

Celebrity Victim

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© 12-Oct-08

Rating: T

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If you don't know Dexter, the viewpoint character is a police blood-spatter analyst with an interesting hobby - he's a serial killer who specialises in killing other killers. In season 2 of the show some of his victims were found, earning him the nickname of the Bay Harbor Butcher. Some swearing follows, no other warnings.

"Hey Dex!" Vince Masuka grabbed my last donut as I came through the door that morning and said "Heard the latest?"

I resisted the urge to kill him slowly and painfully and sat at my workstation and logged on, saying "latest what?"

"Celebrity victim!"

"There wasn't anything special on the news."

"Give it a couple of hours. I just heard a minute ago, they've identified another of the Bay Harbor Butcher's victims."

"Really?" It was three months since the death of Sergeant James Doakes, and I was still worried that my hastily-erected house of cards was going to collapse. I also had a feeling that a normal man would feel guilty about blaming Doakes for my own misdeeds; the man had a family, after all. Fortunately I'm not a normal man. Then I focused on what Vince was saying. None of the unidentified bodies were high-profile criminals and I couldn't think of anyone who could be considered a celebrity in any other respect. "Who did they identify?"

"Lex freaking Luthor!"

"No way." Definitely not. Deeply demented Dexter doesn't do drugs. Mostly I treasure the memories of my victims, I wouldn't have forgotten killing Lex Luthor.

"Yes way - they matched up DNA, x-rays and dentals from one of the unidentified bodies, and blood from a slide. We got an advisory from the FBI."

I entered a couple of passwords and got into the database for the case. Sure enough body 19, which had previously been an unknown, was now reading "Luthor, Lex." So was slide 24. Vince looked over my shoulder and said "Any idea why it took so long?"

"Nothing here... oh, wait a second..." I opened up a couple of files and skimmed through some notes. "Looks like a lot of records were scrambled by the magnetic pulse when Luthor started building his new continent. They had to reconstruct them from the paper backups." Badly, apparently, because I'm pretty sure that body 19 was Keith Tyler, manager of a Miami retirement home who had found some creative ways to inherit from rather too many of his residents. He was about the right age and build, I suppose, but that was about as close as it got. Of course I couldn't say that.

"Does the time frame fit?"

"He vanished about two years ago; they found his helicopter and his girlfriend's body

down the Keys a couple of weeks later. I think that asshole Caine at Dade County handled that, but they didn't get anywhere. If it is him he's one of the earlier vics, not the earliest."

"I suppose that if he stopped off in Miami and ran into Doakes it's possible." Untrue, unless Doakes had temporarily ventured into my brand of law enforcement, but possible. "You'd think that Doakes would have brought him in, he'd have made lieutenant easily."

"I guess he decided he wanted to do things personally," said Vince. "Luthor got off on appeal the first time, maybe Doakes thought that Superman might not show up for the trial. Anyway, it'll be headline news that he whacked that mother, there'll be reporters all over us again. They'll build a statue of him in Metropolis."

"Great." Not great. Reporters mean media attention, and I do my best work in the dark. I made non-committal noises as Vince talked about writing a celebrity forensics book focussing on Doakes and our earlier claim to fame, the Ice Truck Killer, and eventually said "That might not be such a good idea, Vince. For one thing it'd upset Deb."

"What would?" My sister can move very quietly sometimes. I hadn't heard her come in.

"Uh... Vince was talking about writing a book about the Ice Truck case." I never was much good at lying to Deb, except for the constant lie that is my life.

Deb turned to Vince. "Would this be before or after I cut off your fucking nuts?" Deb always did have a way with words. And good reason not to want anyone picking at the scab that was the Ice Truck Killer, Brian Moser AKA Rudy Cooper, her former fiancée.

"Maybe I should just concentrate on the Bay Harbor Butcher," Vince said hastily.

"Great idea! Then LaGuerta can cut off your nuts and I'll help hold you down."

"Okay, forget it. With Luthor one of the victims there'll probably be a dozen books anyway, mine would just get lost in the crowd."

"Luthor? Lex Luthor?" said Deb. "No way!"

I tuned out their conversation for the next few minutes while I went back to the medical records and started checking the sources. Metropolis PD, hospitals in three federal penitentiaries, two dentists, reports I'd filed when I was on the case which now showed some interesting changes. It definitely wasn't a case of mistaken identity, which left very few possibilities. It was well done, so well that if I hadn't known the truth I probably wouldn't have spotted the changes. It would have been out of character to notice or make waves about it, of course, it was supposed to be a closed case. They were still talking about it when I was called out to a crime scene.

