

LAURA SMITH

Hotdogs and Corpses

I was having a pretty good day until a dead body made me see my lunch in reverse.

It was a shame, too, as it had been a decent lunch in the grand scheme of things. Fries, light on the salt, heavy on the catsup, with a Monster Dog from Jimmy's, all washed down with a Diet soda. Diet to compensate for the rest of the calories, obviously. I figure that if I have one diet product each day, then the Lord can never punish me for my gluttony. Yeah, and tell that to my cellulite. I'm sure it would be real interested.... Anyway, so if there was one thing that I was sure of, it was that this lunch definitely tasted better going down than it did coming back up. But then that wouldn't be difficult. My grandma's meatballs tasted better than that, and she was senile and made them out of cat-food. She never had a cat in her life, but when we went shopping she always bought cat-food. Never thought anything of it until I went round her place one-day for dinner and found it sitting next to the mixing bowl. Haven't been able to eat meatballs since, dammit.

But I digress. Where was I? Oh yeah, vomit. And not forgetting the dead guy.

So, it was a Wednesday afternoon and life was good for a change. The sun was shining and blah, blah, all the usual bullshit. I would have said that the birds were singing, but this is Boston and I would be lying. And even if they had been singing, my crazy neighbour Fred would probably have shot them with his nine-millimetre. He's a bit strange like that, never was the same after Vietnam according to Mrs Vincent in forty-nine, the self proclaimed World's Greatest Authority on 'Neighbourhood business.' I was actually feeling pretty pleased with myself as I got to the door of the office. Business was good, and for the first time in a long time we

were in the black instead of the dreaded red. The telephone hadn't been cut off for three months, and Jed "call me J.D" the bank manager had stopped suggesting that I sleep with him to keep my account open. And if he had stopped doing that, then things were definitely on the up. Or maybe his wife was just putting out again. But I doubt it.

The door to the office was open, but I didn't think anything of it at the time. I was too busy admiring the way the sign with my name on it gleamed in the sun. Even when I saw that Andy's desk was empty I just assumed that he was off somewhere sneaking a smoke, or perhaps calling his boyfriend in Aruba on the office phone in the back. I would fire him, but without him I wouldn't be able to find my ass with both hands, and with an ass the size of mine, that would mean trouble. So I tolerated his discussions with Paulo, his 'life-partner' as long as I didn't catch him doing it and as long as it lasted less than an hour. He caught on real quick for a guy that had never graduated High School.

It was when I opened the glass door to my private office that I saw the corpse. Now, I've seen corpses before. I've seen most things that one human being can do to another, and I've seen what they can do to themselves. I've had my share of guts, brains, excretions, secretions and anything else remotely involved with the big D. But as I stared at the guy who sat in my luxury leather office chair, with his tongue swollen and black poking between his lips like a decaying snake, I came to the terrible realisation that at some point in my past, when I was eight or nine, I'd had that very same tongue shoved down my throat. Only it was in much better condition back then. And that's when I gasped a little, screamed a little and tossed my cookies.

I was sitting in a red faced, puffy eyed, crumpled heap by the door when the cavalry arrived. But it wasn't the Uniforms I was expecting. Fate had decided to really screw me over this time and so had sent the person that I least wanted to see at a time like this. I shut my eyes and considered going to Church twice on Sundays, because I was obviously being punished for something, and for Joe Kenzie to turn up it must have really been a doozy. Hell, for Joe Kenzie to turn up it would have to be me killing the Brady Bunch, or else getting jiggy with all seven of the goddamn dwarves. As I hadn't done either, or not so I could remember anyway, there's no telling what I will do when I've got tequila inside of me, I just closed my eyes and tried to pretend that he wasn't there.

Two seconds later he had me crushed against his chest and this wasn't really an option anymore. I opened one eye cautiously, and got an eyeful of his leather jacket. He didn't move and started to stroke my hair. At this point I got seriously freaked out. Here was Joe Kenzie, my mortal enemy for over fifteen years hugging me. Joe Kenzie, my brother's best friend, who tortured me as a child and continued to do so as an adult, stroking my hair. Detective Joe Kenzie, man's man and complete pain in the ass. Convinced that I was actually in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and that I would wake up soon, I opened my other eye and tapped him on one leather-clad shoulder.

