

**Alley  
Justice**

**By**

**T.A. Novak**

This book is a work of fiction. Places, events  
and situations in this story are purely fictional.  
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dead, is coincidental.

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to the Marist Fathers and to Conrad Vachon who tried their best to teach me something at Notre Dame High in Harper Woods, Michigan.

## **Acknowledgements**

I don't believe any author can claim that their final work was the result of their efforts alone. This book started as a simple assignment for the Lake Havasu City Writer's Group in Arizona. Their critiques and questions led to the contents herein.

Then too, I am indebted to those who have edited my work. Without their help, the final product would not be what it is—something I can be proud of.

## Prologue

**June 27, 1968**

The green Checker Cab was coming out of Highland Park. It pulled to the curb. Jake watched it stop. A young black male paid the cabbie and started walking west towards the alley.

“Let me out, Duane! Make a U-turn and head around the block.”

He heard Duane in the background, “His shirt’s black, not red.” Jake ran between oncoming cars. As he got to the alley he saw his man cutting back east. Jake picked up his pace. As Jake got to the corner, the man was re-crossing Hamilton.

He’s making sure no one’s following him. Jake broke into a run. Red shirt, black shirt. Witnesses make mistakes.

Harris Harris, a man with two first names, walked with a spring in his feet and money tucked in his shirt. Piece of cake. Alarms, hah! Just gotta be in and out. Quick.

Harris was back in his neighborhood, two cab rides and a mile from the bank he’d just robbed.

Jake saw the black shirt turn into a yard. He ran faster, drawing his .38. The man crossed a street, into another yard, bumping out a wooden gate and back into another alley.

Harris ducked behind three garbage cans; his small automatic in his right hand. Where’d the cop come from?

Garbage cans fell when Harris stood. A gold tooth glistened as he smiled. In his right hand was a pistol. He fired two shots. Jake fired simultaneously. Harris spun and fell onto the garbage cans behind him. Jake slumped to the alley floor.

There was a slight twitch in a black shirtsleeve, then nothing. The man was dead.

Somewhere in the distance, Jake heard brakes screeching, then Duane’s voice yelling, “Officer down! Officer down!”

In the background sirens were wailing.

## Chapter One

**July 31, 1971**

Orange flames leapt towards the sky, intermingled with the heavy black smoke from burning tires. The heat pushed Jake back. He took a deep breath and tried to grab the door again. The Suburban's chrome handle was glowing hot. Tears were flowing from his eyes, forming rivulets in the soot on his cheeks. "Debbie, help me! Kids, open the door!" He jumped up as he cried out, "Anne! Jeanette!"

It was his own voice that woke him. This had been Jake's daily alarm for more than a month. He glanced at the image in the mirror on the dresser. Again, he was sitting on the edge of his bed, holding his right hand in his left. He expected to see blisters. There were none. He stepped out of the tangled, sweat-soaked bedding that was around his waist and half on the floor, staggering to the kitchen to start a pot of coffee.

As the water ran, he looked out the window and saw the wheat field that edged up to his back property line. The scene of the fire was a full seven hundred and thirty miles away and happened forty-one days earlier. He had never been near mile-marker 437 on I-80, the spot where the Nebraska State Police said it happened. Though Jake no longer heard the screams of his wife and children in his flame-filled nightmares, he felt that he had been there, maybe unconsciously wishing he had perished with them.

As he filled his coffee cup, he promised himself he would make the phone call he had been putting off. He was healing. Slowly, but still healing. He seemed a little better each day. He knew he would never be totally healed, but he had to move on. He owed his family that much. He had to keep reminding himself that he didn't die with them.

Two hours later, Jake dialed a number from the old tin flip-pad alphabetical directory that Anne had kept from their days in Detroit. Jake hoped the number from three years ago still worked.

It started ringing.

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On September 8, 1971 John Anthony Bush was sworn in as a Detroit Police Officer. His silver shield carried the numbers: 2441. He was pleasantly surprised to discover that his old badge went unused. More than three years had passed since he had turned it in to Lieutenant Orth at the Detroit Police Department's Tactical Mobile Unit.

Jake, as he preferred to be called, was again wearing the blue uniform and the Sam Browne of the Detroit Police Department. A recycled, nickel plated thirty-eight Colt revolver was in the spit-shined holster worn in cross-draw fashion on his left hip. At this short ceremony there was no family in attendance. Jake's dad died in 1965, and his mother had moved to California. Jake knew his wife and children wouldn't be there. He forced the thought of them out of his mind.

A return to the police academy was waived. He was, as they say, "back on the job." Jake left District Inspector Bertolini's office without much to say. He knew his old boss pulled some strings to get him rehired. He quietly got into his '69 Ford pickup and drove to Jefferson and St. Jean, to the Fifth Precinct, his new assignment.