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It was a routine domestic stabbing, and all I had to do was take a few samples and pictures of the blood spray and spatter. They'd already read the husband his rights, and there was no doubt in anyone's mind, mine included, that he was the killer. Of course we still had to do everything by the book, because if we didn't the defence lawyers would hang us out to dry. I shouldn't complain, because cases like that are the bread and butter of my job, but sometimes proving that the obvious suspect is the obvious suspect because he's as guilty as hell takes time that I could put to better use - my own brand of justice... well, let's say retribution, perhaps... is far less labour-intensive and (for me at least) much more fun.

I was out of there and on my way back to the lab by one, by then the Luthor news was on the radio. Captain Matthews had called a press conference, and tried to give the impression that he was personally responsible for the identification. After that they had FBI Deputy Director Max Adams, Frank Lundy's boss, who was peddling the official line; inter-agency co-operation, hard-working technicians in the FBI crime lab, reconstructed records, yadda

yadda. It might have been my imagination, but I thought he sounded a little wary. Lundy was noticeably absent. Superman still hadn't made a statement, and probably wouldn't until someone managed to catch up with him while he was rescuing someone or stopping a bank robbery.

One of the TV crews was still in the lobby when I got back to work, I suppose they wanted to get police reactions to the news. As I passed they were talking to Angel Batista, and I swerved to go wide around them. I really don't like getting my face on TV; anonymity is one of the secrets of my success. As I swerved I noticed a little boy, maybe eight or nine, standing back from the crowd, apparently alone. I slowed, crouched down a little, and said "Hello. Who are you?"

"I'm not allowed to talk to strangers."

"Good idea, but I'm not a stranger, I'm with the police department." I wasn't going to try to explain the difference between a cop and a criminologist, not to someone that age. "Is your mom or pop around?"

"Lois is over there." He pointed towards the reception desk, where a dark-haired woman in her thirties was talking to the desk sergeant, and looking seriously annoyed. There was a press card on a chain around her neck, but I didn't recognize her.

"Let's take you back to her; you don't want to get lost in this crowd." I reached down, and he took my hand. I really can't understand why children don't sense me for the monster I am, but apparently they don't; which may explain why so many children wind up the victims of monsters who lack my peculiar code. I led him across to her, and said "Excuse me, have you lost someone?"

She turned from the sergeant and said "Thanks!" then to the kid, "Jason, what did I tell you about wandering off?"

"Not to go out of sight. I could see you, mommy."

"Okay... I can see you're going to be a lawyer when you grow up," and added "Thanks again" to me.

At this point the desk sergeant decided to be helpful. I could have wished otherwise. "Actually, Morgan might be just the guy you're looking for; he works in the crime lab."

"Really?" The woman gave me a couple of hundred watts of smile. "I'm Lois Lane, Metropolis Daily Planet. Can you spare me a few moments, Officer Morgan?"

"I'm not a police officer; I'm a crime scene investigator."

"He said he was a policeman," Jason said accusingly; wrongly, of course, but never mind.

"He was trying to keep it simple," said his mother. "Mister Morgan, can you tell me anything about the Luthor killing?"

I wondered what I was supposed to say to that. Probably that she'd have to talk to the captain. "Didn't Captain Matthews say everything that needed to be said at the briefing?"

"That dummy? All he knows about the case is how to look good and take credit from the people who actually do the work. I want to talk to someone who was involved in the identification."

I was going to say something non-committal, but it was about then I remembered who she was. Lois Lane, Pulitzer Prize winner, and one of the last people to see Luthor before his vanishing act. More importantly, she was someone with a direct line to Superman.

"The FBI made the identification," I eventually said. "Based on the work we did here, of course."

"Do you have any idea why it took so long?"

I hesitated again, pretending to think about it, then said "Just confusion following the black-out, I guess. Apparently a lot of records were destroyed."

"But it wasn't that sort of..." she began, then tailed off into silence. I think I know what she was thinking. People keep calling it a magnetic pulse, but nobody really knows how Luthor's island-building gadget worked. It cut power for a while, but most computers had come back on line without losing a lot of data. There was no obvious reason why it should screw up all his records. Eventually she reached one of the obvious conclusions and said "You think that someone hacked the records?"

