

A BENNETT & DEMARKO MYSTERY

THE ELIZABETH STREET
EPIPHANY

AARON S
GALLAGHER

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Printed in the United States of America
First Printing: Feb 2019

ISBN 13:978-1-64456-027-3



Indies United Publishing House, LLC
P.O. Box 3071
Quincy, Illinois 62301
www.indiesunited.net

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This book is dedicated to Anthony Bourdain
Who showed me food and crime in equal measure.

CHAPTER ONE

Saturday

The hole-in-the-wall bodega, sandwiched between a drycleaner and a liquor store with no door, only a window and a counter, appeared warm and inviting. Over the propped-open door a speaker blared some scratchy reggae song into the disinterested night. Despite the snow the door was always propped open. The tiny grocery and eatery sweltered at over a hundred degrees, the always-on grills and fryers radiated late-summer heat.

A throng of people elbow-to-shoulder crowded the counter, hunched figures of a multitude of shapes and colors, but all with skin darker than hers. She watched from across the street, pulling her blazer tighter. The brown blazer was tailored and suited her, the shirt under it did not. It was white, a little too large, and it was tucked too far into her jeans. It was a woman's blazer, but a man's white dress shirt.

A raven-haired Spanish woman shuttled along the counter, dealing out plates and scooping up the money, a croupier at a losing table. She smacked the owner of the occasional creeping hand, sneaking over the edge of the flecked Formica for a quick squeeze. The counter woman appeared in her late forties, but she was older than she looked. She laughed every time she slapped the owner of a wayward hand, which encouraged more hands, but also more tips.

Toni Bennett stared across the street into the pocket of heat and energy, seeing nothing of the friendly flirtations and camaraderie, waiting like a predator gazing into the grasses of a veldt, waiting for the telltale movement of-

There. The back door opened and a man slipped into the bodega. Tall, he had a bald head and wore an ancient leather jacket and torn jeans. He had ebony skin and a gold ring in his right nostril. As if scenting her prey, Toni's own nostrils flared and narrowed, motionless but for her eyes.

The tall man nudged into a space between a Rastafarian with a lion's mane of dreadlocks and a Puerto Rican pimp she knew by

sight but not name. She watched, she waited. Patient as the grave.

After some joking flirtation and a cup of thick coffee served by the Spanish counterwoman, he reached into his pocket and pulled a round wad of green bills. She waited, lips parting. The tip of her tongue touched her upper lip.

The man slid the roll to the woman behind the counter. She dropped it into the drainpipe at her feet without a glance, a muscle memory action. Toni couldn't see this from the street, but she'd been watching the bodega for a while, and knew about the drop. The counterwoman reached over the serving window's stainless-steel expanse, said something, and took a takeout bag from someone the watching woman couldn't see.

The man accepted the bag without checking it and got up with a quick pinch at the Spanish woman's rear. The woman giggled and slapped his face, violent foreplay. He gave her a wink and turned to go. But not toward the back.

Toni glanced up and down the empty street. It was almost one, East 13th had been abandoned to the lazily-falling snow, except for the hardcore locals and night creatures filling the narrow bodega. She'd watched for two hours on a hunch. It paid off, but she paid for it. Her feet were numb and her face felt like a mask of glass. But warmth was a secondary concern. Tonight's primary objective was making rent.

She watched him leave the bodega and turn east toward Avenue C. If he got to the subway it'd be a lot harder. She crossed toward the bodega, feet crunching in the frozen ruts of snow, and he heard the sound. She scrunched, head down and arms tightly hugged against the cold, and kept on toward him as though she'd not seen him.

He stared at her for a second through the falling snow, watching her plod mechanically through the accumulated drifts. She was three or four paces away before she swerved wide to go around him.

"Hey, doll," he called as she passed, a cavalier sneer on his dark face. "Wanna help me keep warm? Let you lap up all the milk you want."

