

Temptation 07 – Scene of the Crime

By Dragonien

Chad

I hated being good at my job. That's not something that I ever thought I would feel back when I was growing up. Who in their right mind would hate being good at something, right? The people that get the hard work dumped on them because the lazy or subpar people can't handle it, that's who. I wouldn't even mind so much if I actually got the credit for being good at what I do but somehow they found a way to rob me of even the satisfaction of a job well done.

I'd been a full detective for over five years now and had gained a reputation for being a problem solver. That's what happens when the force's former best detective that'd been the force's shining example of competence for over twenty years nearly lets a murderer walk because he walked right past the murder weapon hidden in plain sight and has to have it pointed out to him by the fresh meat who had been promoted less than a day ago. Which of course, he'd never let me live down even after he'd been promoted to chief of police. The problem had been when he'd started sending me all of the black hat cases: the weird cases that no one seemed to be able to make heads or tails of. The mysterious disappearances or the weaponless murders; all the weird situations that make for urban legend and ghost stories while never actually getting solved. He'd sent them with obvious intention of trying to make me look incompetent, to embarrass me in front of everyone like I'd accidentally done my first day as detective. The only problem was that I kept solving them.

Over twenty cold cases that everyone had given up on had flown across my desk and every single one of them had been solved and put a criminal behind bars that otherwise would have skated free. Well, except for the ice cream murder case. No one had been convicted on that; turned out the guy just ate way too much ice cream. But that wasn't enough for everyone to just accept that maybe I was a better detective than them, no. There had to be some silly trick to it otherwise their egos wouldn't have survived. One time, just one god damn time I found a murderer that we'd thought had fled the scene hiding in a secret room by following a weird scent and suddenly everyone was calling me the bloodhound. Every case I'd ever solved suddenly was because I had some freaky supernatural nose. Pretty sure there was something racist about a Doberman being called a bloodhound but I was already too deep in the hole of being the stereotypical canine on the police force to bother trying to open that can of worms.

All of this kept rolling over and over in my head as I found myself on the way to yet another crime scene I'd been 'assigned' too by the chief. None of the other detectives had wanted to touch this one with a ten-foot pole. I had no idea why so I'd just assumed I was getting the shit end of the stick. That assumption rarely led me wrong.

Pulling up to the old apartment complex I already spotted something out of place. The building itself was practically falling apart. It was one of those old high-rise apartment buildings with rusty fire escapes loosely bolted to the side that looked like they were older than I was. The stonework would have once looked fantastic with the swirls of artistic design ending in little tidal wave-shaped motifs at the corners of the roof and around each windowsill. Sadly, the decades of wear and neglect had left almost all of them unrecognizable as anything more than scraped chunks of concrete. The thing that had caught my attention though, As I'd pulled in to the parking lot where one of the beat-cops was watching the front door, was one of the cars in the lot.

Most of the cars in the lot looked to be about on par with the building itself. Old, rusted-out screaming metal deathtraps that could have nearly rivaled the age of the building itself. All except for one of them. In the back of the lot, tucked away in a corner was one car that stood out not only from its year, make and model but from the strange parking situation around it. The car itself was almost brand new, easily less than a year old. It had a pristine, waxed finish that looked to gleam even in the dim evening light. I would bet my own car that the price someone had paid for that automobile could have paid for a year's worth of rent in this old beat up apartment. The other thing that made it stand out was the fact that there was an open parking spot to either side of it. Glancing around the lot I saw that every other spot was taken and at least ten people had been forced to park out along the street, some illegally so. There was clearly nowhere near enough parking in this tiny lot for what the building needed yet this single, unusually nice vehicle had an empty space surrounding it like there were some kind of force field keeping other cars away.

cataloging that little bit of information away, I parked my own beat-up Ford Taurus next to the beat cop's cruiser and climbed my way out of it. The beat cop was a rabbit by the name of Jim or Tim, something three lettered and simple like that. He gave a cursory nod when I walked by, not seeming to want to make eye contact with me. I didn't know if it was my reputation that turned him off to me or he just was intimidated as I had a good few inches on him at 6'4" and wasn't exactly small in build, but I didn't let it bother me. He seemed the skittish type and I didn't feel like trying to figure out why someone like that had become a police officer. That, and the coffee stains on his uniform really bugged me. It showed he either was too jumpy and kept spilling his coffee, or he just didn't take good care of his uniform. Its stupid, I know but I notice things, and most things I notice bother me, so I have to ignore them. Honestly, I hated how perceptive I could be at times. I'd love to just be surprised by someone and get to know them through interaction rather than a casual glance and a brief sniff telling me all I needed to know most days. You'd be amazed what simple details could ruin your entire opinion of someone: the faint rankness of bad hygiene, the telltale signs of dozens of poorly-cleaned stains that told of rushed or uncaring table manners, the smell of another man on your boyfriend...

