



# OLD FRIENDS

1 Winter had delivered a chill to the night-time streets of the city. The police officer patrolled his usual route, idly swinging a baton and doing his best to ignore the polluted stench belching up from the sewers. There was a particular keenness to his eyes, scanning every shadow for any signs of danger. Crime had escalated in the city that winter and the streets were no longer safe.

2 He walked in one of the older parts of town, the place where young families had set themselves up when they first immigrated fifty years earlier. Over the intervening years their children grew up and moved away, seeking brighter lights and cushier jobs in the business districts. Now, it seemed as if only the officer was left, patrolling his neighbourhood, the valiant protector of boarded shop facades.

3 “Excuse me, officer,” a man’s voice whispered from the shadows, “can I bother you for a moment?”

Fingers tightened around his baton, though the officer put on his best municipal face, smiling at the shadows. “Of course, sir, what can I help you with?”

4 “Well, this may sound kinda silly,” the man said, “but could you please tell me if where I’m standing is the old Cruiser Café? It was a restaurant here, about twenty years ago, and they served the best burger grill in the world. I can’t see any signs around here, so I’m wondering if my brain’s gone a bit old and taken me to the wrong street.”

The officer chuckled, his fingers relaxing their grip on the baton. “No, you’re in the right spot. The

Cruiser Café closed up about five years ago when old Mrs Vlahos passed away. Hasn’t been filled since, I’m afraid.”

5 There was a crunch of loose asphalt as the man stepped forward from the shadows, turning to look at the faded green and red tiles that had once housed the tasty burgers of his youth. In that brief moment the officer caught a look at the man’s face — a pale, square-jawed visage, with light blue eyes and a faint scar across the bridge of his nose.

“Surely it’s a bit too cold to be out reminiscing about food this late at night. What brings you out here, sir?” the officer asked.

The man picked at the brown grout between the tiles, rubbing his fingers together as it crumbled away to leave a chalkiness on his fingertips. His eyes remained fixed on a rusty metal bar, jutting out into the street from above the shop’s boarded doorway, where the Cruiser Café sign had hung.

6 “Twenty years ago I was a young man, full of fire and ready to make a fortune in the cities out west. Back then my best friend, Danny Wells, and I hung out here. Danny wasn’t like me at all — he was the older, wiser guy. Loyal as the family dog, and in love with this old city; I doubt Danny’s ever had the thought to leave here his whole life. I was the “go-getter”; the young fool who wanted to see what life was like over the hill. So, twenty years ago, we ate our last burger together and made a pact. No matter what direction our fortunes took us, we would meet up here, at this exact spot, at this exact time to see what had become of one another. I just hope he hasn’t forgotten.”

“I’m sure he hasn’t, sir, but if you two were such great friends, why didn’t you keep in contact all these years?” the officer asked.

7 “Oh, we did for a while. But you know how life is; it

seems to fly past you. Before you know it, you’re old and waiting on a street corner, not even sure if your friend is just five minutes late or not coming at all.”

Saying this, the man pulled back his left sleeve to glance at his watch. The officer gave a soft whistle at the sight of the designer gizmo attached to the man’s arm.

“I see you’ve done very well for yourself out west, sir,” said the officer.

“I only hope that Danny did half as well as me. He was a bit simple when it came to things like money — only wanted enough to put his dinner on the table.”

8 It was getting late, and the officer could feel a freeze settling into his bones. He gave the man a brotherly pat on the back and wished him well, before resuming his walk down the road. A light drizzle started to fall in the police officer’s wake, leaving the man to huddle in the doorway of the old Cruiser Café. He did not have long to wait, however, as a new pair of footsteps echoed down the road a short time later.

“That’s not you, Bob, is it?” the newcomer inquired.

9 Relief defrosting his joints, the man leapt up and grabbed the newcomer’s hand with a desperate joy.

“My friend, Danny, it’s me indeed. I thought you’d never show!” the man, Bob, said.