“Go screw, asshole,” she said without heat, and kept walking. He chuckled and followed after her, killing time, not really fishing, but seeing if he’d get a nibble.

“Come on, mama,” he coaxed. “Long day. Long night. Colder than a witch’s tit out here. Come back to the crib, baby, I keep you warm.”

She hunched more and kept walking.

He followed after, swinging the bag like a pendulum, making it crackle. “Got some primo dinner here, girl. And side order of the extra-good stuff. You wanna chase the dragon, baby?”

She faltered in her step, half-turning her head. “What?”

The man hastened to her side, grin spreading. “I got your hookup right here, baby,” he soothed. “What you need to calm those shakes, sooth those nerves, and get you right and *tight*.”

He slapped her on the ass. “Not that you need that. Girl, you got a *fiiiine* ass on you. Like a peach.”

She turned to look at him. He had a foot or so of height on her and a lot more muscle, but Dexter hadn’t grown any brains at all in the past four months. He didn’t recognize her. “Whatcha got, dirt merchant?” she asked, licking her lips and staring at the bag.

He grinned toothily, the incisors twinkling. He’d had them replaced. He’d been doing quite well of late, had Dexter Harris. Well enough he’d decided not to bother going to court to settle up on some penny-ante assault charges. That made him a skip.

That made him *rent*.

Something in the way she looked at him alarmed him. The grin faltered. No, she didn’t look the way he’d remember, but not all of her was changed.

Her hair was a messy shag cut, pixyish and brown. She had a lot less makeup on (precisely none, in fact), not even a little concealer around her left eye. The eye in question had a dark ring under up, a freshly-popped hemorrhage a day old. An elbow had gotten in the way of her face. She had a pert nose and two delicate cupid’s-bow lips, but they were marred by a half-healed split on the right side through both of them. Around her thin neck were faded bruises from a pair of hands.

Her own hands came out of the pockets of her blazer. He hadn't noticed because she had been hunched and hugging herself, but the blazer wasn't buttoned. Her hands were small, the nails were short, and the knuckles carried numerous bruises and minor cuts, fresh and old.

Dexter took all this in and made the wrong intuitive leap.

Junkie, his mind supplied, happy to have found an easy mark for the night. A little party, some good service, and out the door on that tiny little ass. "Come home with me, baby," Dexter wheedled. Those gold teeth twinkled in the streetlight.

"Better idea," she said. She tucked her arms inside her coat. "You should come to mine."

"Oh yeah?" he asked. "Is it close?"

"Not too far. Eight, ten blocks. You've already been there anyhow, so you know the way."

Dexter's senses tingled. He took a half-step back, then another. "I know you?" he asked. "We party before?"

"Oh yeah," she cooed. "We partied. I screwed you *up*, man."

Dexter gave her a closer look. A half-formed warning niggled at his hindbrain, but he couldn't place it. But his feelers were twitching. He'd been around more than long enough to know that trouble was trouble, even if you couldn't see it. You smelled it, you backed off. He retreated another foot.

"Ain't never partied with you before, bitch," he growled. He slid one hand into his pocket and found the roll of quarters. "More'n happy to do it now."

She gave him a feral grin and taunted, "Last time we went to fist city, slick, you ended up in the trunk. You don't remember?"

As she spoke she tugged her .38 out of the clamshell just back of her right hip. "I'm pretty tired, Dex. I don't wanna tussle tonight. Put it down like a good boy or this time you lose a knee."

Toni held the gun in a solid Weaver two-hand stance like she'd been taught. The barrel of the gun centered on his left leg, a hair outside, so his femoral wouldn't be hit.

Dexter swallowed. "You ain't gonna--"

He swallowed the rest of the sentence when she cocked the

pistol, the snap of metal soft in the night.

“You got a fifty-fifty,” she said without heat. “Heads you win, tails you limp. Go ahead. Toss me for it.”

“Fuck do you want? Drop the piece and I’ll kick your ass. You ain’t shit without a gun.”

