

## Snitches Get Stiches

By: Hamilton J Reed

The subdued lighting of Rossi's seemed almost fluorescent now, compared to the damp gloom outside the windows. The green overhead lamps cast a gaslight glow on rough oak tables and cracked leather benches. Normally you couldn't see either during the massive post work crowd. Now between the weather and the late hour only a few men still sat at the bar.

One of them, Jacob Langley, had a double of whiskey and half of a bowl of potato-cheddar soup in front him. It had been cooling there for almost a half hour now.

"Shouldn't you be getting home to your wife?" the bartender had asked when it was ordered. Jacob's eyes narrowed and his lip curled down into a grimace.

"I get enough heckling at home, I don't need my bartender nagging me too. Just get me some damn soup."

Now Jacob could barely stomach the stuff. Not because of the layer of slowly congealing grease and starch floating on top, although that wasn't helping. He felt nauseous. His hands shook when he went to light a cigarette. He took a sip of whiskey to try and calm his nerves but all he could think of was the fact that now his marriage was well and fucked.

He had done a lot of things that would've destroyed his

marriage if Margot had ever found out and some things that should have destroyed it when she did. But they had always managed to ride things out. Through it all they had shared an unspoken rule. As long as Margot knew where Jacob was around dinner time they could work through anything.

The scrape of the door against the uneven floor made everyone at the bar turn their heads. A man with a thin mustache and a pinstriped suit was standing in the doorway. The distant echo of sirens and cars rushing on wet streets followed him. A soft rumble of thunder was cut short by the door closing.

In five strides the mustached man was at the bar, taking a seat on Jacob's left. He flashed a quick smile at Jacob, granting a view of yellow and gold mixed together, before turning to get the bartender's attention.

Jacob took a moment to size the guy up. Dirt on his patent leather shoes, cuts on his knuckles, and a gold chain attached to something in his vest. The new guy looked to be in his mid twenties or so.

Jacob was about to turn back to his soup when he caught a glimpse of his wife trying to peer in through the darkened windows. He almost knocked his drink over trying to stand up.

"Ah shit, my wife's here. Hey buddy could you do me a favor and if that lady comes in here looking for a "Jacob"

could you tell her you've been in here all night and haven't seen me?"

Jacob didn't stick around to hear the reply, he was already down the hall and in the single bathroom at the back of the bar. He locked the door, sat down on the toilet, and lit another cigarette. He held his breath and tried to listen for the shrill pitch of his wife's voice but the only thing he could hear was the blood pumping in his ears.

He hadn't even finished his cigarette when there were a couple of quick raps at the door and the muffled voice of the mustached man. "Hey pal, your old lady is gone. You can stop hiding now."

Jacob returned to his seat and took a sip of whiskey.

"Hey, thanks a bunch for covering for me man. Here, let me buy you a drink."

"Don't worry about it man."

"Well, at least allow me to introduce myself. I'm Jacob Langley. Here's my card. I work at one of the banks downtown, so if you ever need any financial help or the like, look me up. It's the least I can do for you after helping me out."

"Pleasure to meet you Jacob. I'm Lionel Hurtz, although my friends call me Scratch. Don't thank me for a cover story, I know all about having to hide things. Although.. can I ask

you a favor? Don't worry, it's nothing too big" he flashed another one of those yellow grins and chuckled "but if anyone comes in here looking for me, can you tell them I've been here all night?"

"Yeah sure, you got lady problems of your own or something?"

"Sure, something like that."

A prolonged silence descended over the pair as each stared into the bottom of their drinks. It was only broken by the unmistakable sound of wood on wood. They both turned to face the door. This time three men entered the bar. Two were in blue uniforms and in front of them a man in a practical looking suit. After taking a couple of seconds to scan the bar the man in the suit came over to where the pair were sitting.

Lionel put on a big, shit eating grin. "Evening detective, something I can help you with?"

The detective ignored him and turned to Jacob while opening a notebook. "Hello sir. My name is Detective Malone and I was wondering if I could ask you a couple of questions."

For the first time in his life, Jacob regretted having business cards to hand out. Soft butterflies of regret began to move into his stomach.

"Yeah sure. I mean of course officer."

"Do you know this man you are sitting with."

"Uh... well I know his name is Lionel Hurtz. I just met him this evening."

"I see. Were you also aware that Mr. Hurtz is currently the prime suspect in a double murder that occurred this evening."

Lionel turned his head and caught Jacob's eye, narrowed his lids, then looked away.

"I didn't. That's a... that's very interesting"

"Yes isn't it, now then Mr..."

"Langley"

"Mr. Langley. Do you remember what time Mr. Hurtz entered this bar?"

Jacob's arm pits were noticeably damp. He hadn't felt this nervous since giving a speech his junior year of college.

"Well I don't remember exactly..." there was a brief pause. Jacob could feel the whole world holding it's breath alongside him. "...but he's been here pretty much all night with me. I got off work around 5pm."

The detective frowned and scrawled something in his notebook.

"Very well. I'm still going to have to ask you to come down to the station with me anyway. Just to give an official statement. Also, if this does go to trial you may be asked to

testify. Hurtz, you're coming with us a too."

"What? You heard the guy, I've been here all night.

"Well, we'll see about that. Come on boys it's not a long drive."

Two long hours in an interrogation room and a cold ride in the back of police cruiser later Jacob reached the door of his house. By now the soft buzz he'd been nursing in Ronni's was gone. Under normal circumstances it would have made sneaking in a lot easier, but his mind was elsewhere.

He fumbled for his keys, jangling them for a good half minute before he found the right one. He let the door slam shut behind him. He turned on the kitchen light to get a glass of water. He didn't even bother to take off his shoes before clapping across the hardwood floor and into the room he shared with his wife.

It was only when he went into his room that he realized something was wrong. He turned on the light. Margot wasn't there. The bed was still made from this morning. He went into his kids' rooms and turned on the lights. They were both gone. He went around the house turning on every single light before he got back to the kitchen and noticed a note on the table.

He picked it up and read it. Part of him couldn't believe what it said, so he had to read it again. This time

everything clicked and he slumped into a chair, letting the note fall to the linoleum. It read:

"Jacob; since it seems you don't want a family anymore I've taken what you left behind to my parents' house until further notice. You didn't even have the guts to face me you piece of chickenshit. When I went into Rossi's looking for you I met a guy in a pinstriped suit who told me you ran to the bathroom as soon as you saw me. I hope the bowl of soup was worth it. See you in court,

Margot"