Not letting those thoughts get their roots in too deep again, I shook it off and walked past the officer after he told me what floor I was looking for and made my way towards the elevator. Once I was on the correct floor it wasn't hard to spot the correct apartment. All I had to do was

follow the sounds of muffled conversation and look for the crowd of uniformed officers standing outside of an apartment cordoned off by police tape. Approaching the one that looked the least incompetent, the one that actually had a notepad out and was taking notes, I introduced myself to the vulpine officer.

"Detective Stone. What's the rundown?"

To my surprise and mild relief the officer didn't show any look of disapproval even as he recognized my name. If anything, he looked relieved. Clearly something was up that he had absolutely no desire to deal with and he was happy someone was here to take it off of his plate.

"Neighbors called in a gunshot. At first it just looked like a breaking and entering. Forced entry broke both the doorknob and deadbolt clean out of the doorframe. Bullet hole near the front door makes us think the occupant had a gun on them and fired when their door was knocked open. Guy must have been a shit shot, though cause the bullet hole is above the doorframe. Would've sailed right over the perp's head. They had a safe in the living room that was forced open and everything inside's gone. There's no body though and no sign of the occupant. They haven't called in anything and no one saw them leave the building. that aint the only weird thing either. Everything 'bout this is weird right from the get-go though."

When I raised my eyebrow in question he continued.

"The front door was forced open but there's no signs of a crowbar. Damn near looks like someone used one of our battering rams and just smashed the thing down but even I dunno if we could have knocked it open as cleanly as they did. I'd have said the door woulda broken apart before the deadbolt came out like it did. Same thing with the safe. It wasn't blown open. Looks like someone took a damn crowbar to the thing and just pried it open. Aint one of them cheap online house safes either, this thing's the real deal but they tore it open like it was made of tin. No sign of the occupant and no body, but there is blood. Not a lot though. Just one little splotch on the floor. Lastly, everyone on the floor's bein real quiet about everything. Wasn't even them that called in the gunshot. Was someone down on the street walking by. Everyone we've talked too here is playin dumb, acting like they don't know shit. There's no way any of this went on without half the building hearing it, though so they're covering something up."

"Or trying not to get involved." I countered absentmindedly.

Already I was mulling over what he'd said and glancing around the entrance to the apartment. He was right, the front door looked like it had been smashed in all in one go. As he spoke he began to walk me through the apartment, careful to pull the crime scene tape open for me and indicate the various points of interest. He was right about the gunshot. What had my mind rolling though wasn't that the shot had gone wide but the fact that the occupant must have been waiting on their couch with a gun in hand ready to fire before the perpetrator had even knocked the door in. Otherwise, the invader would have moved further into the apartment

before they'd have had a chance to get a shot off. The fox had been right about the safe as well. Not only had it been torn open like a cheap tin lockbox but it was clearly one of the higher up brands of safes. If I had to guess I'd say that the safe probably cost more by itself than any of the cars in the building's parking lot. All except for one, that was. Already a vague outline of what was going on had begun to form in my head.

When he had finished explaining what they knew so far, the fox was nice enough to step back and let me work. Most of the time the beat cops that responded to a call wanted to just insert themselves and take charge rather than let me and the other detectives do their work. Instead, this one still had his notebook at the ready and was observing. I couldn't entirely keep the smirk off the edges of my muzzle as I looked the future detective up and down approvingly. Then, I refocused back on the task at hand. The last bit of evidence was the blood splatter. It was probably the most unusual thing about the whole situation. The splatter itself was small, barely the size of my palm. It wouldn't have taken more than a shot glass worth of liquid to make a splotch on the floor that size. Which was what made it unusual. Any wound small enough to only let out that much blood would have left a trail as the victim moved around and would be layered as the bottom bit dried up before new blood dripped on top of it. On the other hand, any wound big enough to instantly make a splotch that big would have been a gushing wound that couldn't have easily been stopped without getting splatters of blood all over the surrounding area. Yet despite those being the only two logical situations there was no splatter other than that from the initial impact of the liquid hitting the floor. It was almost as if someone had just taken that shot glass full of blood and just dumped it out right here.

