

Man's Best Friend

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The sun streamed over the grass outside, but a mere pittance of light bothered to find its way indoors. There were no windows of course. Russel huffed. He wished to be relaxing in the sun, not stuck in this dog box, but there was no time to spare. The case had to be solved.

He eyed the suspect in front of him up and down. She was quite the bird. Thin, long legs and bright, beady eyes.

She warbled.

"Wolololol-what is the meaning of this?" The w's bounced off her tongue in a trill. Classic magpie accent.

"You have a motive." Said Russel. He stood up on all fours and circled her, snorting out air before sniffing it back in. He couldn't smell anything suspicious.

"You ought to muzzle that mouth of yours," She screeched. Russel leaned in closer for another sniff and the bird recoiled. "And that nose too wololo-while you're at it."

Russel stared into the bird's eyes. "Birds don't like cats," he said. "They hiss at you, jump on your cage. With this one gone, you're free to go where you want."

He leaned in closer. "Isn't that convenient?"

"No one likes cats," replied the bird, and as birds found it difficult to roll their eyes, her entire head swivelled around.

"That is true." Russel returned to the back of the kennel and sat down to scratch behind his ears. "Cats are indeed very stupid. But I'll still need your alibi."

The bird ruffled her feathers. "Wolololo-what I was doing this morning is none of your business. I shouldn't have to tell you anything about it?"

She turned around and began to strut out of the kennel, but Russel jumped up and cut her off, growling.

She fluttered backwards. "How dare you." She squawked upwards, her tongue flapping around in her beak.

"Shut your beak, parrot." Barked Russel. "Your story, now!"

The bird kept her head turned up at Russel, avoiding his eye, but she calmed down.

“I’m not a parrot,” she said, “I am corvidae. But so be it, I shall run through my morning.”

Russell lay down, still guarding the exit.

“Like always, I was up the earliest,” said the bird. “I thought it was going to be a good day. I planned on leaving the cage and the garden and flying to the park. Far away from you sorry lot-”

Russell growled softly, but the bird spoke undisturbed.

“To begin, as always, I preened myself for half an hour, followed by a quick bath in my little bowl. After that I nibbled on some of my bird mix, although to me it’s just mix. Then I thought I saw the sun rise so I sang some gorgeous wololo-warbles to give everyone a lovely start to the day. Turned out that it wololo-was just a streetlight that had turned on.”

“Did you leave the cage?”

“No. You see, partway through my singing, the cage shook. It gave me quite the fright, I almost fell from my branch. I looked up and saw the cat. She was hissing, fiercely, so I flew to my hut and hid for, oh, perhaps half an hour before I heard the rabbit screaming.”

Russel thought for a moment. Then he said, “So for half an hour before the rabbit found the body, you say you were hiding out of view. That’s coming off as a little suspicious.”

“I wololo-was scared to death. She’s been on top of my cage before, but she always used to just wololo-watch me, never hiss or rattle the cage. She always said she wololo-wouldn’t eat me, but I wasn’t sure that day. Anyway, the rabbit found her first. Why aren’t you interrogating him?”

Russel thought for a moment, then moved to the side. “Very well, fetch him for me will you.”

“I could call him for you,” she thrust her chest out and raised her head to the sky.

“WOLOLOLOLO-”

“I’ll get him myself!”

The rabbit twitched. Where did he twitch? Everywhere. His nose wiggled and his ears swivelled. His leg stamped on the spot, but that was only when he wasn’t bouncing around the kennel or glancing out the exit to look for crows flying over the garden.

“I’m next. I’m next. I’m next. I’m next.” He spoke without breath, only pausing in his speech to let out a whine. “Ooooooh, she was stone cold. Her eyes were like glass. Oooooh. What happened to her, Russel? Was it old age? Sickness? Crows!? Ooooooh.”

Russel lied on the ground covering his ears with his paws. He just wanted to run around with the human, but he had to deal with this idiot.

“Ooooooh. The fence rattling is what woke me up. I heard her yelp, but only a little. I thought maybe she had fallen off. But she was hissing soon after. I heard her running around and around as if someone was chasing her. Ooooh,”

He stopped. His excess energy left through his shaking body. He vibrated like a struck cymbal. Russel finally uncovered his ears.

“Did you go out and check?” He asked the rabbit.

“Ooooooh. No, I couldn’t. It was dangerous. I waited long after it had calmed down before I left my pen. But ooooooh, I found her straight away. Next to the fence. Dead. Ooooooh. The human will be so distraught, she was her favourite.”

“Did you see the bird? Or the frog?”

“No. Ooooh. But the bird keeps to herself, thinks she’s better than all of us. And the frog always sleeps in. She might still be sleeping right now. I haven’t seen her today. Ooooh. What if she’s dead too? Those big eyes of hers, plucked out by crows. Ooooooh. Although they would probably leave her alone, what with her smell and all.”

“Hmmm, interesting.” Russel paced up and down the kennel. “She wasn’t even woken up by the noise?”

“Ooooh. I don’t know. Ooooooh. What are you thinking, Russel?”

“I’m thinking I’m going to have to talk with her. Could you get her for me?”

The rabbit darted around and tucked himself into a corner. “Ooooooooooooooh. Near the pond, where the crows drink?”

Russel groaned. “Fine. I’ll do it myself.”

The frog was ugly. That’s the only way to say it. Short and fat, with swirling patches of dark brown and green, she held herself up with a large belly while her short limbs stuck out straight. It all gave her the appearance that she was in the middle of a parachuting jump. Only when she began to roll over did she have to use her legs to right herself again, and they could barely reach the ground. Her eyelids blinked slowly, taking several seconds each time to cover her enormous eyes in slime. Her long tongue would shoot out and wipe over her face every now and then, giving her a wet shine.

