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The Calamity of the Law

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That slippery raccoon had to be around here somewhere. Just what was his game? It was plainly obvious to Carmelita that he had been in the area. She could sense him, almost smell him, but this was all she had to go on. This was no mere thief, she was well aware of that. If he was, her chase would have been over a long time ago. This was a raccoon on a mission, and one she had to put a stop to. She still recalled the time she had pursued Sly and his cronies Bentley and Murray through several different regions of the world tracking down the missing pages of *The Thievius Raccoonus*, viewing the many times they had eluded her during that occasion as a series of foolish mistakes on her part. She gritted her teeth on the memories of the raccoon's sweet talking, dismissing it as a mere ploy to get her onto his side.

Her mission was an elementary one, and she viewed her job in a straightforward fashion. She had been assigned with bringing down the trio and hauling them into INTERPOL, although by now she had lost count of the number of times they had been able to elude her. But she was not a creature who normally let herself fall for the same trick twice, making sure she could learn from these experiences whenever she could. But there had been something to bar her way, and it was not the fear she had of the consequences that would come her way if she failed to catch Sly Cooper.

As much as she could lie to her superiors, there was no lying to herself. When she and Sly had crossed paths, thoughts of spending a romantic evening with him had sometimes crept into her thoughts no matter how she had tried to escape them. Sometimes she imagined a candle lit dinner at the fanciest restaurant they could afford. Sometimes she envisioned them walking hand paw in hand paw on a beach. Sometimes she thought of them watching the Northern Lights from a snowy mountainside. Sometimes she conjured up visions of a passionate night in bed, curious of what his turn ons were.

This time, she wasn't going to allow him that same luxury or let these visions get in the way. Not if she could help it, even if the moonlit night sky that always seemed to attract the raccoon cast too dark a shadow. As far as she was concerned, the fact that they had stolen from other notorious criminals didn't disguise the fact that they were still professional thieves, honourable though their intentions might have been. There was nothing to suggest that they were anything else.

That night, he had been sighted in a scientific facility in the suburbs of Connecticut in north eastern America. Exactly why he'd chosen to raid this of all places was a mystery to her, as he had normally stolen valuable items, ancient artefacts and things with high sentimental value to him. On the other paw, he'd sometimes chased seemingly random items, such as the fragments of Clockwerk, the mutual arch enemy they thought they'd defeated atop Krakarov Volcano. If it wasn't valuables he wanted this time, what did he want?

When she approached, there was no sound of the alarm, although the front doors were unlocked. *That Bentley and his hacking.* she thought, noticing that the burglar alarm had been switched off. *Without him, Sly is nothing.* Then she spotted a suspiciously familiar van parked nearby. The timing was just perfect. If she was quick, she could nail him.

Her senses tightened. Her heartbeat began to race as she stepped through the pitch black reception area and into one of the narrow corridors. She reached a row of disabled lifts, though the stairs were right next to them. Then the sound of a door slamming echoed from one of the upper floors. Her ears flicked up. *He's here!* cried the voice in her mind. She ascended the stairs as quickly as she could, taking care to keep her footsteps as light as possible so as not to alert the raccoon of her presence. One mistake now and she would lose her opportunity to finally wrap up this mission once and for all.

She reached the top floor just a moment later, and she had to admit – she was awed by what she saw. Through the windows of each door were research departments and testing facilities and rooms filled with some of the most advanced equipment she had ever lain eyes on. It was almost too tempting to explore the rooms herself and find out if some of the many stories that had circulated about this facility were true. There came no signs of life...except the faint sound of footsteps.

Her body stiffened and she abruptly awakened from her trance. She instinctively pulled out her Shock Pistol and aimed it into the darkness. Suddenly, a shadowy figure emerged from the room right behind her, its pair of eyes the only thing to interrupt the darkness and the small amount of light shining in through the window nearby. She bore her serrated teeth in a smile when she saw who it was.

"Sly Cooper!" she announced. "I knew I'd find you here!"

"Well, hello there, Carmelita." smirked Sly. "What a nice surprise it is to see my favourite vixen here."

"Well, *you* aren't my favourite raccoon." said Carmelita curtly.

"We'll see about that!" said Sly brightly. "It's always a pleasure when we meet in places such as these."

"You can't sweet talk your way away from me this time." snapped Carmelita. "I've spent years hunting you down, and I have no intention to let you elude me tonight." It was only then when she noticed what he was carrying. He had a duffel bag slung over his shoulders and resting on top of his backpack, while in his hand paw was a beaker of a liquid that was glowing a bright blue in colour like elemental einsteinium. Just what was that he had there?

"Then tonight's your lucky night, my fair lady." said Sly. *Maybe it is.* thought Carmelita, feeling around her belt for her handcuffs. *I can finally put you away.* But she was aghast at what he said next. "Maybe I don't want to get away from you this time." Carmelita wasn't swayed, aiming her Shock Pistol at his head.

"I know what you're trying to do." she said fiercely. "It didn't work on me last time. What makes you think I'll fall for it now? I haven't forgotten what you did on top of Krakarov Volcano, you know."

