

Episode 1: 12-Inch Coffin Nails

“I’ve been expecting you, Mr. ...” The man in the chair had pushed himself around too quickly, and had to grab his desk to keep from spinning back towards the window of his fifth-floor office.

“You know, I had so much hope for you. And then I saw you practicing that. You really should consider real walls instead of one of these glassed-in things. Or, you know, invest in some blinds. But not those stupid Venetian things. I hate those. Or there’s those windows where you can control the tint. That’d be perfect for someone in your position.”

“Yes, my ... position.” The voice of the younger man behind the desk was low and smooth, practiced. “I am the youngest of this city’s five crime bosses. My father believed that, while he was not liked, he was at least respected-”

“Until two of my officers pulled his body out of the river and found a 12-inch knife in his back.”

“Which is why I asked you here. I know that one of this city’s other Affiliated bosses is responsible for this. What I want to know-”

“Is which one.” Stan Mulder finally left the doorway and sat down across the desk. “What do you want me to do about it?”

“You are a detective. You might ... I don’t know ... INVESTIGATE!”

“The knife screams west-shore Affiliated. I make one inquiry on that side of the river without Caroline’s permission, the next knife victim my men find is me. And, if it was a west-shore job, then there’s no way that Caroline is going to give me that permission.”

“What if I could get you that permission, in writing?”

“Then I would ask for you to solve world hunger, or bring oxygen to mars.” Stan got up and walked to a table in the corner. He poured himself a coffee, took a sip, then spat it out.

“That’s horrible. Didn’t your father teach you anything important.”

“He taught me how to run his holdings after he was gone. The tasks of those who work for me, he allowed me to leave to those who work for me.”

“Pity. Now I have to drink this crap.” Stan sat down again. “Look, kid. I’m one of a handful of people who has met all five of this city’s Affiliated bosses face-to-face and is still alive. I survive because I don’t go within two blocks of your people’s territory without a really good excuse and a really big gun. I’ve got 10 open murder cases in the east side because I’m still trying to convince Jacques that I can’t trace any of them to any of his favourite gang leaders. And I can’t convince him unless I investigate.”

“I’ll get you that permission too. Just find whoever it is that murdered my father.”

“Look. An ordinary murder is hard enough to deal with because of your kind. This was a crime boss. A lot of people are going to get killed because of this. I’m going to be trying really hard to not be one of them. I’m ... Well, no. I’m not sorry. That’s just how it is.” Stan stood up, finished his coffee, and set the empty mug down on the desk. “I will say this. Your father knew every rule this city has. He made most of them. It didn’t help him. If you want to stay alive, figure out what he did wrong, and don’t do that.”

“I’ll be in touch, detective.”

“Good for you kid.”

Stan didn’t shut the office door as he left. Annoyed, the young crime boss stood, crossed the room, and slammed the glass door. He took perverse satisfaction from the sound of the falling, shattered glass door.

...

Police Chief Larry Denning was yelling at his entire department when Stan walked back in. “And where the hell have you been?”

“Affiliated body washed up on shore.”

“Bloody Affiliated.” Denning shook his head. “Well, did you track down which boss it belongs to?”

“Wasn’t hard. It was a boss.”

“Fuck. That’s about 10 years-worth of bullshit that this city shouldn’t have to go through – again.”

“Yeah, it’s going to be a long week.”

“Where are you going now?”

“To my office. I’m about to have a meeting.” Stan walked over to the coffee pot first. “Well, it’s better than what that punk had in his office.”

“What punk?”

“Just met the new South boss. Nice kid. Horrible taste, and a bit tacky.”

“Damn it. Not South. He was the only sane one.”

“Yeah, we’re really going to miss him.”

“Just go do you job for once.”

“Anything you say, chief.” The sarcasm in Stan’s voice was hard to miss.

Stan wasn’t even through his door before four of the six phones on his desk started ringing. Instead of risking upsetting any of them, he answered all five and put them all on speakerphone.

“I suppose you’re wondering why I’ve gathered you all here.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” The woman’s voice was high, almost screeching.

“Is that Caroline? Why is she there?” The second woman had a British accent.

“Ladies, if you have a problem-”

“Shut up, Jacques.”

“Ah, Isabelle. So fiery, so passionate, so-”

“I said SHUT UP!”

“Detective, can you please hang up on these three. I have something urgent to discuss with you.” Marissa sounded tired.

“You don’t sound well, Marissa. Is something wrong?”

