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The Closers

Written by Michael Connelly

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**MICHAEL
CONNELLY**

The Closers



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PART ONE
BLUE RELIGION

1

Within the practice and protocol of the Los Angeles Police Department a two-six call is the one that draws the most immediate response while striking the most fear behind the bulletproof vest. For it is a call that often has a career riding on it. The designation is derived from the combination of the Code 2 radio call out, meaning “respond as soon as possible,” and the sixth floor of Parker Center, from which the chief of police commands the department. A two-six is a forthwith from the chief’s office, and any officer who knows and enjoys his position in the department will not delay.

Detective Harry Bosch spent over twenty-five years with the department in his first tour and never once received a forthwith from the chief of police. In fact, other than receiving his badge at the academy in 1972, he never shook hands or spoke personally with a chief again. He had outlasted several of them — and, of course, seen them at police functions and funerals — but simply never met them along the way. On the morning of his return to duty after a three-year retirement he received his first two-six while knotting his tie in the bathroom mirror. It was an adjutant to the chief calling Bosch’s private cell phone. Bosch didn’t bother asking how they had come up with the number. It was simply understood that the chief’s office had the power to reach out in such a way. Bosch just said he would be there within the hour, to which the adjutant

replied that he would be expected sooner. Harry finished knotting his tie in his car while driving as fast as traffic allowed on the 101 Freeway toward downtown.

It took Bosch exactly twenty-four minutes from the moment he closed the phone on the adjutant until he walked through the double doors of the chief's suite on the sixth floor at Parker Center. He thought it had to have been some kind of record, notwithstanding the fact that he had illegally parked on Los Angeles Street in front of the police headquarters. If they knew his private cell number, then surely they knew what a feat it had been to make it from the Hollywood Hills to the chief's office in under a half hour.

But the adjutant, a lieutenant named Hohman, stared him down with disinterested eyes and pointed to a plastic-sealed couch that already had two other people waiting on it.

"You're late," he said. "Take a seat."

Bosch decided not to protest, not to make matters possibly worse. He stepped over to the couch and sat between the two men in uniform, who had staked out the armrests. They sat bolt upright and did not small-talk. He figured they had been two-sixed as well.

Ten minutes went by. The men on either side of him were called in ahead of Bosch, each dispensed with by the chief in five minutes flat. While the second man was in with the chief, Bosch thought he heard loud voices from the inner sanctum, and when the officer came out his face was ashen. He had somehow fucked up in the eyes of the chief and the word — which had even filtered to Bosch in retirement — was that this new man did not suffer fuckups lightly. Bosch had read a story in the *Times* about a command staffer who was demoted for failing to inform the chief that the son of a city councilman usually allied against the department had been picked up on a deuce.

The chief only found out about it when the councilman called to complain about harassment, as if the department had forced his son to drink six vodka martinis at Bar Marmount and drive home via the trunk of a tree on Mulholland.

Finally Hohman put down the phone and pointed his finger at Bosch. He was up. He was quickly shuttled into a corner office with a view of Union Station and the surrounding train yards. It was a decent view but not a great one. It didn't matter because the place was coming down soon. The department would move into temporary offices while a new and modern police headquarters was rebuilt on the same spot. The current headquarters was known as the Glass House by the rank and file, supposedly because there were no secrets kept inside. Bosch wondered what the next place would become known as.

The chief of police was behind a large desk signing papers. Without looking up from this work he told Bosch to have a seat in front of the desk. Within thirty seconds the chief signed his last document and looked up at Bosch. He smiled.

"I wanted to meet you and welcome you back to the department."

His voice was marked by an eastern accent. *De-pabt-ment*. This was fine with Bosch. In L.A. everybody was from somewhere else. Or so it seemed. It was both the strength and the weakness of the city.

"It is good to be back," Bosch said.

"You understand that you are here at my pleasure."

It wasn't a question.

"Yes sir, I do."

"Obviously, I checked you out extensively before approving your return. I had concerns about your . . . shall we say *style*, but ultimately your talent won the day. You

can also thank your partner, Kizmin Rider, for her lobbying effort. She's a good officer and I trust her. She trusts you."

