

Highway Encounter

Helping someone in trouble is one thing, but I think I may have gotten in a little over my head this time. Way over.

This stretch of highway was deserted in the early hours of the morning. I hadn't passed another vehicle since I'd left the motel, about half an hour earlier. I was beginning to wonder if I'd ever get a cup of coffee when I saw the police cruiser on the side of the road about a kilometre ahead.

I took my foot off the gas and touched the brake without even thinking about it. You know how it is ... you do it whether you're speeding or not. It's instinct.

Anyway, I'd have to slow as I passed. I noticed now that there was a red pickup pulled over, ahead of the cruiser. I could see the cop walking back toward his car, probably to write out a ticket.

Better him than me.

Then I noticed something unusual. The driver of the truck had gotten out of his vehicle and was walking back to the cruiser, toward the cop. I was getting closer now ... maybe about 200 metres from passing them.

That's when it happened. I saw the man point his arm at the cop, who had turned. I saw several flashes, with some smoke. The police officer seemed to crumple onto the ground behind the open door of his cruiser.

My, God, he had shot the cop!

I slowed and came to stop, still about fifty metres from the two vehicles. By now the man had run for his truck, although not before glancing in my direction. But as I sat there wondering what to do, he peeled out onto the highway and drove off.

I drove up to the cruiser and parked behind it. Getting out, I was afraid of what I would see as I approached the vehicle.

I could hear the police radio in the background. The officer was sitting against the side of his car. There was blood near the top of his chest, and more below him on the ground. He appeared to be barely conscious, but he looked at me as I knelt in front of him.

"Help me, please", he managed to get out. "The radio"

"Yeah, I understand. I saw what happened. I'll call for help right away."

I grabbed the handpiece from the radio on the dash, and after a moment of fumbling, I found the button and talked.

“Hello, is anyone there? An officer has been shot. Can you send an ambulance?”

I wasn't sure of the proper procedure, but apparently they had already known something was wrong. They answered immediately.

“Please identify yourself, sir, and then tell us exactly what happened”

So I told them my name, and what I had seen. Then I told them that I would try to help the officer. At this point I had no idea how badly he was injured.

“Please do whatever you can to help him. Several other units and an ambulance will be there in about thirty minutes.”

Thirty minutes! Well, I would do what I could. I told them I would check back in after I had looked at the officer's wounds.

I knelt down on the pavement in front of him, and loosened his collar carefully. He was wearing a vest, and it looked like one of the rounds had hit him dead-centre in the chest. It didn't seem to have penetrated. But there was an entry wound in his right shoulder that was oozing blood, and, yes, another at his waist just under the vest, on his left side, that was bleeding even harder. I carefully felt around behind him, but neither bullet had exited. I didn't know whether that was a good thing or not.

The officer groaned. “It hurts. How ... bad is it?”

I told him about the two bullet holes. “I'll try to stop the bleeding. Don't worry, you'll be OK. An ambulance is on the way.”

I took off my shirt and managed to rip several pieces off the bottom of it, which I wadded up. I stuffed one under the edge of the top of his vest; it covered the wound, and it seemed like it would stay in place.

The one at his waist was a different story. I didn't know how I'd be able to keep pressure on the wound, unless I just held something there.

“What's ... your name?” the officer asked me. He was obviously in a lot of pain.

“It's Kelly. When I was on the radio, they said two other police cars and an ambulance would be here in about thirty minutes.”

I tried to rip some more strips from my shirt. It wasn't easy. Maybe I could tie two of them together.

“My ... name is Sandy. This is ... “ he winced, but managed to continue, “ ... this is the first time I’ve ever been shot. Let me tell you ... “ he paused again, ... “it isn’t much fun.” He grimaced. “Thank you for stopping.”

“That’s OK” I told him. “My father was a cop. There was no way I was going to just keep driving!”

I was about to ask him what he’d learned about the man who’d shot him, but I heard another vehicle approaching. Good, some help. Maybe someone who had better first aid skills than I did!

I stood up briefly and looked. Ahead of the cruiser, parked about fifty metres on the opposite side of the road, was the red truck.

I ducked back down. “Oh, God! It’s him! The guy who shot you! He’s come back!”

Sandy struggled to get up, but there was no way he could. He was in too much pain.

“What’s he doing?”

I stuck my head around the edge of the cruiser door and looked. “He’s just sitting in the vehicle. No, wait, he’s getting out. He has a pistol in his hand!”

“Kelly, listen to me carefully. There’s nothing ... nothing I can do ... my arm ... “. There wasn’t any way he could draw his weapon, and I didn’t think he had the strength to even hold it, let alone confront this guy. “You’ll have to ...”

I looked around the edge of the door again. He had started walking towards us. He was holding the pistol by his side.

“Sandy, he’s coming this way! What can we do?”

“Kelly ... unsnap my holster. Take out my pistol.”

“What? Sandy, I can’t ...”

“Kelly, just do it. He’s going to shoot us both. He doesn’t want any witnesses. Get my gun!”

