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Stephanie Sinclair spent the evening alone with her cat Max. They nestled on the couch while Stephanie read and sipped wine. Well, she tried to read. Her mind was pre occupied with her stalker and her choice of detective. Maybe she *should* have gone to the police. At least she knew what to expect from them. Probably about the same as this dopey dick she just hired except they’d be free. Maybe check on an alternative at work tomorrow. She closed the book and stroked Max. He rolled on his back and soaked in the attention.

“Whaddya think Maxie boy? We gonna be OK? You gonna look after Mommy? Huh?”

Her thoughts went back to the panorama of Chase Rourke’s office. How depressing it was and she was sure he was just watching TV when she got there. Probably cartoons to boot. She should ask around about him. The phone jingled.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Miss Sinclair? This is Chase Rourke.”

“Hello Mr. Rourke. I was just thinking of you.”

“I just wanted to call and report on things so far.”

“Ok Mr. Rourke. Go ahead...”

“Well, I spent last night keeping your house under observation. I surveyed the neighbourhood too looking for suspicious people or silver cars. I’m happy to report that I observed no peculiar activity. I also followed you from your house to Highway 404 in the

morning and observed no suspicious cars following you. I also spoke with my contact at the police department and he has promised to check out anything recent regarding your brother and his disappearance.”

“So you’ve found nothing then Mr. Rourke?”

“So far, Miss Sinclair ... but that’s a good thing.”

“How is it good?”

“It means you can feel safer, Miss Sinclair.”

“I wish I did ... but I don’t. How much do I owe you Mr. Rourke?”

“Don’t worry Miss Sinclair. I’ll bill you at the end of the month. I’m taking the investigation to the next level now and will report to you shortly.”

Stephanie Sinclair rolled her eyes. “Fine Mr. Rourke. Thank you for calling.”

She hung up the phone and walked to the front door and peeked through one of the small windows. No signs of anything out of the ordinary. She went back to the living room and turned out the light.

“Nighty-night Max baby.”

She climbed the stairs and performed her nightly bathroom ritual and before slipping between the sheets she fingered the curtain aside and surveyed the street. Just the neighbour walking his dog. All quiet ... except for that shadow crouching at the side of

the house across the street ... crouching beside the house that didn't belong to the driveway ... crouching beside the house that was in shadow. Or was it just a pile of garbage? She studied it. No motion at all. Probably garbage.

She dropped the curtain back into place and got into bed. The sheets were cold and she shivered. Was her imagination running away with her? Would James just show up as if nothing had happened as he had many times before? She tried to put it out of her head but lay awake. She resolved one thing; when she went to work tomorrow she would check on real investigators in the city and ditch this yokel, Rourke.

The sound of Max yowling and a thud roused Stephanie from her fitful sleep. More yowling and glass breaking. She crept wide-eyed; heart pounding to the bottom step and looked toward the living room just as a dark figure sprang through the far doorway pulling Max from his face and slamming him against the wall. The dark figure shot out the back door. Max shot up the stairs and into the bedroom. She rushed to the back door and looked out. Nothing. She slammed it shut then dialled 911.

Two officers arrived in about thirty-five minutes. They took notes and looked around. Their analysis was simple: break and enter by unlocked back door. Intent: probably robbery. Lucky the cat was feisty. They would cruise the neighbourhood and suggested she go back to bed and try to sleep. They would drop by tomorrow and have her sign the report. Stephanie cleaned up the mess in the living room then went to bed but didn't sleep. She debated calling Chase Rourke but decided not to waste two calls in one night.

Morning came but Stephanie hadn't slept except for maybe nodding off a couple of times. She rose and slogged her way through her morning routine then flopped into her car and headed to work. She felt hungover yet she maintained a hazy lookout for silver cars, expecting one to dart up behind her, pull out as if to pass. then run her into the ditch.

The few silver cars so far were piloted by equally dozy looking drivers with that dead eyed slaughterhouse look. She didn't notice the grey pickup truck parked under the bridge at the highway 404 on ramp. She didn't see that it slipped into the traffic many cars behind her and hung back there all the way to the city.

