

Episode 2: Hell Hole

Sarah O'Shea heard the toilet flush, but figured, given the time, that she still had almost an hour before anything interesting happened. It seriously annoyed her, therefore, when Stan Mulder walked into his bedroom not even one minute later. He was not wearing a shirt, but she silently thanked God that he was wearing pants. His coffee mug was decorated with sarcasm: *To err is human. To blame it on someone else shows management potential.*

The scene that greeted Stan's eyes was one he would have found hilarious at other times, if they were happening to someone else. As it was, the intruding woman that his chief had arbitrarily decided would make an excellent deterrent to Stan's normal life was now not only not a nightmare, but in his house. He made the decision to have more pity on soap-opera characters who found themselves in the situation he was faced with, but said nothing.

"Well ... Hm. This is awkward." O'Shea scratched the back of her leg with her foot. She looked around at the room, trying to find something interesting enough to hold her gaze.

"See, this could be because I'm new to this whole 'partner' thing, but I think I missed the part where Denning told us to ransack each other's houses."

O'Shea put up her hands like she was defending herself. "Your room looked like this when I got here."

"I know. I was more implying that I want to know why the fuck you're in my apartment."

"Right. Um ..." Sarah looked around again, still trying not to look at Stan, who was still standing in the door of his bedroom. "Reason ... I swear I have a really good reason for being here."

"I'm a detective, and I'm really pissed right now, so I'm kind of thinking it would be in your best interest to have at least one really good reason. Like pizza. But I don't see pizza, and you don't have beer, or a coffee for me. So ...?" Stan leaned against his doorway, waiting for her to explain herself.

"Ok, here it is ..." Sarah shook her head. "I'm sorry, I can't believe you live like this."

"Like what?"

"There's garbage everywhere. You have clothes everywhere, and I'm sorry, how do you tell what's clean and what isn't? Your bed doesn't have a sheet, or blankets, or pillows. Your desk is covered with who-knows-what. I can't do this. This is going to bother me forever now."

"Well, I'm sorry about that. But there's a really easy way that this could have been avoided."

"You're going to say something about me never coming here in the first place, aren't you?"

"Denning did say you were smart."

"I'm sorry, but Chief Dennings did say I should get to know you before we started working together."

"First of all, it's Denning, not Dennings, like I said the first time we met. Second, we've apparently been working together for a week, so this had better be your first attempt at 'getting to

know me.' Third, normal people get to know someone by stalking them, or harassing that person's friends. Normal people don't break into someone's house to see what they're like."

"I'm a cop. Breaking and entering is part of my job."

"I am also a cop. More importantly, I'm a police officer with a lot of good reasons to be both paranoid and heavily armed."

"You aren't armed right now. You're not wearing a shirt, but you're not armed."

Stan pulled a knife out of his back pocket. He also moved a piece of the door frame and revealed a hidden gun, right beside the head of his bed, within easy reach if someone broke in at night. "In this room, there are ... ten ... Ten other weapons." He walked over to his desk and moved some papers around. "This gun is standard issue. I'd start complaining to someone about not having been issued yours yet." He turned around, crossed his arms, and stared down at Sarah. "The gun that you are currently standing on, please move, but do it carefully, it has a very sensitive trigger, is not standard issue. Neither is the rifle in the corner behind me. Depending on who you complain to and how long you complain, you might get one or both of those as well as your own pistol."

"These guns don't really help you outside."

"That's just what I take with me whenever I leave my apartment." Stan walked around Sarah and sat on the edge of his bed. "In the corner with me rifle, I have a machete and a 75-pound-draw recurve bow: easy to use, quick to have ready, and silent. Great for multiple people. Killing multiple people, not for a bunch to use. Then, there's also my hockey stick."

Sarah looked at the white, six-foot long stick, then back to Stan. "A hockey stick isn't a weapon."

Stan looked mad. "You don't watch sports, do you?"

"No."

"That wasn't a question. Moving on. In the corner behind me, there is another machete. And in addition to the first knife I showed you, there are a handful of others somewhere in here, and other places in the house. Step carefully."

"How can you live like this?"

"I drink a lot of coffee, so I'm constantly not here because I'm buying coffee. Or I'm at work ... trying to work."

"I just don't understand."

"There is nothing wrong with the way I live."

"I'm pretty sure I just saw that vest move, Stan." She pointed at an olive-green waist-coat at his feet.

"That is interesting." Stan picked it up.

"I really hope you're going to say because vests aren't supposed to move."

"Well, this is a waist-coat, not a vest, but there is that. The other thing was that I didn't know I owned this."

Sarah shook her head and walked to the door. "I'll see you at the office, Stan. Then maybe we can get some work done. That boss murder isn't going to solve itself."

“It probably will, actually. One of the bosses will make it into some kind of deal and pretty much everybody directly involved with the murder will end up dead soon.”

“That isn’t how the Affiliated work.”

“Because your little papers say so? I’ve seen that exact thing happen, O’Shea. We aren’t dealing with real Affiliated here. They aren’t scared of us. They don’t go underground whenever one of their big players is taken out of the game. I tried explaining this to Denning. He wouldn’t listen to me. I’m telling you now. Ask for a transfer to somewhere where you can do any kind of good. These Affiliated are in for the long haul. They will kill you.”

“Are you ... concerned about me?”

“I see my job as trying to keep as many people from dying as possible. So, no, I’m not concerned about you.”

“I’ll see you at the office Stan. Try to get some sleep.” Sarah disappeared around the doorway. Stan’s voice brought her back into view.

“Yes, I live like this. Do you want to know why?” Sarah just slouched against the doorway expectantly. “It’s because I live in a city where the Affiliated won. I’m a cop in a city where the Affiliated won. I pretend to people every day that this badge is here to protect them. It isn’t. Like I said, I’m here to keep as many people as I can from getting killed. I’m not a hero. If anything, I’m as bad as they are. And I’m only telling you this because I know that in two years, in three if you’re really unlucky, you’ll end up just like this.”

“I’m not going to turn into you, Stan. I don’t know you yet, but I know that much.”

“You’d like to think so. But do you really think I didn’t tell myself the exact same thing? I still do, sometimes.”

“You tell that to yourself because you know you’re better than this, Stan. You may not care about much, or anything, but you’re still better than this.”

“I’m a soldier on the front line of a war that ended a decade ago. I’m only still here because nobody bothered to tell me that my army lost. This is why I want you gone, O’Shea. That way, I can do as little work as possible before the Affiliated decide to not bother with maintaining appearances anymore and shut down the police force.” Stan suddenly remembered that he had coffee with him. He drained the mug in one long gulp. “Maybe I’ll catch up on TV. What shows do you watch?”

“I don’t watch TV.”

Stan shook his head. “I can’t fire you, because I don’t actually outrank you. But in addition to everything I said, I wouldn’t have hired you if I had known that. You’re in for a rough, meaningless life here. I suggest finding a good TV show that you can lose yourself in. Helps to numb the pain. You could pretend you were in the show. That’s what I did with a few different ones before they ended. My fake lives were much more interesting than this one is.”

“I’ll see you at the office, Stan.” Sarah disappeared again.

Stan yelled after her. “I didn’t say that you could call me that.”

He heard her yell back as she opened his front door. “Too late.”

Stan lay back on his bare bed. Staring up at the ceiling, he did something that he had never used to before Sarah O'Shea had been forced into his life to be the most recent pain in his ass. Slowly, a smile pulled the corners of his lips upwards, but they fell back just as quickly.