Another quick glance around the room confirmed that there were no medical supplies in view; no used first aid kits used to treat a wound nor blood packs that could have been spilled. If someone had a spare bag of blood for some reason they'd rarely have only the one, and they'd need a particular medical setup to keep them fresh and usable. As I looked around something else did catch my eye. There was more blood, just such a small amount it was easy to miss. When I started making my way with clear purpose across the room the fox officer, Daniels his name tag had read, carefully began to follow after me while making a clear effort not to get in my way or disrupt me. About five or so feet away from the initial blood splatter there was another bit of blood; a single droplet just barely noticeable against the dark hardwood floor. Tracing a path between that drop and the main stain, I glanced around until I found a second droplet near the door to the bathroom. Stepping inside the bathroom I found the blood droplets I expected at this point stood out much more visibly on the white tile. There were three more of them, all three leading straight to the toilet. A final droplet on the rim of the toilet seat itself, along with a small smear of blood on the flush handle told me that whatever had been dropping blood had been flushed down the toilet.

"See this, Daniels?" I asked quietly.

The fox jumped a bit, seeming surprised that I knew his name. That surprise didn't keep him from rushing over to my side without hesitation though, much to my approval.

"Seems whatever was covered in blood was carried from in there to the bathroom. Maybe a rag or something they used to try to clean something else up? Not the stain, though, it didn't have any swirls or anything so they didn't try to clean that up. But it dripped as they carried it, and must have gotten some on their hands from the way the toilet handle is smeared. I doubt it's the perpetrator's blood, though. Unless he's a complete idiot he would never have left this much of his own blood around and would have made more of an effort to clean it up. So I can only surmise that this is the victim's blood. Either the perpetrator didn't care that he got blood everywhere or he left this here on purpose for some reason. My guess is it's a message."

When Daniels looked at me in confusion, I couldn't help but grin. OK, maybe sometimes I did like to show off a bit. When I had an audience that wasn't full of assholes and might actually appreciate me.

"Notice anything about the apartment that seems off?" When Daniels gave me a confused look I continued. "This apartment is a run-down slum. The people here are piss-broke. Yet the guy living here has a safe in his apartment that's worth more than most of the cars the people that live here drive. Did you see that nice car down in the parking lot, by the way? The one that stands out from the others? That thing is also probably worth about half as much as this building and no one is willing to park within a parking space of it despite there not being enough parking for everyone. Whoever lives here clearly could afford something much nicer, but has a reason they're staying here instead. They also have a reputation, one that the other people in the building know about and are afraid of if their refusal to give us any information and answer questions is any kind of indication of. Add all of that together to something that's got a fair chance of being a message to whoever found it and what do you think that means?"

The fox took all this in and bit down on the end of his pen for a moment. I noticed it was a pretty nice pen. A quality, fancy one rather than those cheap disposable ones. It had probably been a gift. It also had lots of small gnaw marks on the end of it where he was biting on it now, meaning that was probably an unconscious tic of his when he was thinking. When he finally got to where I was leading him I swore I could actually see the light bulb appear above his head as his eyes went wide.

"He's a gang member, isn't he?" Close, but not quite.

"Almost. I'd bet my paycheck he's probably a member of one of the crime families in town." I paused for a moment to look through the bathroom door to the living room outside again. "Not sure which one, though. This was definitely a hit, though. Normal gangs couldn't afford stuff like that. If they'd had the kind of money this guy must be throwing around for that car they'd be loading up on guns. Mafia's got plenty of connections and doesn't need to blow their cash on gear like that, so they use it on the finer things to earn respect rather than insinuate fear."

As I spoke, he nodded along and rapidly wrote down notes on his little note pad, trying to absorb everything I was telling him. It wasn't surprising he had guessed gangs first. While there were a few fairly well-known Mafia families in town, most of them stayed to the ritzier parts of town. They let the slums run themselves with the various rowdy gangs doing mostly as they wished so long as they paid their tribute to the family that controlled the area and didn't get too wild. To find one of the family's members out here, though in what he was almost positive had to be a safe house of some kind, meant something was going down in the cities underbelly and that never ended well for the average citizen.

"Alright. When CSI gets here let's dust the place for fingerprints, especially that toilet handle and the safe. Make sure they get that whole safe dusted down, whoever ripped it open like that just as easily could've grabbed the sides or top to get leverage. Swab the blood and see if we can get any matches. I'm assuming the place is probably going to be paid for in cash and I doubt the landlord is gonna give us anything on who rents it, if he's ever even seen their face. Just as likely they just mailed in the cash every month and the landlord never even met them. I'm not sure yet if someone's actually dead, but let's see if we can get any info on the owner of that fancy car down in the lot and put an APB on its owner. My money's on that's our victim. If they aren't dead already something tells me someone's working to make sure that happens sooner rather than later, so we need to find them first."

Not everyone liked me, but at least they admitted to themselves that I knew what I was doing. Save for a few grumbles there was little hesitation in getting to work on their assigned roles. As they cleaned up the place I started to make my way back towards the elevator. If this person was associated with who I think they were, the list of people that would willingly cross them was relatively short. I knew whose territory this was so I knew just where to start. Looks like I had a date with a Jungle Cat tonight.