Chase followed Stephanie to work keeping a good distance back so he could watch the cars around her. There were always silver cars but all of them seemed unremarkable. Chase figured that if there was a stalker, they would know her routine and simply wait at work and if they were intent on killing her they would have run her off the road or ambushed her in the city. Still, this was something he felt obliged to do. Miss Sinclair was a poor driver. Her car wandered in her lane and she seemed to be looking everywhere except where she was going. Maybe she was a drinker.

The journey to Metro General Hospital was uneventful. The usual stop and go and crawl. Stephanie Sinclair pulled through the gate into the Employee Parking area and Chase peeled off and stopped Henry under the canopy over the front entrance drive. He flipped the passenger sun-visor down to display an 'On Delivery' sign then with his flashers on, he slipped into the bushes of the garden near the entrance and observed Stephanie as she walked from the lot across the street to the hospital. Instead of entering by the main door though, she slipped down the side. Chase abandoned his observation post and jogged to the corner of the building and peeked around. Stephanie was just entering a side door. He knew she worked on the second floor. Perhaps she was taking the stairs? Chase entered the main door and bounded up the curved staircase to the second floor mezzanine. He grabbed a tousled newspaper form from one of the couches overlooking the lobby and proceeded to the hallway where the offices were. She worked in administration and had to pass this spot. There was a pop machine just down the hall. He took up a place just beside it, opened the paper and leaned on the machine. He waited for Stephanie to come down the hall.

There were few stationary people here, everyone seemed to be in motion with some kind of task. He sauntered back to the balcony and made a casual survey of the lobby: one guy reading a newspaper by the door; an old couple sitting looking nervous and a young mother with three rambunctious kids. Typical lobby. The guy with the paper was middle aged and slim ... didn't fit the stalkers profile. Where was Stephanie? She should be here by now. Maybe he had been wrong that this was the floor where she worked. He'd wait a few minutes more. He strolled back to the pop machine and shook his paper open again. The door down the hall marked 'Stairs' hushed open and the click, click of Stephanie Sinclair's shoes advanced up the hall. Chase watched her from behind the paper. She had stopped for coffee and a bagel. He slouched behind his paper as she passed and continued to the glass doors of the Administration Office and went in. Chase folded the paper and slid it on top of the machine then returned to Henry via the stairs. He pulled his notebook out and recorded his findings for the morning then took a leisurely drive back to his office.

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As Chase pushed open the door to his office, Mrs. Wise had to step out of the way to avoid being slammed.

"Penny! Where are you going?"

"Chase! You scared the liver out of me. I'm going to the bank. We actually have a cheque to deposit. Why haven't you called?"

"I've been out on surveillance and had to maintain silence."

Mrs. Wise gave him the stink eye that betrayed the *'yeah, bullshit'* thought running through her mind.

"I'll be back in a few minutes. May as well grab some lunch while I'm out now that I don't have to lock the office and hurry back. You want anything?"

Chase handed her some bills and said, "Here Penny. Get me two Cuban sandwiches please and there should be enough left to cover your lunch. Oh, and a diet Dr. Pepper too, OK?"

Mrs. Wise smiled as she took the money and went down the hall. Chase's generosity gave her more spring in her step than her support hose normally provided.

Rourke passed through the outer office and went into his inner sanctum. He struggled the window open a crack and flopped down in his chair. There were two pink 'missed call' slips on his desk. One was from John Darm, probably about the brother. The other was from Nicole, his BFB as the kids said. It was true too. She really was his best friend and he enjoyed the benefits. He would drop in on her at work later. The number on Darm's message was his office number. Rourke flipped through his dog eared Rolodex for Darm's cell number.

"John? Chase. What's up? Ya got some news on James Sinclair?"

"Hey Chase. No nothing on him yet. Just wanted to let you know that there was a break in last night at your client's house."

"What? Really? What happened?"

“Seems someone entered by the kitchen door and was sneaking through the house when, get this... the perp was attacked by her cat! Fuckin’ thing went for his face. Scared him off. He lit off through the back yard and escaped. Nothing stolen, just a few things broken from the wrestling match with the cat. Whole thing spooked the girl pretty bad.”