“Who put you in the trunk, Dex?”

“You did,” he spat. “You and that asshole.”

A dangerous glint flared in her eyes.

“Ain’t seen him around,” Dexter said, pressing the perceived advantage with a tight grin on his heavy, brutal features. “What’s the matter? What you sittin’ on ain’t enough to keep him around?”

A couple of months ago that comment would have gotten Dexter shot. Time had passed and she’d learned that taking her anger out on people that had nothing to do with it didn’t help. Besides, she needed all her rage for the ones that *had* had something to do with it.

“Last warning, Dexter,” she said, and her voice was the bored, steady tone of a toll-taker in the middle of a double shift. “You giving it up, or you gonna go for the full-pirate look, teeth, peg leg, and all?”

Dexter snarled, showing gold incisors like a tiger, his heavy lips moving like glaciers, but he put his hands up.

“The bag.”

He dropped the food bag into the snow.

“Up against that car there,” she ordered. Dexter took two steps and plunged his hands into the snow built up on the roof of the car.

His feet, that voice in her head said. It wasn’t her voice, it was a male voice, quiet, authoritative, and instructive. They’re not far enough apart. And he’s not leaning over far enough. You put ‘em wide and bend ‘em over so they can’t get a lick in without a lot of awkward maneuvering.

She noticed Dexter’s bunched shoulders.

So? the voice asked. *What about them?*

So he’s thinking of making a play, she answered.

So? the voice asked her again, patient and calm and inexorable.

So he’s a righty, she thought. *The bag.*

Good catch, the voice praised, and she felt an irrational surge of pride.

She stepped closer, the gun in both hands. She kicked his feet apart. She used her left hand to pull the cuffs from her blazer pocket. “You know the drill, Dex,” she said. “Gimme your paw like a good boy.”

Dexter snarled and put his left hand behind, but out to the side. *Bait*, she thought. She holstered the pistol and shifted the cuffs to her right hand. She made sure he could see her out of the corner of his eye as she reached for his wrist. Dex let her take the wrist and start to pull it behind him and then he struck. He used the momentum to swing a wide right-handed roundhouse, twisting sideways, fist tunneling snow into the air as he put his weight behind it.

She had already gone low and when his torso was more or less facing her, she punched him hard in the belly with the cuffs wrapped around her fist. A handy set of brass knuckles.

Dexter’s breath exploded into the frigid cold, stunned shock on his comical, gaping face. Straightening, she brought her hand up and smacked him across the face with the cuffs. He yelped as the metal dug into his skin, bloodying his cheek and nose. With one hand on the back of his head she slammed him against the car, grinding his face into the snow. While he coped with a face full of cold powdery snow, she levered one arm behind his back and shot the cuffs around the thick wrist. She drove a fist into his right kidney. He screamed, and gulped cold snow, choking on it. His free hand flew to press the skin over the kidney- and she slipped the cuff over that wrist.

Sputtering, Dexter whipped his head side to side, clearing his nose with a choking cough. The flakes puffed around his face like dandelion seeds, clinging to the blood oozing from the scrapes of the cuffs.

“Bitch,” he gasped, “I’m gonna tear you-”

She punched him in the kidney again.

“Ah! Damn! Knock that shit off!” he yelped, flinching away from the impact. “You can’t do that!”

“I ain’t a cop, Dex. You can’t sue me. You can’t touch me. And you’re a bail-jumper with two falls. I’m licensed to do whatever I have to if it means bringing you in,” she snarled in his ear. “Even if it means you get a little banged up. I’m in a shitty mood and I’d love to take it out on someone. You’re what I got. You wanna tell me some more about what I can and can’t do? I’ve got all the time in the world and a whole set of anger issues to take out on you.”

“Go fuck yourself,” Dex snarled, but he stopped struggling.

“Aw,” she pouted. “You sure you don’t wanna dance some more? I could-”

“Excuse me, that’s my car,” a voice behind her said.