"That's not my field, but I doubt it. You'd need expertise in a dozen different forensic areas. I think I'd better get back to work." I started towards the elevator, leaving her at the desk. Much better than answering questions, I thought. She followed me, of course.

"Off the record, what do you think happened?"

"Off the record... Off the record, I think you need to talk to the FBI, not me."

"If you change your mind..." she handed me a card; her name and cell phone number. I pocketed it, and went on up.

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If I'm ever in a position to write an account of my activities without fear of discovery, explaining my reasoning at this point will be difficult. The last thing in the world I wanted was publicity for exposing the deception, so rocking the boat was dangerous. Continued media interest in the Bay Harbor Butcher was equally dangerous; someone might eventually prove that Doakes was innocent. At a more personal level I liked the idea of being remembered as the killer of the world's greatest attempted mass-murderer, but if the 'Butcher' was credited with him I'd always know that he was still out there, maybe plotting something even worse. In the abstract I had no objection to that, of course, but his last experiment would have destroyed all of the East Coast, not just Metropolis, and I like living here. His crimes were almost beyond comprehension, but they certainly met Harry's definition of a deserving case. What I wanted, what worked best for me, would be for the deception to be revealed without exposing me to the glare of publicity. A quiet retraction of the identification would work reasonably well, an ideal solution would have Luthor caught... and preferably left somewhere where I could get my hands on him, though I really doubted that was a possibility.

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"La Guerta's ecstatic," Deb told me at the water cooler about an hour later. "Doakes was in Arizona on reserve training the week that Luthor vanished. If he couldn't kill Luthor, and the Bay Harbor Butcher did, then he couldn't be the Butcher."

"If it is Luthor, and if he was killed the same week he vanished. We don't know when he died, and I'm not convinced it's Luthor anyway. It just doesn't add up."

"How come?"

"Because..." I tried hard to think of a killer argument, and suddenly remembered one; "...Because of the manifesto." The manifesto was my longest and least successful attempt at literary creativity, an attempt to throw my pursuers off the track. It had failed miserably.

"The manifesto? Doakes was playing with our heads. He hardly mentioned Superman or Luthor."

There was one reference in thirty-odd pages, a paragraph about Superman's 'callous alien indifference to water fluoridisation' that accused him of 'ignoring real issues to chase petty criminals like Luthor'. I'd barely thought him worth mentioning, just another name check in an interminable rant. "If he'd really killed Luthor, why wasn't Luthor one of the named victims?"

Why not claim it as justification?"

"Because we didn't know who it was?"

"So why mention him at all?"

"How do I know?" asked Deb.

"My guess would be that it really didn't matter to him. It was just another name check, something to throw in to put us off the scent."

"Damn. If you're right... Okay, I'll talk to La Guerta, try to head her off from going public."

"I think you should. You should keep it to yourself too; I think it's going to get messy." Knowing Deb she was on the phone to Frank Lundy, asking his opinion, before I was back at my desk. Don't get me wrong; I do my best to behave as a loving and protective brother, though those are emotions I rarely feel, and felt awkward taking advantage of my sister's less than happy love life. But I might be doing them a favour; she wanted to get back together with him, and giving him some leverage against his boss might be the way to do it.

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I found proof about half an hour later. I won't bore you with the technicalities, but for legal reasons it's important not to claim more accuracy in your report than your equipment can actually produce. We don't have the latest equipment in our labs, and there are some tests we can only do to an accuracy of say one part in ten thousand. That's plenty for most purposes, but more recent equipment can do much better. Some of the results in reports Vince and I were supposed to have written showed results to more decimal places than our equipment can actually achieve. I printed out a copy, marked the offending sections with a highlighter, and started to wonder what I'd do with it.

I finished the blood work from the morning early enough that I had time to do a little research on my next extra-curricular project, but with Luthor on my mind I couldn't sum up much enthusiasm. My Dark Passenger wasn't happy, but both of us knew that it would be better to wait until things felt right, and if my planned playmate got away... well, there were plenty of other fish in the sea.

The biggest fish I could think of, of course, was Lex Luthor, a mass murderer whose attempt at genocide would have killed billions. Not just a big fish - the great white whale. Which is a mammal, of course, but similes were never my strong point.

* * *

"Morgan, my office!" I looked up but Captain Matthews was already out the door, moving fast. I picked up the printout and followed him. When I got there La Guerta and Deb were already standing there, looking distinctly uncomfortable.

"We have a situation here," said Matthews, "someone's been saying things they shouldn't to the press. Morgan..."

