

## Detective Cartwright

Detective Jake Cartwright's yellow tipped fingers hovered over the vast pool of blood on the concrete. The blood's warmth lingered. He stood up from his crouch, reached back to burrow through a pile of takeout bags in the front seat of his Bonneville, and grabbed his withered notebook.

Jake took a last heavy drag off of the lit cigarette from his ashtray before he flicked it on the ground. He exhaled a long plume of smoke and tossed back his overgrown hair. A small group of onlookers had formed in front of The Roasters Café, now blocked off by squad cars and yellow tape; hopefully he could make his way out before the first news van arrived.

"Just great." Jake muttered.

Sgt. Ruiz, a thickset officer with slick black hair and built like a Mack Truck, took out his flipbook to brief Detective Cartwright.

Ruiz spoke sternly, "Hey Jake. We got two males, light color skin, multiple tattoos on both, loose fitting blue jeans, one with a small flame neck tattoo. He's taller, about 6'2", with shoulder length hair. His pal must have been about 5'9", in a navy button down, he had a grown out crew cut and goatee. Obviously both of these guys were packing."

"Thanks Eddie. Tell your brother thanks for working on my engine," Jake replied.

"No problem, let's just be sure to get this one sealed up."

Cartwright knew Ruiz was a pure blue blood who enjoyed any opportunity to razz him, especially about Jake's last two cases that were thrown out on technicalities, something about papers not being filed properly.

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The array of shell casings smattered on the sidewalk signaled to Jake that he was going to walk into carnage. With his notepad ready he opened the café door and made a half-hearted sign of the cross as he traversed the threshold. Jake's heartbeat quickened. The rank smell of dried blood, burnt coffee, and punctured drywall overtook his nostrils. Jake maneuvered his eyes around the room to gather the number and possible ages of victims, bullet holes through the glass, and other scene details.

"These punks," Jake snarled as he scratched his notes. His mouth and lips pursed. He stalked back and forth, dodging college sweatshirts slung on the backs of chairs. The two barista stations shimmered in the day's sunset and Jake saw a slug stuck in the machine. He noticed how tightly his hands were clenched as he quickly grabbed a pastry bag and his keys so he could pry it out. As he popped the slug out, he saw two figures in the shiny chrome finish of the espresso machine.

Jake spun around as two guys hopped into a red Ford pickup. He couldn't make out the passenger, but the driver, his stringy hair under a Cardinals hat, looked back to pull out. When he turned, it revealed a tattoo of a small flame on his neck, an image that looked familiar but Jake could not place it. Jake thrust his belongings into his trench coat, bolted toward the door with thundering footsteps; his voice crescendoed as he shoved the door open. "RUIZ!"

The chase was on.

The sergeant turned his head as Jake pointed at the red truck pulling into traffic. Jake clutched his keys as he raced to the driver side of his Bonneville. In

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seconds, the door slammed. Ruiz hurried down the street toward his squad car, barking the description into his CB.

Jake flipped on his lights and squealed his tires as he jerked his car to follow the truck. Cartwright saw the driver turn his head to look back and aggressively shake the passenger. The truck slowed down and then accelerated to run through the first light. Jake sped through in a near miss with cross traffic. The red Ford bobbed and weaved through traffic in the sleepy lakeside town. Jake stayed steadfast with sirens going. He veered and dodged his car around the others. Sweat dripped as he kept pace with the suspects. Jake could not escape the searing image of the flame tattoo. Then the middle window of the truck slid open and a black square-edged gun pointed at him.

Jake swerved and ducked as he heard the cracking of shots. One bullet, a complete miss, just a ping off the cement. The second, a shattering of headlight glass filled the emptiness of the street. The final round popped through the passenger side glass and buried deep into the grey faux leather backseat. Jake slammed his brakes, pulled out his gun, and turned up his scanner.

The Ford truck rubbed off of the front end of a station wagon. The suspects made a turn toward the downtown lake area and the decaying industrial parks. Jake pursued, tires squealed in the turn as he hit hard on the accelerator once again. According to the radio chatter more police were joining the pursuit and setting up a perimeter in the area.

Through the graffiti-lined, vacant, mazelike streets, Detective Cartwright, held his silver 9mm in his right hand as he steered with his left. He played cat and

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mouse with the red truck. Jake slowed his car a bit as he stalked the truck behind lake worn brick buildings, into the alleyways, even through an old warehouse.

Finally, he looped back to a main road still a step behind. Impatient, Detective Cartwright revved his engine and tried to drive a reverse route from the chase to get the punks off guard, but there was no trace of the red Ford truck. Jake thought all was lost. He stopped his Bonneville and rolled down his window to listen for peculiar sounds. Almost a minute passed before he heard the screeching hinge and slam of a heavy metal door in a nearby building.

Jake's circled and parked when he saw the red truck pulled over in an alley behind a large, old steel factory. The truck was empty, the doors swung open. He radioed his location and pulled out a fresh cigarette. "Finally an open and shut arrest to show Ruiz." His gun drawn, back pressed against the wall, he reached into his pocket for his lighter. He pulled out the cool metal of his father's Zippo to flick it open. The company logo caught his eye. The flame looked familiar. Suddenly Jake heard a loud noise and snapped his head toward the alley.

Sergeant Ruiz stood over Cartwright as he came to "Well, it looks like they got away Jake, and you look like crap by the way."

Even as Jake's head spun he recognized Ruiz's smug tone. Cartwright sat up, felt his sore mouth and back of his head. As Jake patted himself he found no trace his keys, wallet, phone, gun, and Zippo.

"Not for long," Jake grunted.