She looked over her shoulder. A man stood a few feet away, hands shoved in a leather motorcycle jacket, watching them. He was almost taller than Dexter, narrow as a tenement cat, and wore sunglasses. His tightly-curved gray-white hair was cut short, his long, drawn face had deep lines beside his wide mouth, and his legs were skinny in jeans tucked into black motorcycle boots.

“Sorry,” she said. “Gimme a minute to curb my dog.”

She grappled Dexter’s arms and tugged him toward the shadow of the building. Dexter walked two steps and spun, lashing out with a foot. The boot caught her in the thigh and she grunted. He shoved against her, shoulder-blocking her to the snow. She landed on her back and rolled away from him. She rolled to her hands and knees as Dexter started to run.

The man stuck a foot out and tripped Dexter into the snow. Dexter fell headlong, wheezing as he fetched up against a newspaper box half-covered in crusted white. He struggled to his feet, hampered by the cuffs.

The man grabbed Dex’s jacket, and Dex headbutted him in the belly. The taller man staggered, gasping.

Dexter started to run and the woman tackled him around the legs. They went down into the snow and slush, rolling. Dexter kicked hard but she was off to the side before he could connect. As he drew back a boot to put her teeth out, the tall man’s hands grabbed his jacket and tugged him backward.

He dragged Dexter to the stoop nearest the sidewalk and threw

him into the edges of the steps. Dexter cried out as his back cracked against them.

The woman stood, panting, and brushed herself off. "Thanks," she said, wiping snow off her face. "I got him from here."

"Looks like *I* got him," the man said. He looked down at Dex. "She's intent on fucking you up, kid. You maybe better come with me instead."

"Go screw," Dexter said, spitting out blood from a cut on his lip. "Ain't going with *either* of you."

The woman grabbed Dexter by the collar. "Look, I'm sorry about your car, but--"

"You better leave him here with me," the tall man said. "I'll explain it to the cops."

"Yeah," she said, "No." She tugged Dexter upright and shoved him toward the sidewalk. She looked up and down the deserted street. Nary a cab in sight. *Maybe I could-*

"What's your story?" the man asked.

"No story," she said. "Come on, Dex. We'll--"

"You a bounty hunter?" the man asked.

She stopped and gave him another long look. An earring in his left ear glinted in the streetlight from a block away, a spark of silver. His eyes were dark and glittered with interest.

"What, you writing a book?" she asked.

"Not at the moment. Right now I'm just curious. You said you weren't a cop. You just tackled that dude and now you're perp-walking him up the block like it's just another Tuesday. That smells like a bounty hunter to me."

She gave him an appraising look.

He's wise, the voice that wasn't hers said. *Perp-walk. Isn't a common phrase.*

"Look, I'm sorry about your car, but this is my business, not yours. Have a good night."

He watched her. "He dropped a bag."

She looked at the snow. The takeout bag was lying half-covered beside the car. "Yeah," she said. "It's heroin. Well, heroin and tacos. You want it?"

She saw the man's eyes dart to the bag, and his eagerness seemed to surge. He reigned it in, and the hunger in his eyes for the bag subsided. "No," he said in a voice she could tell wanted to say 'yes'. "Don't you?"

"He's already got a load on his plate. That's just his weekend fix. Won't make much difference next to the rest of his pending charges." She smacked Dexter in the back of the head. "It was just a place to find him. Dipshit should have skipped town, but he didn't want to go away hurting. Always hard to find a new connection in another city, huh, Dex?"

"Screw you," Dexter muttered, head down.

"So that's Dexter Harris, huh?" the man said. "You tracked him through his habit?"

Her scalp tingled and it had nothing to do with the cold. "Who are you?" she asked.

"Gold," he said.

"Toni," she said. "So what?"

He smiled. "Yeah. So... I've been looking for Dexter for three days. And he was about to outrun you. I brought him down. That makes him mine. Sorry, kitten."

