

Darklighter

by
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Part Four

An hour later, I was sitting at my desk with my coat drying on the back of my chair. My hair was drying as well and remembering that it liked to hang in my face rather than defy gravity. My newspaper was open to the ads for rental apartments. Candies and wrappers made a pile to my left. I slowly picked out a lemon candy, un-wrapped it, and popped it into my mouth while I stared at the person sitting in front of my desk. She was a frail looking old woman. Dressed prim and proper, she was still trying to rock a style that had been popular in the 1950's. She fit in well with the décor of the building.

I was supposed to be taking the old woman's statement, but my notepad had very little on it and my hand, poised with a pen, hadn't moved in a long while. My eyes had become glazed and my mouth was set in a thin line. I suppose I was a study in patience, but I'm sure it was clear I was about to reach the end of it.

Sparks was working at his own desk. He glanced over periodically with an expression of concern as if he was afraid I might try to hurt the old woman. It made the situation that much more irritating. I hadn't intended on taking the woman's complaint. She had wandered through the continuing chaos, tottering around gang members, drug addicts, and alleged prostitutes as if my desk was her loadstone. She had ignored my glare, sat down, and began talking with firm confidence that was at odds with confusing information she was trying to convey.

"The thief looked like Jamie, Harold's son."

I blinked, unprepared for actual information. I raised my pen from its lazy sideways position. "Who's Jamie?"

The old woman looked confused, her brow furrowed.

"I see him in the hallways of our apartment building, mostly."

I sighed and made a circular doodle on my notepad.

"Harold or Jamie?"

The old woman made a motion with one finger like a conductor in front of an orchestra and nodded. "Harold." She was wearing a wedding and engagement ring encrusted with diamonds. They hung loosely on her boney finger.

I waited, finishing my candy and making more circles on my notepad. Nothing more seemed to be forthcoming from the old woman.

"And who is Harold, exactly?"

The old woman clutched her blue, macramé purse with both hands and said in exasperation, "Jamie's father! I've already told you that."

I scowled and sipped at my cooling coffee. My candy made it taste like lemon. The old woman squinted as she read what was written on my mug. She huffed and looked offended.

"I don't like you, Detective Singer. Is there someone else I can talk to?"

I put down my mug and plastered on a fake smile as I turned to Sparks. I asked in a pleasant tone, "Sparks? Do you mind taking Mrs. Angelino's complaint?"

I turned back to the old woman. “Officer Sparks is one of our best. He’ll get to the bottom of... whatever you’re complaining about.”

Sparks stood up like a spring being released. As if the woman was his own grandmother, he gently guided her to the chair in front of his desk and helped her sit. When she was settled, he sat in his chair and poised a pen over his notepad. He looked like her complaint was the most important event in his day. I have never been able to master the art of dealing with the public. I really didn’t want to. It was the hard cases that interested me, not finding lost keys and noise complaints.

I sifted through the case files in my overfull IN box, pulled one out, and opened it on my messy desk. I looked at the corresponding file I had long ago opened on my computer. I was allowed to read for a few minutes before I became aware that someone was standing in front of my desk. I hunched behind the computer, trying to ignore the person and hide, but they didn’t go away. Finally, I looked up with a glare, ready to repel another assault on my time.

A stocky Hispanic looking woman stood stiffly in front of me. She had straight black hair, pulled back in a one foot braid that looked wrapped tightly enough to give her a headache, and she was dressed in a plain, brown business suit. She stared at me in a flat, emotionless manner that didn’t give me a clue whether she was about to launch into a complaint or compliment me on my... I couldn’t think of anything that warranted a compliment at the moment. The only thing I could ascertain was that she looked like a police officer, not a person there to lodge a complaint.

“You are?”

“Detective Valentina Flores, I’ve been assigned as your partner.” Her voice was as flat as her expression. She seemed to be trying to excel at rigid blandness. She wasn’t bad looking, but not especially pretty either. She looked competent. I could see her throwing a perp onto the hood of a car and handcuffing him without any trouble. It was obvious she spent time at the gym.

I didn’t lose time with pleasantries. “I only have a few rules; show up on time, take lots of notes when I talk, and try to keep up. If you’re gun happy, you can go back where you came from. My name is Jack, but I don’t do Jack Bauer. We’re solving cases, not getting in the line of fire.”

Flores’s non-expression cracked briefly. Her dark, arched brows drew together a miniscule fraction, expressing her confusion, before smoothing out again.

I was incredulous. “Jack Bauer—Are you telling me you don’t know who that is? Jack Bauer—24—lots of shooting—forget it.”

I held up the file from my desk.

“This is our case, Flores. The Chief wouldn’t let me work anything serious until I had a partner, so we’re behind and we have to play catch up. I’ll fill you in

on all the facts as we drive—you can drive, right? I don't unless absolutely necessary. If you saw me drive, you would thank me for that decision.”

Flores took out her car keys and dangled them where I could see them. They were hanging from a large animal claw on a ring. It looked large enough to have come from a carnivore.

I looked Flores up and down as I stood up and took my still damp coat from the back of my chair. “You don't talk much, do you?”

Flores didn't reply.

I shrugged into my coat as I came around my desk. As we began to walk out of the station I couldn't help saying, “That's good, because I like to do all the talking.”