“I’m sorry Bob, these old legs just aren’t as speedy in the chill. But it’s certainly great to see you again, after all these years. I’m afraid the Café’s closed, been like that for some time. Tell you what, come with me — there’s this great place around the corner that does a real good coffee. We’ll go there



and you can tell me all about the west.”

- 10 The two friends walked arm in arm, leaving the old road behind them; they kept close together, preserving warmth amidst the sting of the misty rain.

Bright lights marked the newer, safer areas of the city, and the pair stepped out of the shadows and into the light. For the first time Bob was able to see how the years had altered his friend. He stopped dead in his tracks.

“You’re not Danny Wells!” Bob gasped, stumbling back. “Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change the colour of your eyes!”

- 11 “It’s long enough to make a good man turn bad,” the man said, “and you’ve been under arrest for the last ten minutes, Silky Bob. We got the call this morning from out west that you might be seeking to lie low out this way. Now, I’ve got this letter to

give you from Officer Wells. He asked that you read it before I take you down to the station.”

The undercover officer placed a piece of torn-out notepaper into Bob’s hands. Pulling his coat around him to avoid soaking the paper, he read the quick scrawl under the white glow of the streetlight. At first his hands held the note firm in their grip, but each word increased the tremor of his stance.

12 *Bob,*

*I was at the appointed place right on time to meet you. But when you stepped out of those shadows I saw the face of the man wanted for all those robberies out west. I couldn’t do it myself, so I radioed an undercover officer to bring you in.*

Danny

Rewritten with permission courtesy of the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia.

## Questions

- 1 The winter had delivered
  - a a chill.
  - b pollution.
  - c a particular keenness.
- 2 In the past, what could you find in the police officer’s neighbourhood?
  - a valiant protectors
  - b business districts
  - c young families
- 3 The tiles of the Cruiser Café were
  - a red and blue.
  - b green and white.
  - c red and green.
- 4 Why was the man waiting at the old café?
  - a He was being arrested by the police officer.
  - b He had made a pact to meet an old friend.
  - c He wanted to eat a burger.
- 5 Who had sought their fortune out west?
  - a Bob
  - b the newcomer
  - c the police officer
- 6 What sentence shows the moment that Danny knew he was speaking to his old friend?
  - a The officer put on his best municipal face, smiling at the shadows.
  - b The officer gave a soft whistle at the sight of the designer gizmo attached to the man’s arm.
  - c The officer chuckled, his fingers relaxing their grip on the baton.

## Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- 7 Police officer’s truncheon (1)
- 8 Came to live in a foreign country (2)
- 9 Permanent mark on the skin (5)
- 10 An agreement or deal (6)
- 11 Starting again (8)

## Grammar

Some words can be joined with an apostrophe and these are called **contractions**. E.g. *it is* becomes *it’s*.

Match these **contractions** from the text.

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| 12 <b>wasn’t</b> | <b>I am</b>    |
| 13 <b>I’m</b>    | <b>can not</b> |
| 14 <b>can’t</b>  | <b>has not</b> |
| 15 <b>hasn’t</b> | <b>was not</b> |

## Back To The Text...

- 16 The men hadn’t seen each other for fifty years.
 

a true	b false
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- 17 Bob and Danny had once been close friends.
 

a true	b false
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18 Prediction: What is likely to happen in the future?

- a Bob and Danny would meet again.
- b Bob would be going to jail for a while.

## Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- 19 a The officer scanned every shadow.  
b The officer gripped his baton tightly.
- 20 a Bob picked at the old grout.  
b The officer explained that Mrs Vlahos had died.

- 21 a It started to rain.  
b Danny saw Bob’s watch.

## Think About This

22 The word *escalated* in section 1 means  
a improved.                      b decreased.  
c disappeared.                      d intensified.

- 23 Which of the following best describe Danny?
  - a Dedicated and simple living.
  - b Inexperienced and lazy.
  - c Experienced and ambitious.

## Challenge Option

Writing: Write a script of the last conversation Danny and Bob had 20 years ago.

