



Of Plunder And Souls:

The Rescue Of Mr. Spaghetti

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PIRATES, YOU SAY?" ASKED THE DETECTIVE WHO STOOD ON CLARA'S front stoop. At least Clara thought he was a detective. He was dressed in a fedora and a trench coat and looked disturbingly like Humphrey Bogart. He could have been the claims adjuster. She had talked to so many people that day, she had lost track.

Clara put her fists on her hips. "Listen here, Buster. Maybe you want me to lie to you—like that punk of an ex of mine did last time they took a car of ours. Tell you some comfortable story about car thieves and let it go at that. But that ain't gonna happen!" She shook her head for emphasis, sending her many cornrows flying and wagged a finger at him. "I'm one woman who respects the truth, and that. Is. Not. Going. To. Change!"

Usually, this was the place where they shot her the "You should be locked away!" look, but this guy just nodded calmly, like he was on the set of *Dragnet* or something. Cool as a cucumber, he was.

"Pirates towed your car, Ma'am. Is that right?" The detective asked again. He spoke with a Bronx drawl, so that his "that" sounded like "dat." Clara had never heard a Bronx accent in real life before. She kept expecting him to drop it and talk like a proper human being.

"Yes!" she snapped.

"That's all right, Ma'am. I believe you."

"You...you do?"

"Sure thing, Ma'am. These pirates have been towing cars all over town."

Clara sighed. It felt good to have someone believe her. Still, it took all the fight out of her.

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“Any idea who’s behind it?” she asked.

The detective nodded solemnly. “A pack of the worst supernatural scum in Faeriedom.”

Just great. It would be that the guy who finally believed her was three crayons short of a box. Clara cocked her head and fixed him with the look that her miserable excuse of an ex used to call the “Hairy Eye.”

“Faeries towed my car?”

The detective met her gaze square on, completely unphased by the “Hairy Eye.” That itself was amazing.

“Ma’am,” he drawled, “you just told me that Pirates stole your car on a Tuesday morning and sailed away—in the middle of Chicago—and I believed you. Common etiquette dictates that you should extend me the same courtesy.”

Clara frowned. The guy seemed so calm and reasonable. Not what she expected from a crazy, but then she had been an ER doc, not a psychiatrist. Maybe real crazies were as cool as cucumbers. It would certainly explain the way he dressed and talked, like he had walked out of a 1940s movie.

“Look here, Mr. Spade-wanna-be. Pirates is one thing....” Clara froze, her mouth wide open. A terrible feeling, much like what she imagined being stung by a scorpion might feel like, began spreading through her body. Tears pricked threateningly at her eyes. She let out a low warble of a moan: “Mr. Spaghetti! He’s locked in the car!”

“Is that your dog, Ma’am?” the detective asked.

Clara shook her head, nearly whipping him with her cornrows. Next time, she would stand a little closer and wap him good. “No. A doll. My son’s favorite doll.” It shamed her that her voice broke. “He’s going to be inconsolable.”

“Children lose dolls all the time, Ma’am. Part of life.”

Clara turned on him, showing her teeth like a wolf. “Is that so? Why don’t you come in and explain that to my son. He’s eight years old, weighs nearly seventy pounds, and has the language capacity of a two year old. You come to my house tonight, and you explain to Sammy what happened to his Mr. Spaghetti!”

The detective lowered the brim of his fedora. “I’ll get your car back, Ma’am.”



Clara lay on her stomach among the trees at the Lincoln Park Zoo and peered through her binoculars. The ground was damp and cold under her shirt. She hoped this would not take too long. Behind her, she could hear the voices of laughing children as a school group toured the exhibits. This caused a pang of maternal longing, as she suddenly missed her son.

According to her research into recent car thefts—she had called her sister’s friend at the police department—the roadside parking area she had under surveillance was a likely spot for the car thieves to hit and just after morning rush hour was a likely time. Twelve cars had disappeared from this parking area alone in the