hurt anyone intentionally. But, the public doesn’t know. If we don’t phrase our answer carefully, people will riot.” said Kingsley.

“Rookie, our reputation has improved since Floyd. We’ve been doing our best to improve ourselves for the black community. If they and Governor Maripola haven’t noticed that, then that’s their own fault. Now, sit down and shut up!” said Chief Officer Harold.

Kingsley shut his mouth and sat down, fuming. He didn’t even hear the rest of the meeting, the rest of the words being empty promises. Once the meeting was over, Officer Gabriel stopped Kingsley just outside the door.

“Rookie, thank you for having my back in there.” said Officer Gabriel.

“Of course. I was near you and I saw the shocked look on your face. Those shots were definitely an accident.” said Kingsley.

Officer Gabriel’s hands trembled. Kingsley had never seen the confident officer look so…terrified. It was almost as if something was eating at his soul.

“Officer Gabriel, is there something you’re not…” questioned Kingsley.

“It’s nothing. I’ll see you at the press conference.” said Officer Gabriel.

Officer Gabriel walked away towards the rest of the senior officers while Kingsley joined the younger group. Alex was chatting with them and when he looked at Kingsley, their eyes said what words could not express:

Something doesn’t feel right.

Kingsley took one step into the press conference room and was blinded by the flashing of hundreds of cameras. Microphones were shoved directly into his face and voices asked him questions that he could barely make out.

“Officer Kingsley, what do you think of the incident?” said one voice.

“Officer Kingsley, as a black cop, do you think that this crime was racially motivated?” asked another.

“Officer Kingsley, is the police force going to change based on this incident?” asked another.

Senior Officer Oliver, who was with him, stepped out in front of Kingsley.

“Chief Harold will answer all of your questions during the conference. Officer Kingsely has no comments at this time.” said Senior Officer Oliver as he dragged Kingsley towards the front of the conference room, where all officers who were at the scene were supposed to sit. Kingsley wished that Alex was here to help ease the nerves bubbling in his chest. The doors to the conference room were opened and in walked Governor Maripola along with her staff and a teenage boy that Kingsley assumed was her son. They were both dressed in formal attire and had tears in their eyes. Governor Maripola looked like she hadn’t slept. Unfortunately, she sat right next to Kingsley, who got even more nervous by the second.

“...My condolences, governor.” mumbled out Kingsley to break the tension.

Governor Maripola just grumbled and looked away from him. The teen boy, however, gave him an appreciative nod. Chief Harold then stood up on the stage with Officer Gabriel and Senior Officer Oliver and called the room to silence. Talking in the room ceased, but the cameras continued to record. Chief Harold cleared his throat.

“Good afternoon. I am Chief Harold of the LAPD, here to present an update on the incident at Spring Valley Elementary School. Our investigators have identified the suspect as Carson

Maripola, husband of June Maripola, as the one who killed Angela Maripola. We are still looking into the why of this hostage situation, but every officer on the scene is ready and willing to cooperate with the case and the victims families. Now, Officer Gabriel is next to answer your questions." said Chief Harold.

As soon as Officer Gabriel stepped up to the mic, the reporters pounced on him. They were calling for answers, for justice. He pointed to one of the reporters to ask their question.

"Was this crime racially motivated? Would you have shot them if they were white?" asked the reporter.

"I didn't intentionally shoot anyone. As I said, the gun misfired twice and hit both of them. There was no motivation at all. It was an honest to god accident." said Officer Gabriel.

"According to our research, the chances of the pistol misfiring twice is 12%, extremely low odds for this situation. Either it was extremely unlucky or you're lying to us, Officer Gabriel." said the reporter.

"I am not lying to you. Ever since Floyd, we've been committed to improving our reputation in the black community. Why would I undo it all just like that?" said Officer Gabriel.

"Your reputation hasn't improved at all." Governor Maripola spoke.

All eyes turned to her, who was alight with righteous indignation.

"From the black community, I have heard many stories of the officers of the LAPD since Floyd. Two months ago, a young mother was pulled over for a speeding ticket and was pulled out of the car by her hair even though she complied with him. One month ago, a little girl was carrying a toy gun and one of the officers put her in handcuffs until her father arrived at the sight of her crying. Two weeks ago, it was you, Officer Gabriel, who received a report of a disturbance at the basketball court and shot at my son Eli who was about to leave with his friends. The news hasn't

heard any of these stories, because we are too scared to come forward. I have given the talk of what to do around the police to Eli and I didn't want to do it to Angela because I wanted her to enjoy her youth and happiness while she still had it. And now, because of *you*, Officer Gabriel, I've lost her and my husband. So, DON'T YOU DARE TELL ME THAT YOUR REPUTATION HAS IMPROVED. MY DAUGHTER AND HUSBAND IS DEAD AND ITS YOUR FAULT!" yelled Governor Maripola.

She finally sat down and started bawling, her son Eli trying and failing to comfort her. Kingsley looked at Officer Gabriel on the stage and felt something snap in him.

"...Fine, do you want to know the truth, Governor Maripola?" said Officer Gabriel.