“Well, since you asked-”

“And I’ve stopped caring. Now, I think I know why you’re all calling me at the same

time, but if you didn't know, your colleague was just pulled out of the river. I will now take questions."

"How long had he been in the river?"

"That's your question? Seriously?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. Next."

"Wait-"

"You know my policy, Marissa. One question each. Next."

"What was the weapon?"

"I'd be more inclined to answer that if I didn't have 12 Affiliated-linked murders on the East Side to deal with, Jacques."

"You told me it was only 10. How many is it really?"

"That's a second question, but it'll be 29 by tomorrow if none of you keep your thugs under better control."

"My turn. What were your men doing dragging the river without my permission? You know I get touchy about things like that, Stan darling."

"Some do-gooder phoned it in at 3 am. I had to get out of bed, and believe me, I wasn't happy. But the last time I called you at that time, Caroline, you threatened to have me dismembered and dissolved in acid. Last question is yours, Isabelle."

"Who took over South?"

"Terrence had a son. Terrible taste in coffee and interior design. Some boring name. Luke, or Michael. Something like that." There was a knock at the door. "Well, that's all the time we have, folks. Be sure to tune in next week for a full bank account of your choice."

"Don't try to be funny, Det-" Stan hung up on all four at once.

They were all going to be upset with him sooner or later. If he made it sooner, then they would focus on him, and the ordinary people, the ones who didn't know what was really going on, would all be safer for it. Besides, none of them would actually have him killed. He made all of their lives easier. He'd stopped caring about what they did before he'd had his badge for three years. Whoever it was knocked again.

Sighing, Stan leaned back in his chair and yelled, "What do you want?"

A youngish woman pushed open the door about halfway and stuck her head around.

"Detective Mulder?"

"Sure. What do you want?"

She walked into the room. She was well dressed, short and thin, with red hair. "I was just transferred to this station. Chief Dennings just assigned me to be your new partner."

"It's Denning, not Dennings. And, no, he didn't."

"Why would you think that?"

"Because, while he does in fact hate me and this sounds like something that he would enjoy doing to torment me, this is low, even for him. He'd probably try poisoning my coffee

first.”

Well, maybe you should ask him.”

“What a marvelous idea.” Stan rolled his chair over to the wall and slammed his fist against it a few times. The chief walked in a minute later.

“You summoned me, dick.”

“Who is that annoying female in the corner of my office?”

“I’m not annoying.”

Stan looked around the large police chief at the now sitting woman. “For the sake of this argument, you’re whatever adjective I decide you are.”

“Be glad he settled for annoying. The last partner I tried to give him tried to shoot him within 10 minutes. Then he quit.”

“Why?”

“Because he was an a-”

“Why am I here, Mulder?”

“Because she claims to be my new partner, and you’re here to tell her that she’s wrong and that she can go back to whatever city turned her over to us.”

“No.”

“What do you mean, no?”

“She’s trained in forensics, advanced interrogation, and she excelled in armed-combat training.”

“I’ve also written three papers about the Affiliated that are part of police academies’ training regimens now.”

“Can you also shoot lasers out of your eyes and catch any bullets that get shot at you? Because that would be more useful.

“No, I can’t.”

“Lieutenant O’Shea, would you give us a minute?”

“Yes sir.” She left the room, not looking back.

“Look, Stan ...”

“Don’t give me the ‘look Stan’ bullshit Larry. We both know that this is a bad idea. These Affiliated, they’re not like the ones she’s used to dealing with. They fight each other. They don’t keep quiet. They aren’t afraid of the police like she’s used to them being, because where she’s seen them before, cops are actually trying to hunt them down. They won this city years ago, and they know it, Larry. If she starts messing around with the bosses, a lot of people are going to die. She’ll be one of the first.”

“You actually sound concerned, Stan ... Like a human. With feelings.” Stan sat on the edge of his desk. Larry leaned against the wall. “Stan, with Terrence dead, South is going to fall apart. This might be the last real chance we ever get to fight them on our terms. O’Shea is new enough that she actually thinks that fight is worth starting. So she stays.”

Stan started tapping his empty coffee cup on his desk. He was just staring at the floor. Larry was about to leave when Stan spoke again. “You know my number one rule: don’t mess

with the status quo-”

“When it’s the only thing keeping you alive. I know your rules Stan. But O’Shea is here now. Keep her alive, and the status quo might not be the only thing protecting you.” Larry turned in the doorway. “Go home and get some sleep. You look terrible.”

Stan’s lips lifted in a half-hearted smile.