The tall man grabbed the collar of Dexter's jacket, yanking him sideways away from the woman.

Toni barked a laugh. "Nice try, but I don't tolerate claim-jumpers. Let him go. My cuffs, my collar."

She took Dexter's arm and pulled him away.

Dexter said, "Look, neither of you is gonna-"

"Shut up!" Toni and Gold yelled at the same time.

"Be reasonable," Gold said. "You fumbled. I picked it up. I'm gonna go ahead and run it into the 'zone. 'Be not angry at a man who speaks truth.'"

His voice sounded oddly-cadenced, as though he had quoted something at her. She raised her eyebrows and shrugged at him.

"Ayn Rand," he muttered. "Never mind. Look, it's what it is. Sorry, kitten."

Gold snagged Dexter by the back of the neck and forcibly yanked him away from Toni. He turned to go.

She hit him in the small of the back, a flying tackle that drove them both to the ground. Gold grunted in sudden pain as he hit the sidewalk and rolled. Toni crouched behind him, hand going to her holster.

She slapped empty leather.

“Shit!” she growled, scanning the ground. The gun was-

A fistful of snow took her across the eyes, and she flinched away. A pair of hands shoved her into the snow again. Gold stood, brushed himself off, and turned to see Dexter running back the way he had come, headed for the warmth and light of the bodega.

Gold pelted after him and managed to kick his legs out from under him. Dexter slid to a stop with a groan. His nose burst with the impact, and he coughed blood in streamers across the snow. It steamed and began to freeze.

Before he could haul Dexter to his feet, a small boot caught him behind the right knee. He lurched to one side, knee cracking on the sidewalk. A jolt of pain arched up his leg and he hissed. The hiss was cut off as a small fist dropped out of the sky and caught him along the jaw. He coughed and gasped. She towered over him. “Get... the *fuck*... away from... my collar,” she choked, panting. “You’re third-rate at *best*. You... had to track *me*... to find *him*.”

She scuffed snow at him and walked wide around him, out of arms’ reach.

“Come on, Dex, get to your goddamned feet,” she growled, hauling on Dexter’s arms. Dexter climbed to his feet once again. He glared down at Toni and then at Gold, who was massaging his neck with a sullen glare.

“Look, maybe you two wanna get a room and thrash this out. Let me sit it out, huh? My nose hurts like hell, I’m fucking cold, wet, and the shakes are gonna drop my fillings all over this winter wonderland, bitch,” Dex growled.

“Shut up,” Toni ordered. She dragged him back to the stoop. “Sit or get put down.”

Dex scuffed snow from the stoop and sat, unhappiness plain on his bloody face. Toni put a hand behind her back and rested it on the empty holster. “I’m gonna cuff you to that rail for a bit,” she

said. "You get uppity, I'll settle for the ten percent of the price for bringing you in dead. Savvy?"

Dex's eyes narrowed. "You ain't gonna shoot me, bitch."

She jerked her hand a little. "I might just for calling me that again, asshole. Try me."

Dexter looked into her eyes. What he saw caused him to look down at his feet.

She pulled the keys and unlocked one of his hands. She slapped the free end around the thickest part of the iron rail. She stood up and backed away. "Good boy," she panted. Once out of reach she began scanning the ground. After a minute or so she located her pistol and brushed it off.

"*Son of a...*" Dexter snarled. "You lyin' little-"

She pointed the gun. Not at him, but *near* him. "Little what?"

Dexter swallowed. "Nothin'," he said with a sneer.

"Good boy," she said and holstered the pistol.

"Hey," Gold called. He was on his feet a short distance away. He had his hands out away from his sides, fingers spread. "Let's talk."

"About what? How I'm about to cash in this ticket?" she asked. She scanned the street. Still no cabs.

"You got no ride, kitten?" Gold asked.