Rouke remembered her bad driving. “Any idea who it was?”

“Nope. Male; dressed in black; average height and build.”

“Hmmmmm... anything else?”

“Just one strange thing. Burglars usually force a door or break a window. There was none of that. It looks like the lock was picked.”

“Interesting. Professional sounding, eh?”

“Could be that or just a guy with a new twist. Thought I’d mention it though.”

“OK. Thanks John.”

“Yeah, no sweat. Don’t forget; ya owe me a breakfast.”

“I didn’t say breakfast ... and our deal was for info on the brother, remember?”

“Talk to ya later Chase.”

Chase swung his chair and put his feet up on the desk. Have to check out Stephanie’s house. He waited for Penny to arrive back with the food and when she returned he

grabbed the sac with his sandwiches and Dr. Pepper and went down and rolled good ol' Henry homeward. On the way he stuffed one of the Cuban sandwiches down his neck.

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When Chase got home, Eileen the house keeper was vacuuming. Chase mounted a stool at the breakfast bar in the kitchen, unwrapped his other Cuban sandwich and snapped the Dr. Pepper open. Eileen had some easy listening station on the radio. The house was very quiet now that Eileen had shut the vacuum off. She appeared in the kitchen.

“Well, Master Chase. You’re home are ya?”

Chase finished his sip of Dr. Pepper.

“Yes Eileen. Just a quick stop for lunch, then I have some work to do this aft.”

“What kinda work would that be then? You helpin Ben trim the trees down the drive?”

“No ... I have a case I’m working on.”

“Away with ya! Another dog missing?”

“Very funny Eileen. I’m working on a real case with someone being followed and as of this morning there has been an important development.”

“Oh ... important now is it? And what might that be?”

“Sorry. It’s very confidential. The fewer people know the better...”

Eileen had her back to Chase and rolled her eyes, “I see Mr. James Bond. Tell me now; will you be here for supper?”

“Yes, and Nicole will probably be with me.”

“That’s lovely Master Chase. I’m planning pig’s arse and cabbage, so there’ll be lots to go round.”

Chase finished his sandwich and Eileen took the litter then started getting things together for supper. Chase ambled into the study, searched the titles on the bookshelves, pried a few volumes out and set them on the desk. He opened a desk drawer and pulled his camera out. Time to get on over to Stephanie Sinclair’s house.

Stephanie’s neighbourhood was quiet. Most people at work or school. Chase parked Henry in the Sinclair drive. He took a quick tour of the front yard that disclosed nothing then circled around to the side of the house, reached over and unlatched the gate to the back yard and went in. The grass in the yard was well kept but the garden border was in horrible condition. Stephanie was not a gardener. In fact it appeared that the yard was seldom if ever used. Must have a lawn service. He went to the back door and stooped over to examine the door. No sign of any jimmy marks; a few scratches on the lock mechanism. Certainly looks like it was picked. He examined around the door. No key. He turned his attention to the stoop and the stairs. They showed no suspicious signs so he progressed to the yard. Just past the concrete slab at the bottom of the stair was a dent in the lawn. A heel mark from when the crook jumped from the stoop. Rourke took a direction from the mark and looked toward the garden. The tree branches showed signs of disarray. He went to the spot and studied the ground in the garden. One possible toe print

there. He pushed the branches aside and peered over the fence. There was a beautiful complete footprint stamped deep into the loose earth of the neighbour's garden. He leaned over the fence and snapped a shot then took a shot of the toe print and heel print. He returned to his truck and drove around the block to the neighbour's. He parked and strolled up one side of the street then down the other. There it was. Scuffed dirt by the curb and recent oil drops. The crook must have parked here, a few houses away, went through the backyard to Stephanie's house and returned the same way, scuffing up the dirt in his hurry to leave. He took a picture of the dirt by the curb. Funny ... there were no footprints leading towards the Sinclair house. Of course the perp would have been very careful on the way in ... undoubtedly panicked on the way out. Chase would have to get serious now. Stephanie was right.