"Ah, yes." said Sly huskily, showing no reaction at all to her weapon. "I remember that as clearly as if it was yesterday. I haven't forgotten how those luscious lips of yours tasted, my lady love." To both her annoyance and, she didn't want to admit, her delight as well, she found herself recounting his actions. The memory of their kiss weaved its way through her thoughts like a thread through a silk robe. But then Sly held his hand paws up, the liquid glowing even brighter in the moonlight and lighting up the room. *I don't know what that liquid is,* thought Carmelita, *but he's not leaving with that.*

"What are you doing?" she growled.

"I'm giving myself up to you and letting you take my haul as evidence." said Sly. "You've won." Carmelita scowled, scarcely able to believe what she was hearing.

"What kind of an idiot do you take me for, Ringtail?" she snarled. "You'd never give yourself up to me."

"True to my word, I give you my hands." he continued slickly. He backed into the wall and lowered his hand paws, as though waiting for her to handcuff him. "Maybe someday, I could take yours in marriage."

"Getting hitched with a thief like you?" spat Carmelita. "We have a better chance of me growing my own ringtail." She wasn't going to get sucked into his ploy if she could help it. He would never normally surrender to her. Was there some ulterior motive? There couldn't be any other reason. What he had in mind, he was dropping no clues. Despite all that, it seemed like an ideal opportunity to arrest him, and she couldn't see any other way now. Making no attempt to would surely result in a reprimand from her superiors, though she soon sheathed her Shock Pistol, not wanting to risk damaging anything inside the building. She took hold of his wrists and pinned the raccoon against the wall, though he managed to keep holding the beaker.

"Sly, are you insane?" protested a voice over Sly's radio. "Why are you letting Carmelita arrest you? Going after this substance was enough of a gamble, whether it works or not. Our client was very insistent, you know!" *Oh, so now he's thieving on contract?* thought Carmelita. *Another offence for his list of infractions.*

"Don't worry, Bentley." said Sly calmly. "I've got it all under control."

"Sly, that heart of yours will get you into a lot more trouble than you've ever been in someday." protested Bentley. "Even Murray and I will have a hard time getting you out of that."

"Sly Cooper, you're under arrest." she proclaimed, whipping out her handcuffs. "You have the right to remain silent. You and your friends will be repatriated to Paris and given a trial. And your punishment will follow."

"Jail with the pleasure of your company." crooned Sly. "Does that mean I can waive that right?"

“Will you shut up?” snapped Carmelita. But before she could slap on the handcuffs, he unscrewed the beaker’s lid and wafted some of its vapours towards her. She turned away in an effort to avoid inhaling them, but there was no getting away from them, and the instant she scented the liquid’s sweet smell, she began to feel light headed as Sly quickly capped it again. And before she realised it, she saw another Sly beside him. Then another appeared out of thin air, then another, and then even more until she finally had nowhere left to go, being completely surrounded by raccoons.

“Which one of you is the real Ringtail?” she asked helplessly, feeling even fainter at the thought.

“Hey Carmelita,” all of them said in unison, “what’s the matter?” Panicking, she tried to find a way to get through them, but there was no path back to the stairway. She reached out for them, only to catch thin air. What was happening to her?

“I can’t place all of you under arrest!” cried Carmelita. “I need my backup!” Then all of the Slys moved aside.

“Well, it’s been nice to meet you again.” said about two dozen voices around her. “But if you’re hallucinating, it’s just not as much fun. Until we meet again, my foxy love!”

“What did you do to me?” roared Carmelita. “Come back and put me right!” But then she saw one of the Slys sprinting away for the staircase, and by the time she finally found a way through the raccoons, she couldn’t catch up to him before he disappeared out of sight. The remaining raccoons began to advance upon her, their eyes adoring and several of them licking their lips in anticipation.

“Fancy meeting you on a fine night like this.” said one of them. In the distance came the sound of tyres squealing as Sly’s van pulled away. But why couldn’t she get away from the remaining Slys? She barged into the next room and slammed the door behind her, her heart racing furiously and sweat starting to matt her fur.

“Safe at last.” she breathed, letting out a heavy sigh. But her relief was incredibly short lived.

“Hey Carmelita.” chorused more voices. “Glad you made it!” She looked around her and heard herself scream in terror. Where research specimens should have been were grotesque versions of Sly Cooper, each with at least one body part missing. The various medical and scientific instruments all around the room took on an even more ominous appearance in the darkness, and she could see that furry face of his popping up in them as well. In fact, his face seemed to be everywhere in this room, whether it was the rare flowers growing under a bright light, the various test tubes on the work benches or the warning signs dotted around the walls.

“Somebody please help me!” she cried. But there was no escape from the raccoon now. What on Earth was the liquid Sly had stolen if this is what it was doing to her? The real Sly had to be long gone by now. Whatever she had expected him to do, she had never anticipated he’d pull this kind of stunt. Between her fear and the panic that threatened to choke her, bitter anger for Sly flowed into her brain. That raccoon was going to pay for this, no matter how long it took. There was no way she was going to let this go.

The End