I reached for his holster and unsnapped the cover. I tried to pull the gun out, but it seemed to be stuck. Sandy winced in pain.

“You have to ... pull it back first. Then lift it straight out.”

I tried again. The gun came out in my hand. It was heavy. I’d never held a pistol before.

“What’s he doing now?” Sandy managed to get out.

I risked another glance. He was still walking towards us. Only about twenty metres away now. He was walking very deliberately, and seemed calm. “He’s still coming.”

“All right, now listen carefully. The pistol you’re holding ... it’s a Smith and Wesson .40 calibre semi-automatic. There are eleven shells in it. There isn’t a safety.”

Sandy had to stop. His face was contorted with pain.

“Sandy, I can’t ...”

“Kelly, you have to do this. He will kill us. Please!” He managed to continue. “All you have to do is pull the trigger. Keep pulling it, as many times as you need to. Aim for his centre of mass ... uh, the middle of his chest.”

I didn’t know if I could do this. I looked past the edge of the door again. The man had stopped about five metres away. The gun was still held at his side.

“Kelly ... do it. Now. Aim with the front sight.”

I stood up, and moved out onto the road. I held Sandy’s pistol out in front of me, using two hands. I pointed it at the man. I yelled “Stop”.

His gun started to come up. I didn’t think. I just pulled the trigger.

The gun kicked up in my hands, but I brought it down and fired again, and once more.

The noise was deafening. I had never heard a sound that loud. In a daze, I looked toward where the man had been. I didn’t see him.

And then I did. He was on the ground. He wasn’t moving. His pistol was on the road a few feet from where he was lying.

“Kelly ... what’s happening. Did you hit him?”

I barely heard him over the ringing in my ears. “He’s down, Sandy. Not moving.”

“Go to him, now, quickly.” Sandy’s voice was hoarse with pain. “Kick the gun away from him. Find out if he’s still going to cause us problems.”

I did as Sandy instructed. The man was either unconscious, or ... dead. There was blood beside his head. I went back to Sandy.

“You should ... get back on the radio. Tell them ... tell them what happened.”

I grabbed the radio, and told them that the man had returned, and that I had shot him.

“Sir, please say again. Are you telling me that you have shot someone?”

“He came back. Sandy ... uh, the officer ... gave me his gun and told me to shoot the guy. He was going to ...”

“Sir, please put down the weapon and slide it away from you. The responding officers will be there as quickly as they can.”

But I was no longer listening. Sandy had groaned, and his head had fallen onto his chest. I moved close to him and felt for a pulse. It was there, although it seemed a little weak. And he was still breathing.

The wound at his waist had started to bleed a lot. I balled up the other strip I had ripped off my shirt and held it against the wound. I hoped that would help stop the bleeding. I didn't know what else to do.

We sat that way for what must have been fifteen minutes, although it felt like an eternity. The wound at Sandy's neck seemed to have stopped bleeding, but I could feel the blood soaking into the cloth that I was holding to his waist. I pressed harder. Sandy groaned, and his eyelids fluttered.

I didn't hear the police cars arrive. But I heard a loud voice somewhere directly behind me.

“Sir. Back away from the officer and put your hands behind your head!”

I looked back at him. I was still pressing hard on Sandy's wound. I didn't say anything. I didn't know what to do ... I didn't want to release the pressure and let the blood start flowing again.

“Sir, I am not going to tell you again. Back away from the officer and put your hands on your head! Now!”

“I can't! He's bleeding badly. I can't let go!” I turned back to Sandy.

I heard the officer come up behind me. I'm not sure what he was originally planning to do. But just then Sandy opened his eyes. He looked at his fellow officer. “It's all right, Bob. He's helping. He's ... a friend.”

The officer who'd been behind me knelt down beside Sandy and me. He put his hand over mine, where I was pressing against Sandy's wound. “It's all right, sir. I'll take over from here.” His voice was gentle now. “Please. Sandy is my brother-in-law. I'll do it. You go talk to my partner and tell him what happened, OK?”

So I did. Within a few minutes the ambulance arrived, and the paramedics wasted no time in hooking up some fluids to Sandy's good arm and loading him into the back. But I was busy explaining what had happened, to the other cops.

"Sandy told you to shoot him?" one of them asked. I don't think he believed me. But then he added, "I don't know how you managed it. But you did a good job. I'm sure he would have killed both of you. He's already wanted elsewhere for suspicion of murder. He's not a nice character."

I hadn't killed him. In fact, the first two shots had missed him completely. The third one had grazed his head; he'd been unconscious, but probably wouldn't end up with more than a really bad headache. So much for 'centre of mass'.

Sandy laughed about it when I visited him in the hospital a few days later. He would make a full recovery, after a few weeks in the hospital. "You're lucky you hit him at all! Pistols aren't very accurate. I don't know what I was thinking, telling you to do that!"

But he grew sober for a moment. "But I'm glad you did."

.....

Thank you to my brother Don, a former cop and now head of security at a large college in Ontario, for the technical information about pistols. I really have never held one. If there are any mistakes, they are mine.