

Pewter Badge

by Michael J. Solender

I never killed a cop before.

She is barely taller than my fifteen year-old daughter. The brim of her cop hat wouldn't likely hit my chin.

Munoz. Her pewter hewed badge stated her name proudly.

I figured she's likely first generation American. She's probably the first in of her family to go to college. Officer Munoz is certainly the first in her family to become a cop.

"OK sir, just sit tight. I'll be right back." Munoz said rather politely, not having the least inkling of how my knife was gonna feel in her gut when she came back with my license.

Sweat was rolling down the crack of my ass adding to the already pasty mass of my boxers that bunched up under my jeans. It was never this humid in L.A., but the breezes in from the coast and the recent rain was enough to trigger the cactus and Joshua trees to bloom, a rarity. This was not lost on the gardeners who hailed it, all the same time the mugginess was being cursed by guys like me with no a/c in their cars.

"Yes miss," I manage to say, trying to figure in my mind exactly how I'm gonna cut her when she comes back and orders me out of the car. She'll call for back-up after she runs my driver's license.

I'm done for, knives lose to guns every time and all I have is my stiletto.

I can't figure out why she pulled me over. The car is registered to me and I know I wasn't speeding. Hell, I was playing it cool. There is no way they've already found the body. I mean, he wasn't even cold yet.

What the hell is taking her? I'm watching her in the rearview and she's on her radio, eyes straight ahead at me.

Jesus, I'm getting sick sitting here sucking exhaust on Western. Every greaser, Chollo and low-rider in the city stares down the poor, pulled over, sumbitch as they pass me flashing gang-banger hand signs.

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I reach down into the glove box for my smokes.

"Sir!" Her amplified loudspeaker cracks like a squawking crow through the humid midday sun. "Please keep both hands where I can see, them."

I put my hands back on the wheel, but not before feeling the stiletto in my waistband. I was careful to wipe it clean of Zumi's blood which was all over the handle and the blade. Christ, I didn't understand why Mick wanted his tongue cut out and brought back to him, but my job was not to ask questions, just to do his bidding.

Sitting in her cop car behind me I see Munoz working her computer. I'm dying here. I got Zumi's tongue in a zip-top bag, inside a pink donut box that I took off his counter. It's sitting right there on my front seat, mocking me. I hadn't noticed until this very moment, but there's a huge bloody streak down the side of the box. A Rorschach, courtesy of Zumi, screaming at me from his unattached tongue on the side of the donut box.

Zumi was still breathing, barely, when I left him ten minutes ago. He had to have bled to death by now and there was no way he was moving or talking to anyone after what I did to his tongue. Apparently being on Mick's payroll wasn't enough for him, he had to snitch for the vice squad too. Mick didn't much care for that arrangement and wanted to send the signal to his other runners this kinda shit wouldn't fly.

That's where I came in. Mick's muscle. That's what they called me. Occasionally I'd slice off a finger or two, but never a tongue and before today, only one hit. Now I was about to be a cop killer. My day was not looking up.

"Sir." Munoz was at the passenger window and I had been so caught up, I hadn't noticed her leave her car and come up to mine. The bloody pink box was just below her chin as she leaned into my car, handing me my license.

"Yes, Officer?"

"Do you know why I pulled you over?"

I see another cop car in my rear-view approaching; this one pulls right past us and stops in front of my car.

"No, officer, I don't think I was speeding." Like everyone in L.A. doesn't go 20 mph over the limit all the time.

The driver's door on the cop car ahead of me opens up and a huge *mofo* cop, twice the size of Munoz, gets out and starts walking back to us. I slide my hand subtly to my waist and my sharp, little situation helper.

"Your tags are expired. In fact they're two years overdue. The state needs their revenue so we can keep these fine roads up."

The giant robo-cop sidles up to my side of the car and greets his fellow cop, "Hey Carmen, what have we got here?"

I'm dead now. The pool in my shorts is now a lake.

"Expired tags, he's gonna have 'em paid for today though, aren't you Mr. Fraser?"

My head stops reeling. Shit she's gonna let me go. I start to breathe again. "Yes officer right now, gonna go home and write the check today."

I start my car.

The Amazonian cop says, "Hold on buddy, are those donuts you got there? Don't you think a warning instead of a ticket deserves what's in the box for Officer Munoz?"

I start to stutter and sputter, unable to say anything.

Munoz looks down at the box and then up at her cop buddy. "Naw, I gotta lose a few and you sure as hell don't need one. Have a nice day Mr. Fraser, get your tags taken care of."

I slowly pull out into the buzz that is Western Avenue. It's July. I'm sweating like a pig. I got some punk's tongue in a pink box sitting next to me.

I gotta get a new job.