"I have already thanked her but I will do it again."

"I know it has been less than three years since you retired but let me assure you, Detective Bosch, that the department you have rejoined is not the department you left."

"I understand that."

"I hope so. You know about the consent decree?"

Just after Bosch had left the department the previous chief had been forced to agree to a series of reforms in order to head off a federal takeover of the LAPD following an FBI investigation into wholesale corruption, violence and civil rights violations within the ranks. The current chief had to carry out the agreement or he would end up taking orders from the FBI. From the chief down to the lowliest boot, nobody wanted that.

"Yes," Bosch said. "I've read about it."

"Good. I'm glad you have kept yourself informed. And I am happy to report that despite what you may read in the *Times*, we are making great strides and we want to keep that momentum. We are also trying to update the department in terms of technology. We are pushing forward in community policing. We are doing a lot of good things, Detective Bosch, much of which can be undone in the eyes of the community if we resort to old ways. Do you understand what I am telling you?"

"I think so."

"Your return here is not guaranteed. You are on probation for a year. So consider yourself a rookie again. A boot — the oldest living boot at that. I approved your return — I can also wash you out without so much as a reason anytime in the course of the year. Don't give me a reason."

Bosch didn't answer. He didn't think he was supposed to.

"On Friday we graduate a new class of cadets at the academy. I would like you to be there."

"Sir?"

"I want you to be there. I want you to see the dedication in our young people's faces. I want to reacquaint you with the traditions of this department. I think it could help you, help you rededicate yourself."

"If you want me to be there I will be there."

"Good. I will see you there. You will sit under the VIP tent as my guest."

He made a note about the invite on a pad of paper next to the blotter. He then put the pen down and raised his hand to point a finger at Bosch. His eyes took on a fierceness.

"Listen to me, Bosch. Don't ever break the law to enforce the law. At all times you do your job constitutionally and compassionately. I will accept it no other way. This *city* will accept it no other way. Are we okay on that?"

"We are okay."

"Then we are good to go."

Bosch took his cue and stood up. The chief surprised him by also standing and extending his hand. Bosch thought he wanted to shake hands and extended his own. The chief put something in his hand and Bosch looked down to see the gold detective's shield. He had his old number back. It had not been given away. He almost smiled.

"Wear it well," the police chief said. "And proudly."

"I will."

Now they shook hands, but as they did so the chief didn't smile.

"The chorus of forgotten voices," he said.

“Excuse me, Chief?”

“That’s what I think about when I think of the cases down there in Open-Unsolved. It’s a house of horrors. Our greatest shame. All those cases. All those voices. Every one of them is like a stone thrown into a lake. The ripples move out through time and people. Families, friends, neighbors. How can we call ourselves a city when there are so many ripples, when so many voices have been forgotten by this department?”

Bosch let go of his hand and didn’t say anything. There was no answer for the chief’s question.

“I changed the name of the unit when I came into the department. Those aren’t cold cases, Detective. They never go cold. Not for some people.”

“I understand that.”

“Then go down there and clear cases. That’s what your art is. That’s why we need you and why you are here. That’s why I am taking a chance with you. Show them we do not forget. Show them that in Los Angeles cases don’t go cold.”

“I will.”

Bosch left him there, still standing and maybe a little haunted by the voices. Like himself. Bosch thought that maybe for the first time he had actually connected on some level with the man at the top. In the military it is said that you go into battle and fight and are willing to die for the men who sent you. Bosch never felt that when he was moving through the darkness of the tunnels in Vietnam. He had felt alone and that he was fighting for himself, fighting to stay alive. That had carried with him into the department and he had at times adopted the view that he was fighting *in spite* of the men at the top. Now maybe things would be different.

In the hallway he punched the elevator button harder than he needed to. He had too much excitement and

energy and he understood this. The chorus of forgotten voices. The chief seemed to know the song they were singing. And Bosch certainly did, too. Most of his life had been spent listening to that song.