

Woody Bleeker walked through the rain that dripped through the few narrow cracks that the city left open to the sky. Four years he'd worked this beat. Detective, NYPD. It sounded so glamorous. But all he had to show for it in four years was a drinking problem and bad dreams.

He let himself into his apartment. He took a bottle of scotch from the bureau and poured himself a glass. He was just about to take the first sip when a sound came down the stairs.

"WOODY!"

He stopped, the bottle in his hands.

"What, ma?"

"I got you a new pair of socks!"

"Ma, I told you, I don't need any more socks right now!"

"Yes you do, all your socks have holes in them!"

"Ma!"

"And there's still some rice pudding in the fridge, but don't eat it in your room!"

"I can eat my rice pudding where I want, ma!"

"Don't talk back to me. And you need to get an early night tonight—you can't be a big secretary at the police department if you don't get enough sleep."

"Ma, I'm not a secretary, I'm a detective!"

"Woody, how long are you going to keep that up? Being a clerk in the detective bureau doesn't make you a detective!"

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Work was hell the next day, as always. Woody's tiny office in the police department was filled to the ceiling with stacks of binders and manila folders. A never-ending stream of cases, of good people making bad mistakes. Until Maria walked in.

She came through the door, her head buried in a book. *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*. Neruda.

She was beautiful. Eyes like sapphires, artfully sloppy makeup and a French haircut topped off a body to die for entombed in a floral-print dress.

A woman this beautiful had never been in Woody's office before. He panicked.

"I'm sorry, you must be in the wrong place," he called. "Sometimes people can't read the sign—the lettering is starting to come off."

She didn't hear him speak. She pulled herself out of her book and noticed Woody.

"Detective?" she said.

"Defective? I would have just said 'broken'..."

"No, are you Detective Bleeker? My name is Maria Moretti, I was wondering if....."

She was tough on the outside, but Woody thought he could see a spark of innocence hidden behind the exterior. She was just a kid.

"...No, not me," Woody said. "I'm just Woody Bleeker."

"But I read about you in the paper. All about how you took care of that mob killer, what was his name, Andiamo. I have the clipping right here. "

It dawned on Woody that something significant had happened. Whether it was terrible or wonderful, he still didn't know.

"Can I see that?" he said. "I... need to make sure that they got my middle name right, the spelling is very complicated."

She handed him the clipping.

MOB KILLER NABBED BY NYPD DETECTIVE WOODY BLEEKER

by Ron Hackman

Detectives arrived at an apartment on 21st and fourth last night to find a pool of blood seeping out from underneath the crack in the door. They entered to find human viscera hung over the dresser. A severed arm swung suspended from the chandelier as a warning to anyone foolish enough to investigate...

Enter Woody Bleeker, the new rising star of NYPD's detective unit. Bleeker, beaming with pride, explained that the wanton destruction in the apartment was the work of one Amerigo Andiamo, the famous "Butcher of the Mob."

Andiamo is the Italian mafia's second most notorious killer, known for sending the family members of his victims smoothies made from their remains.

"Well, I got the dirty bastard," said Bleeker. "I hope this teaches all the other scum like him that's out there that the city's jails are where they belong."

Andiamo escaped from prison several minutes after this reporter obtained the above quote.

The recent escape leaves the mob's number one killer, Amerigo Andiamo, on the loose. Andiamo, when reached for comment, told the New York Daily Tribune that he was going to "gut that pig Woody Bleeker the next chance I get."

Below the article there was a little black and white picture of Andiamo. He was a massive, muscular man, impeccably dressed. He wore a suit and a bowler hat and his face was covered with scars, and he was smiling like he'd just given a kid a skinned knee and enjoyed it.

Woody gulped. This was a frame up. Someone wanted him dead.

He thought it out. If looks could kill, this girl would be a pound of dynamite. She was trouble. But by the looks of it, trouble had already found him, whether he liked it or not. This was turning into a real problem, and he had never been one for math.

“Detective Bleeker?” said Maria.

Woody looked up.

“You were mumbling. Listen, if this is a bad time...”

He shook his head.

“Good. So, I’ve been having some problems with my husband.”

“What kind of problems?” Woody said.

Maria blushed. “Never you mind that,” she said. “But he’s into some dirty business. I think he has connections with the mob. I want to spy on him.”

She looked around at the stacks of papers that filled the cramped office.

“It looks like you could use a break, anyway,” she said. “Why don’t you come out with me tonight and I can explain things better. Pretend it’ll be fun.” She cocked an eyebrow suggestively. Suggesting what, Woody could only guess.

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