"Screw you," Toni said. She peered down the street at the corner. She didn't see a payphone. She didn't relish walking back to the bodega.

"Tell you what," Gold said. "Split the fee and I'll give you a lift."

She gave him the full force of a withering glare. "I'd sooner let him go."

Gold grinned. "I doubt that; you fight too hard. Come on. I got rent to make."

"What, you think I'm out here for the fun of it?" she demanded. "Rent, food, and a pressing need to do other shit. And I need *his* bail-jumping ass to fund it all. I'm not sharing. Go screw."

Gold shoved his hands into his pockets. "You got two choices, far as I can see," he said. "You take me up, or you go find a phone."

Now, you *could* take him with you, but you wanna spend the next two hours chasing him down and beating on him?"

"I can think of worse ways to spend my evening," she said, but the wet, the cold, the sheer despair of everything else in her life crashing down made her think about it. For just a second. She looked at Gold. "Seventy-thirty."

"Come on. I got expenses. Fifty-fifty."

"Sixty-forty, or I'll just start screaming 'fire' and wait for the cavalry," she said.

Gold frowned at her. "You're a hard-nosed bi... uh..." his eyes flicked to Dexter's nose, still dripping blood onto the steps. "... woman," he finished.

She appeared somewhat mollified and didn't answer.

"Fine, fine," Gold grouched. "Sixty-forty. Deal."

"Okay," she said. "Sixty-forty split if you give me and my prize a ride to the 9th."

"Done."

He stuck out a hand. Then she pulled her pistol. "Trouble is, you got a flat."

She fired one shot and it detonated the front tire of the snow-covered Buick. Air hissed as the tire deflated and the shot echoed between the buildings.

Gold stared at the tire for a moment and threw back his head. He guffawed plumes of laughter into the air, then bent over, arms across his belly as he cackled.

Toni raised an eyebrow, watching him impassively. Dexter stared open-mouthed at the pair of them. "You are batshit, ain't you?" he asked.

"Zip it," Toni suggested. "Hey, laughing boy. Your car's outta commission. Looks like no split for you."

She waved the gun at Dexter. "We're going for a walk. You feel like arguing?"

Dexter pointed across the street. "I don't think so. You woke the neighbors."

She looked over her shoulder and saw two or three lights flick on. Faces appeared in the windows.

“Damn it,” she muttered.

Gold’s chuckles died away, and he wiped tears away from his eyes. She eyed him sourly. “Just what the hell do you think is so fucking funny?” she asked.

Gold straightened. Still grinning he said, “Ain’t my car. I was trying to fleece you.”

She blinked at him, gave a sudden bark of laughter, the humor taking her over from head to toe. It felt a lot like a catharsis. She hadn’t laughed in a good long time.

Three months, the voice whispered. *Three months, seven days.*
Shut up, she told the voice.

The sound of a siren came to them then, gaining strength, and a cruiser rounded the corner, red and blue lights flashing. She tucked her pistol in the holster and found her permit and ID in the blazer pocket. She held the papers over her head. Glancing at Gold she said, “Better look peaceful. This late, sometimes it’s easier to shoot you than do the booking paperwork.”

Gold put his hands up. “I know most of the cops. You’re in more trouble than I am.”

“Naah,” she said as the cruiser halted in front of them. “I know a lot of cops too.”

“Don’t move,” a voice called from the open window of the cruiser. “Stay still.”

The two officers got out, one with a drawn weapon. He covered his partner. The driver said, “Someone called in a scuffle- oh. Hey, Toni. Whatcha up to?”

“Hey, Francy. Still on the night shift?”

“Till I retire, I bet,” Francy Hernandez said. He had a pencil moustache struggling for existence on a wide expanse of upper lip, and his dark skin and eyes were red and blue in the flashers of the patrol car. He glanced at Gold. “I know you, don’t I?”

“Bobby Gold,” the tall man said. “I’m a ratcatcher for Evans Bonds.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Francy agreed. “Hey, Pat! Kill the lights, would you?”