“Yerp?” She bellowed.

Russel was cowering in the back of his kennel. He couldn't cover his nose near the frog like his ears near the rabbit.

"I would like to- I would like to know what you did this morning." Russel gagged, wishing he could speak without opening his mouth. The stench was rancid. Oh, to be out in the open air, playing fetch with the human.

"Nuttin."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nope. Just Sleepin."

Russel needed to find out her story as fast as possible and get her out of his kennel. He stood up, braved the stench and walked closer.

"Did you ever hear anything?" He asked.

The frog just blinked slowly.

"Did you get woken up at any point before the rabbit found the body?"

The frog didn't respond. Underneath its main eyelids, a second set of eyelids began to close.

"At least give me an answer!" Russel barked as close to the frog he dared.

The frog's eyelids shot out in all directions and its eyes bulged.

"What? Where am I?"

It hopped up, bouncing off the roof and landed on its back. Dazed, its eyes wobbled around the kennel, settling on Russel.

"Oh. Sorry," she said.

"What on earth are you doing?" said Russel.

"Fell asleep. Help me up?"

Russel snorted. "Help yourself up."

"I'm not answerin any more o' your questions until you help me up."

Russel huffed. Then he leaned in, placing his nose under the frog's head, which was barely distinguishable from its body. He winced, then he flicked up and knocked the frog over.

“Thanks.” Said the frog.

Some slime had stuck to Russel’s nose. He desperately wiped it off with his paws, gagging.

“Did anything wake you up?” He asked again.

“Oh yer, this massive splash from the pond, thern this thrashing sound for a few minutes after.”

“And what did you do about it?”

The frog blinked again, staring straight back at Russel.

“I went back to sleep?” She seemed confused by the question.

Russel flopped on the ground and whimpered in dismay. Then he stood back up and began pacing around.

“No,” he said to himself. “I think I can make this make sense.”

He turned to the frog. “Call everyone in.”

But the frog already had her eyes closed.

“Never mind. I’ll do it myself”

Russel had gathered the animals in the centre of the garden. The bird and Russel sat as far as they could from the frog, while the rabbit ran frantic circles around them all.

“I believe I know what happened to the cat,” said Russel.

Thumper paused his racing for a moment. “Ooooooh, you do. Ooooooh, what happened?” He set off again.

“I believe it started early in the morning.” Russel looked at the bird.

“With you!”

“Excuse me?” said the bird.

“Yes, your story was very convenient. Despite being up earlier than everyone else, you say you went back into your hut and hid while the cat’s death unfolded.”

“But it’s true. The cat wolo-was hissing at me, she scared me inside.”

“Ahhh,” Said Russel. “Was she? Or was she hissing at someone else? Someone like you!”

Russel tried to look dramatically at the rabbit, but it was still lapping them every couple of seconds and Russel couldn't catch his eye.

“... rabbit,” said Russel.

“Ooooooooooh, me?” The rabbit stopped running.

“Yes, someone notorious for running around to and fro. Someone who could have been irritating the cat. Perhaps trying to trick her into falling off the cage.”

“Ooooooh, I didn't do anything. I found her near the fence. That's where she fell.”

“Impossible!” Barked Russel. The rabbit froze in fright, it even mostly stopped wiggling. Only its tail kept on shaking.

“-Unless,” continued Russel. “She was frightened off.” Russel looked at the frog.

“By you.”

...

“By you!”

The frog's eyes were completely closed. Russel huffed.

“Someone who could jump up and harass the cat from the cage to the fence. Someone with surprisingly powerful legs, strong enough to launch themselves up over the fence. And a large enough weight to knock a cat off. Sending her to her death!”

The rabbit squeaked and bounded behind a bush, the bird fluttered backwards a little too.

“I knew she wololo-was rotten.” Said the bird.

“Yes, indeed,” said Russel. “Inside and out.”

The frog still hadn't woken up.

“Take her away,” Said Russel. “Dump her in the park and let's all forget about her.”

The bird, stretching her head as far away from her feet as possible, hopped onto the frog, grabbed her and flew up and away.

Only then did the frog wake. She looked at the ground speeding away from her and let out a soft croak of confusion.

“This is why I prefer sleepin,” she said.

The frog and bird had gone. And the rabbit was still hiding. Finally, Russel had some peace and quiet to lay in the sun, just in time for the human to walk into the garden.

The human screamed upon sighting the cat. Russel podded up to her and pushed his nose into her legs, trying to comfort her. But the human pushed Russel away and ran to the cat instead, stroking its fur and crying.

The rabbit was right, thought Russel. The cat had always been the human’s favourite, ever since she had arrived as a mewling kitten. The bird, the rabbit and the frog were idiots, worrying only about themselves. But the cat, like Russel, loved the human with all her heart. And the human had returned in kind.

But soon she would forget about the cat.

Soon she would play with Russel again. They’d have all the time in the world.

Of course, a knock from a fence would never be enough to kill a cat. No, you needed more than that.

First, Russel had scared her off the bird’s cage. Grabbing the pole in his jaws and shaking it back and forth. The cat had hissed at him, but eventually she had to jump off. Only after she had leapt to the fence and tried to run down its length to the neighbours yard had he managed to get her to the ground. He rushed into the wooden palings headfirst, shaking the fence underneath her and knocking her off. He had chased her around the whole length of the garden before he caught her.

But he couldn’t finish her straight away, his teeth would incriminate him. Instead he had dragged her over to the pond, where she could be drowned.

As always, he had to do it all by himself.

But man could only ever have one best friend.

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