Governor Maripola looked up at him in confusion. Officer Gabriel took a deep breath.

"The first shot was genuinely a misfire. Angela was someone that I didn't mean to kill. She wasn't who I was aiming for. I was aiming at your husband. I wanted that filthy fucking nigger to die for what he did. He was going to hurt so many people if I did nothing, so I shot him. I shot him dead and I don't regret it. He deserved it. That nigger deserved it." said Officer Gabriel.

Kingsley didn't believe what he just heard from Officer Gabriel's mouth and neither did the rest of the police force, who all felt the tide shift to Governor Maripola's favor.

"...I've heard enough. I will start making efforts to change the police force. Expect your resignation by the end of the week. This press conference is adjourned." said Governor Maripola

Governor Maripola left the room with Eli in tow and the reporters moved like a swarm of mosquitos towards the three officers on the stage. Kingsley pushed himself through the crowd towards the door to leave. Once he was outside, Kingsley just stood there confused and scared. The governor was going to move forward with her defunding of the police plan and the

reputation of the police is even worse than its ever been. Just then, his phone got a text from Alex.

“Meet at the usual spot after we get off today. We need to talk.” said Alex

“Of course. I’ll be there.” responded Kingsley.

Kingsley walked towards his car and drove home, wanting to disappear into the horizon forever.

Kingsley arrived at a run down ramen shop and sat down at the bench next to Alex. Ever since the two got admitted to the force, they would come here after long and tired days and eat, using this time to vent out their problems. They’d come here so often that the chef knew their orders, so a piping hot bowl of ramen was sitting right in front of him. Kingsley ate, savoring the taste of perfectly cooked pork as the news repeated the press conference over and over again.

“We interrupt this program to bring breaking news: A protest has begun outside of Governor Maripola’s home. Police are there to keep the scene orderly, but we are asking one of the protesters why they are here. Excuse me, ma’am!” called the reporter.

One of the protestors came up to the reporter, a white woman wearing an All Lives Matter shirt.

“Why are you protesting?” said the reporter.

“Simple: Officer Gabriel did nothing wrong. Carson Maripola deserved to die or else more people would have been hurt.” she said.

“Oh, so do you think there was no way the officers should have resolved this conflict peacefully?” said the reporter.

“Yeah, especially for someone like *him,”* said the woman.

Kingsley gripped his chopstick tightly.

“And you don’t think that this is manslaughter at all?” said the reporter.

The woman chuckled.

“I think that that was justice. Plain and simple. Officer Gabriel should be allowed to walk free.” said the woman.

Kingsley’s chopstick broke and pieces of wood fell into his bowl. The TV continued on with the story.

“Furthermore, it was announced on Twitter that Elijah Maripola, the governors son, will be holding a peaceful protest outside of the police station. He hopes that the protest will bring forth dicussion on how to change the police for the better.” said the reporter.

The TV cut to commercial. Kingsley was shaking with rage.

“Hey…” started Alex

“What does she know about justice? In what world is the police above the law?” said Kingsley.

“A cruel and unjust world. A world that I refuse to accept.” said Alex.

“Same here. Even though…” said Kingsley.

He looked down in shame. Alex looked at him with worry.

“What’s wrong? You can tell me, you know.” said Alex.

“Alex, I thought about shooting Carson, too. My finger was on the trigger. I was…so angry that someone’s father can do that to their own child. I have no right to be called better than Officer Gabriel. I felt the same as him.” said Kingsley.

“But, you didn’t shoot him, did you? “ asked Alex.

“No.” said Kingsley.

“Why didn’t you?” said Alex.

“…Because I wanted to know why. Why would a father do that to their child? What must have happened for him to go to such lengths? I thought that once we took him into custody, we could have helped him. Killing him would have made things worse.” said Kingsley.

Alex grinned.

“That’s why you’re better than Officer Gabriel. You think about criminals as people, not just suspects.” said Alex.

Alex’s eyes glowed with recollection as he spoke.

“I remember when we first met at the police academy. You spoke about changing the world and those old folks in the room laughed at you. But, I saw fire and conviction in your eyes that no one else had. In these three years, I watched you work and work to improve the reputation of the force, but your kindness is overshadowed by the other officers' indifference to the needs of the people. You live up to the motto of protect and serve, while the others only serve themselves with their badges and egos.” said Alex.

Alex stood up and left money for both of their meals.

“Elijah is having a protest tomorrow and you’ll likely be called to keep the peace. Me and a couple of detectives are going on strike as our form of justice. What are you going to do?” said Alex.

“…I’m not quite sure,” said Kingsley.

Alex gave him a knowing look.

“Whatever you choose to do, I know that it will be just. I’ll see you later.” said Alex.

Alex left while Kingsley sent him money as a thank you for his meal. He went back home and crawled into his bed, the silence around him being louder than he’d liked.

“It will be just, I promise.” Kingsley muttered to himself as he slipped into a dreamless sleep.