The cruiser’s flashers died and only the headlights illuminated

the street. Francy was joined by his partner. Pat Clemmens was two-fifty in a uniform meant for two hundred. His belly strained at the shirt, which testified to the resourceful nature of the city's tailors. He hitched up the gun belt and panted, "What the hell? Oh, hey, Toni. Figured you'd be at the game tonight."

"Naah. I had a hunch about Dexter I hadda chase down," Toni said. She hiked a thumb over her shoulder. "Skip for Kinsella. Wanna do me a solid and drive him in for me? And maybe let me tag?"

Francy scowled. "I can run him in for you, sure, but I can't let you ride along. We got rules, you know?"

Toni stared at Francy for a second.

"Come on, Toni, be reasonable," Francy pleaded.

"I don't ride him in, I don't get *paid*," she said.

"Not my problem, Toni," Francy said. His eyes shifted down.

She said, "Next game, I'll get the pizza."

Francy looked up at her under a speculative brow. "Ray's?"

"There any other kind?" Toni asked. "Helen doesn't let you have pizza anymore, does she?"

Francy shook his head. "Says she doesn't want me catching the fat like Tubby here."

"Hey!" Pat protested. "I'm not fat. I'm just storing food for the winter."

"Which one?" Toni asked.

Pat shrugged. "Dunno. All of 'em."

They laughed. Gold said, "Uh, can I put my hands down now?"

Francy snorted. "Sure, sure. Toni, he with you?"

"He's *near* me," she said. "That's all I'm gonna cop to."

"She shot a car," Gold said, pointing at the flat tire.

Francy frowned at Gold, then at Toni. "You discharged your weapon?"

Toni held out the permit and her ID. "I got the papers. And yeah, the gun went off. Dipshit here," she paused, looked at Gold, glanced at Dexter, and looked back, "uh, the dipshit chained to the stoop, not this dipshit. That dipshit fought me. We struggled. In the fracas, my gun fell out of my holster and discharged. I'll pay the

owner damages.”

Gold’s mouth dropped open. “Why, you little liar!”

“Hey!” Francy exclaimed. “That’s my pizza connection you’re impugning. I know her. I don’t know you. If she says it’s an accident, it’s an accident. Long as it’s *two* pies next game, Toni. From the look of all of yas, this was a proper little scrap. Unless you can prove my friend wrong.”

Gold scowled. “No, damn it.”

“All right. Come on, you,” Francy said to Toni. “We’ll write it up at the stationhouse. Get your prisoner.”

Toni trotted to the stoop. “You gonna play nice, Dex? We got all the coverage in the world now.”

Dexter said nothing, but he didn’t struggle as she uncuffed him and recuffed his hands behind his back. She pushed him toward the cruiser and Pat opened the door. One hand on his head, Toni shoved him into the squad car. She trotted around to the other side as Francy and Pat opened their doors. She opened the passenger side rear door and looked at Gold over the top of the cruiser. “Win some, lose some, big guy,” she called.

Gold he had a grin on his long face. “Game’s far from over, kitten,” he called back. “I’m down, I ain’t out.”

“Yeah, well,” she said, “I’m playing with the pros and it looks like little league is where you’re stuck. See you later.”

She slid into the car and slammed the door shut. With a short blast of the siren, they sped off.

Bobby Gold watched them recede. He shrugged to himself and muttered under his breath, “How ignorant thou art in thy pride.”

Gold looked around. A few people had come out of the buildings near him, watching the commotion.

He half-smiled at them and though they were across the street, he said, “Shelley,” by way of explanation and habit both. He remembered something, hunted around, and found the takeout bag that Dexter had dropped. He opened it, saw two foil-wrapped lumps. One oozed grease. The other did not. He closed the bag, the hunger gnawing at a different part of him than his stomach. He sighed, shoved his hands and the bag into his pockets, and started

to walk after the cruiser.

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