

# The New Policeman

**Monroe Street, Chicago, August 17, 1873**

Francis pushed the heavy helmet back to scratch his jaw. All around him was chaos—buildings looming next to gaps of new construction. A maze of electric, telegraph and tram wires along with attendant poles obscured the heavy summer sunlight. There were awnings of all colors over shops, banks and saloons. Signs everywhere: 'Goodfriend shirts', 'Commercial National', 'SMOKE'.

Hansoms, horse-drawn omnibuses and carriages were backed up along both main streets by a cart overladen with hogsheads stalled at the intersection. Drivers and passengers spilled onto the pavement, yelling and cursing at the obstruction. Men in dark suits and caps, women in heavy frocks and hats watched the scene. Francis waded into the midst of it all, the heavy blue wool of his new uniform still chafing. After a month of traveling beat, he was still unused to it.

"What has you stopped in the middle of this street?" he called to a man pulling at a brace of carthorses.

Eyes wild and rolling, the animals tossed their heads about. One bled from the neck, stomping and resisting. The driver's hands were covered in dark horse blood. He turned to Francis, knife in hand. Francis's hand went straight to the club on his belt.

"This blamed horse won't get going. He's just stopped here. Stoppin' all of Chicago he is. I nicked his neck a little to let the pressure out. Get him goin' again."

The man's features were slack, as if drunk or simple.

"Alright. Slow it down now," Francis said. "I want you to put that knife down, right now. Slowly mind. I don't need you letting any more pressure off."

The driver regarded him with a confused look.

"What is it, officer? I ain't done nothing wrong."

"Right now, you're the cause of an obstruction at a major intersection. Now put that knife down or I'll haul you in."

The man slowly put the knife down, a scowl on his features at the injustice of it all.

"Blamed horse is the cause of it all," he muttered.

Francis took the knife and tossed it in the wagon. He motioned other nearby drivers to the halted wagon of barrels, directing them to untether the frightened horses and use their own beasts to haul away the over-burdened wagon.

"How'm I going to explain this to my ganger?" the driver asked.

"Take it up with City Hall," growled Francis, stepping back from the center of the thoroughfare. He scratched again under his helmet strap. The obstruction finally cleared, he walked down Monroe Street, squinting in the early afternoon sun.

A loud bang. It came from everywhere and nowhere, at once. Francis looked back to the intersection. Traffic still moved, ignorant of the loud sound. The bare-breasted caryatids of Palmer House stared down unconcerned. Francis turned the corner at Clark and spotted a man dashing past pedestrians, pursued by another in a black suit. They were running straight at Francis.

"Halt there," shouted Francis, spotting the gun.

The man stopped, looking back at the other chasing him. The latter waved a revolver of his own, trying to clear people out of the way. The young man raised his pistol, blinked and shot straight at Francis—a quick blaze of fire spat from the gun barrel.

The blink saved Francis's life.

He had enough time to begin to dodge to the right. A sudden sharp slice of pain came under his left shoulder, followed by a coldness spreading all down his side. He put the fact of the bullet from his mind, as the young killer approached. Instinct made Francis reach for his club. Somehow, he raised the baton, bringing it in an arc down upon his assailant's pistol. He felt outside himself, watching everything from a distance. He noted how young his attacker was, hair untidy and eyes slightly crossed. The young man looked in confusion at his weapon on the ground, unsure of what to do. Then his pursuer was upon them, a burly type with jet-black hair to match. His brow was a single bar above his grim face.

"You've done it now, Bridges!"

He raised his gun at the young man.

"Nobody plugs a Chicago cop and walks away from it."

He said the last with relish as he studied the best spot on Bridges to place his lethal shot.

"Bloody Pinkertons," spat Bridges. "Always skulking around after honest men."

He cowered in anticipation. The detective laughed, savoring the moment.

"No."

Francis still felt he was watching himself from outside. He spoke to confirm he was still alive. He put himself between them, left hand limp at his side, club half raised.

"Don't you shoot him."

He gasped as a sudden spasm of pain took him. The Pinkerton gave a disgusted sneer and tucked his gun into the depths of his black coat. Bridges saw his chance and made to run. With his good hand, Francis grabbed him by the collar and shoved him to the wall. Francis hoarsely cried to the gathered crowd for help securing the criminal, blood dribbling out of the left cuff of his police coat. In the confusion, the detective slipped away.