The protest was still going strong when Kingsley showed up at 11 am. Some people were handing out water, a lot had signs with Angela and Carson's face on it, and others brought crackers and various snacks. Eli was standing atop a white car, holding up a sign with his family, along with George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others killed by the police. It was a list far too long for Kingsley's liking. Eli noticed Kingsley and hopped down from the car to see him.

"Hello, you were Officer Kingsley, right?" said Eli.

"Please, just Kingsley is fine," said Kingsley.

"You know, you were the only officer who offered their condolences to my mother," said Eli.

"I find that hard to believe," said Kingsley.

"Really, I kept track," said Eli.

"I bet the others were just shy. It was not out of disrespect." said Kingsley.

"Yeah, sure," said Eli.

Kingsley looked over at the list of names on the poster board.

"May I add one?" asked Kingsley.

"Sure, if you can think of another." said Eli.

Kingsley stared at the list and wrote down a name with a pen.

"Tamir Rice. How could I forget?" said Eli.

"His story was tragic. Made me cry on several occasions. Like Floyd, I didn't want something like that to happen again." said Kingsley.

"…You know that we just want justice, right? We just want things to be fair." said Eli.

"Trust me, it feels like I'm the only one who does know." said Kingsley.

The police doors suddenly burst open. A bunch of officers in riot gear moved forward. Even though he was masked, Kingsley could recognize Officer Gabriel by his build. He pulled out his speaker as the shields aligned next to him.

“This is an illegal gathering! Disperse or you will all be arrested.” yelled Officer Gabriel.

Eli moved up to the shields.

“Officer, I have a permit for this gathering right…” said Eli.

“I repeat, this is an illegal gathering. Disperse!” said Officer Gabriel.

“Listen, we just want to talk about solutions. About changing things for the better. Please…” said Eli.

“…Last warning. Disperse or face the consequences.” said Officer Gabriel.

At that message, the protestors all quickly moved out of the area with fear in their hearts. All except Eli and Kingsley.

“Eli, we have to go,” said Kingsley.

“No! I’m not leaving until I get the justice that I deserve!” yelled Eli.

“You asked for it. Restrain the suspect.” said a senior officer.

Officer Gabriel grabbed Eli and pinned him against the ground. As he put on the handcuffs, his knee moved to Eli’s neck. Eli squirmed desperately.

“I…can’t.” muttered Eli.

At that moment, Kingsley saw red. Not caring that his friend was in full riot gear, he sprinted towards him and pushed him off Eli with all his might.

“GABRIEL, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING? HOW DARE YO-“ started Kingsley.

Bang

A sharp pain entered Kingsley's stomach. He felt hot blood on his hands. He looked at Officer Gabriel, whose hands were shaking.

"Why…" Kingsley said before his vision went to black.

Kingsley woke up in a hospital bed and was immediately greeted by Alex, who hugged him so tightly that his wound hurt like hell.

"Are you ok? How are you feeling?" asked Alex.

"I'm fine. What happened?" asked Kingsley.

"Here, I think it's better to show you." said Alex.

Alex picked up the remote and changed the channel to the news.

"During the protest at the police station, one person, Officer Kingsley Jones was shot while trying to protect Eli Maripola. Maripola got out of the scene unharmed while the shooter, Police Chief Harold Watkins, was restrained by his men. Him, alongside Officer Gabriel Rosenberg, are now in jail and awaiting trial for their crimes. Governor Maripola hopes to honor Officer Jones in a new program to help the police." said the reporter.

"I thought Gabriel shot me." said Kingsley.

"No, it was the chief. I was on the investigation team that found that piece of evidence." said Alex.

Kingsley stared at the screen at Officer Gabriel. His face looked detached and sunken in from reality. Suddenly, he got an idea.

"Hey, Alex, have you interrogated Officer Gabriel yet?" asked Kingsley.

"No, they just shoved him in a jail cell. Why do you ask?" asked Alex.

"…I need you to do me a small favor," said Kingsley.

The next day, Kingsley walked into the interrogation room alongside Alex. Officer Gabriel was sitting in his chair with his head looking down in either fatigue or shame. The head detective looked at Kingsley with annoyance .

“You only get one question, Officer. Make it count.” said the head detective.

Kingsley sat down across from Officer Gabriel. He looked up and smiled at him.

“Hello, Kingsley. Feeling better?” said Gabriel.

“I am. The head detective was kind enough to let me have one question.” said Kingsley.

“Go ahead,” said Gabriel.

“Why did you make that outburst at the press conference? Why didn’t you just keep it to yourself? It was unlike you.” said Kingsley.

“Because, that was justice.” said Gabriel.

“Huh?” said Kingsley.

“Misfire or no misfire, I killed two people. That deserves punishment. I just sped up the process. And besides, this allows our reputation to improve anyway, with me and Chief Harold gone.” said Gabriel.

“So, you ruined your life just so you could protect everyone else? That…doesn’t seem right to me. I…” said Kingsley.

Kingsley couldn’t finish his sentence. Gabriel smiled sadly at Kingsley.

“That’s what I told you, rookie. There’s no such thing as true justice in this world.