It was as if I had lit a firecracker under his butt. In all my years I have never seen a guy move as fast as he did at that moment. Carl Lewis would've had nothing on him, I'm telling you. Judging from the look on his face and the long drawn out cry of "ffffuuuuuuucccckkkkkk" issuing from his lips, I think I kinda surprised him. Hey, from his reaction I surprised myself. I couldn't possibly look that bad, could I? I would have considered this question with the gravity it deserved, but I was kinda too busy getting yelled at by a very pale and very irate Detective, who was speaking too fast to actually pause for breath. "Whathethefuckdoyouthinkyou'redoing?" I looked at him, bewildered. It sure as hell wasn't English, and it wasn't a language I was familiar with, of that I was certain. He looked at me, and he looked mad. I tried to resist the urge to flinch as he spoke again. "I said, what the *fuck* do you think you're doing?" Something inside me snapped. I had a corpse that I knew in my office, I had spewed my lunch, and now this guy was trying to hassle me about sitting on my own goddamn floor? "What do I think I'm doing? What do I think *I'm* doing? Hey, pal, you're the one that stormed in here like goddamn Batman and tried to smother me to death!"

"I thought you were hurt!" Oh well, that answered my previous question about whether or not I actually looked that bad. Great. "So what, you decided to finish the job and hug me to death?" Silence. I must have hit a nerve.

By this point we were both on our feet, eyeballing each other across the room. Joe raked his fingers through his short brown hair and sighed. Some colour was coming back into his cheeks; the shock must've been wearing off. When he spoke he sounded tired. "A call came into the station. I picked it up on my radio and was in the area. You didn't leave your name when you called 911, so for all I knew you were the damn corpse." I knew I should have left it at that, but couldn't resist digging.

“You thought I was dead? And you were... worried?” A strange concept. Joe Kenzie would care if I died. This day was just getting weirder and weirder. “I was just worried that someone else had beat me to killing you.” Ouch. Ok, normal service restored. “Yeah, that’s really what it felt like when I had my face full of your jacket.” Infante, I know, but part of our ritual. He glared at me a moment longer and I could tell that he was imagining killing me in a variety of colourful ways. Well, two can play that game. Then I remembered the corpse and decided I’d had my quota of dead people for the day. Or for the week. Or for the year. Or ever.

Joe followed my gaze with his baby blues and saw the cause of our problem; the corpse currently in residence in my office. He moved closer, and I swear I opened my mouth to warn him, but somehow the words didn’t come out, and the next thing I knew, “What the fuck is this? It smells like... Oh. Oh, no. Tell me you didn’t.... You vomited in the middle of my goddamn crime-scene? You vomited and let me walk into it?” I was speechless at the sight of Joe Kenzie standing among the remains of my lunch. In his very nice trainers. In his very nice, very new, very expensive, very vomit covered trainers. I closed my eyes and waited for the thunderbolt to hit me. It never came, but when I opened them again Joe was squatting next to the corpse muttering a whole bunch of words that his mother sure didn’t teach him. He had asked me a question. I had missed it, concentrating too hard on his impressive vocabulary. “What?” He gave me a look of exasperation and sighed again.

“I said, did you touch anything? Anymore puddles of vomit that I should know about? Or are you just gonna wait till I stand in them?”

“Screw you.”

“Not now, Sweetheart, I’m kinda busy. I’ll take a rain-check and get back to you.”

“Not if you were the last guy on Earth.”

“That’s not what you said when you were sixteen.” I flushed, mortified. He remembered? He *remembered*? All these years and he hadn’t said any... “Shit.” Startled I looked up, his voice cutting through my mortification, for the moment at least. “We know this guy. Went to school with him.” He was holding the corpse’s wallet between gloved fingers. I didn’t have to look at the ID to know who it was. “Tommy Gennaro.” He looked surprised.

“You remember him?”

“He was my first kiss.” He looked at me consideringly, looked back at the corpse.

“Slim, if you have this kind of effect on all the men you kiss, that rain-check is going to be a long one.” He smiled, flashing his white teeth. I clenched my fists and resisted the urge to fly across the room and throttle him. I had the feeling that only one of us was going to make it out of the office alive, increasing the official office body count to two. Well, two for joy. But I think that only works for magpies. Especially if I were one of the two. Shit. The best laid plans and all that crap. I smiled back and prayed that when the end came it would be quick.