As Jake drove, Jesse Scott's face crossed his mind. Jess was an old partner from Jake's Tactical Mobile Unit days. The last he heard, Jess was working at the Fifth. Jake hoped he still was. He'd understand why Jake had come back to Detroit. The thought of a return would have never crossed his mind had he not remembered an unexpected visit by Jess to Hope, Michigan, two summers before. On a Sunday in July, 1969, Jess had just showed up in Jake's front yard. He said he was out for a Sunday drive, one hundred and thirty miles from Detroit.

Jake remembered when Jesse Scott had given his two-week notice to resign from the department effective the last day of July, 1967. The riot started July 23rd. Since Jess was resigning, the bosses didn't let him on the street. He was left behind to guard the TMU office in the basement of the city garage on Jefferson

and Chene. Jess quietly left for Minnesota amid the turmoil in Detroit the last day of the month. Jake never thought he'd see his old partner again.

During that 1969 visit he remembered Jess saying that he had suffered what he termed a "life-altering" event. "My life in Aiken, Minnesota, came to an abrupt end about a year after I left Detroit."

"How?"

Jess, never one for long conversations, went on to unload about his family's move to Minnesota, going into the bulk oil business with his older brother, and how his brother got killed by a drunk driver. "Within a month after that, our house burned down. I started drinking too much. Beth finally had enough and took the boys back to Petoskey, Michigan." Jake just listened. "I've quit the sauce, but it was too late for Beth. So I went back to Detroit."

"Where you working?"

"Number Five. Precinct narcotics."

"Kicking in doors on drug houses?"

"Yeah. I volunteer to be the first in."

"You're nuts." Jake shook his head, remembering his one-time partner and his too-tough-to-die attitude.

"Oh, I might take a bullet. A gold one that'll get me an early retirement—at full pay."

"Think that'll get Beth back?"

"No. But then I can go off and hide in the woods somewhere."

"And you hunted me down to tell me this? Why?"

"Just needed someone to talk to."

Jess drove off and Jake never heard from him again. But that one visit with Jesse Scott came back to Jake when he, too, had a life-changing event. Now, more than ever, he needed to find something to fill the void in his life. Maybe Jess had the right idea.

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Life was different for Jake this time around. There was no story-and-a-half house with kids running through it and a lawn to

mow. Jake vowed to never drive past it, no matter what. There were too many memories. This time his home was a cramped basement apartment with a small kitchenette and a studio couch for a bed. It would have to do until he found something better.

Returning to Detroit hadn't been a hard choice to make; he'd always known deep inside that he'd be a cop until the day he died. Now, there was no one left to explain his actions to. Just fragmented memories remained—distant ones. His subconscious blotted out most of them, except the last kiss from his wife, Anne, and those from his kids.

Yes, the memories still occasionally slipped past Jake's protective subconscious. Deb, Michelle, and Michael had just gotten out of school for the summer. Anne packed them, along with the four-year-old Jeanette, into their new Suburban and took off for a month's vacation to visit Anne's mother and the rest of the in-laws in California. Jake's last image of them driving off still remained somewhere in the deep recesses of his mind. The older girls had painted cardboard signs for the side rear windows, reading, *California here we come*. Michael had mastered using the new CB radio, installed so they could talk to the truckers along the way. "Breaker, breaker—"

Somewhere, buried among the few things Jake saved from his shattered life, was a newspaper article from the *Omaha World-Herald*. It told the story of a family driving west on I-80 and being in the wrong place at the wrong time. A stolen car careened out of control hitting a Chevy Suburban and bursting into flames. All the occupants of the Suburban died and so did the driver of the stolen car.

There was a period of time that summer when he shed too many tears, blaming himself for letting his family go west without him. A part of him died with them. *Maybe the old Jake did.*

Jake tried to remember the love he had for his family and tried blocking out the tragic end to their lives. He didn't always succeed. His loneliness was a constant reminder.

Many times the car thief also crossed his mind. *I hope the bastard's still burning in hell.*



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When he finally came to grips with reality he made that phone call. It was time to go back to a life on the streets of Detroit. Jake knew where he belonged. Besides his family, what he missed the most was wearing a police officer's shield and feeling the weight of a gun on his hip.

The phone call to Jimmy Gramatico had gotten him a meeting with Jimmy's uncle, District Inspector Anthony Bertolini. A physical by the department doctor got him cleared to be hired, and he breezed through the physical agility test on anger alone.

Now, he was a cop again.

Jake pulled into the lot behind the Fifth Precinct. And yes, he was scared. Correction, apprehensive. He walked through the garage and took a short hallway to the front desk. He stopped in front of the lieutenant that was manning it. "Patrolman John Anthony Bush, reporting for duty sir."