Deb and I said "Yes?" more or less simultaneously. Matthews looked irritated but waved his hand at me. "Did you say anything to any reporter that might have cast doubt on our identification of Luthor?"

"I... A reporter did ask me about it, but all I said was that the FBI made the final identification. I said she should talk to them if she had any questions."

"Which reporter?"

I pretended to try to remember "A woman with a little boy... Lois something..." I fished in my pocket and found her card. "Lane, that was it. From the Daily Planet."

"Did she ask anything else?"

"Umm... just why the identification took so long. I told her about the magnetic pulse. It was pretty much the same thing you said in your press conference."

"I've just had a call from the FBI. It appears that the Planet's lawyers have filed a Freedom of Information request for all documents related to his identification. Are you quite sure that's all you said?"

"Absolutely. Of course I hadn't read through the reports then."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"They claim that one of Doakes' blood slides matches Luthor, but the analysis work is too good. The FBI says that the results came from our labs, but our equipment isn't nearly that accurate. I think that there are similar errors in some of the bone work reports from Vince Masuka, but that isn't really my field. I think someone's substituted forgeries for our reports. And if the courts are subpoenaing records, sooner or later someone's probably going to ask me about it under oath."

Matthews looked sick; LaGuerta just looked disappointed. And Deb... well, I wasn't quite sure, but I think I caught a triumphant glint in her eyes.

"What about you, Morgan?" This time he was asking Deb. "What does your boyfriend say?"

"I... I did ask Frank Lundy about it, but he isn't my boyfriend, not really, we're just friends."

"So what did your 'friend' say?" Matthews doesn't do sarcasm well, so he mimed the quotes around friend.

"He's completely out of the loop on this one. Mostly it was his case, but he didn't know anything about the ID claim until that Deputy Director made the announcement. That could just be FBI internal politics, of course, but I think it's fishy."

"Face it," said LaGuerta, "we've been played."

"Damn it," said Matthews. "What the hell are they up to?"

"My guess," said Deb, "they've got Luthor stashed away somewhere, don't want the case to come to trial."

"They put Lex Luthor into witness protection?" said Matthews. "What the hell for?"

"Maybe they think they can use his knowledge of Kryptonian technology," I guessed. "Or maybe they think he'd be their best shot at killing Superman if he ever goes bad." Not a bad idea, really. When I think what I'd be like if I had Superman's powers... Well, let's just say it's a good thing for the world that I don't.

"Fuckers!" said Deb. She always did have a way with words. "He saves the USA and most of the rest of the world, and that's the thanks he gets."

"So what do we do about it?" asked LaGuerta.

"We could go public," said Deb. "Get our shot in first. The FBI wouldn't like it, but screw them."

"I like that," said Matthews. "I have family in Metropolis, I want to see Luthor pay. But blaming the FBI... Isn't there an alternative? Maybe we could say that someone must have hacked into their records and planted fakes. Do we still have any of the originals?"

"No," I said. "They took everything with them when they shut down the investigation."

"Damn." Matthews considered for a moment, then said "Someone from the labs will have to go public. Morgan..."

"Maybe Vince Masuka," I said hastily. "I get nervous in front of cameras, but he's been talking about writing a book about the Butcher case. He'd be up for the publicity."

"Isn't he a minority member?" asked Matthews. "That always plays well. He goes public with my backing, and I announce an internal investigation to see how hackers could have altered our records, and say that we'd welcome FBI involvement in case the tampering was at their end. That puts the ball back in their court."

"And you come out of it looking good because you're admitting that you were initially fooled by the fakes," said LaGuerta, "and have the balls to admit it."

"I like that," said Matthews. "Get Masuka. If we hustle we can make the late news."

* * *

And that, pretty much, was the way it went. Suddenly the big news story was in Washington, where the FBI was denying that anyone could have faked the records, while gradually admitting that they might not be completely accurate. Vince had his day in the sun, and eventually signed a contract to write the Bay Harbor Butcher book. He even thanked me for letting him take most of the credit on the technical side - Matthews is out there as the cop who revealed the deception, of course - and I've offered to help with fact checking when Vince writes the book. I can't think of a better way to be sure that it won't say anything to cause me problems. Deb and Frank Lundy aren't back together, but they're talking more than they were. There's still no real word on the fate of Lex Luthor, but I have a feeling that one of these days he'll come out of the woodwork.

On a more personal note, by the time we were out of the media spotlight I was ready for my next little adventure in law enforcement. And here he comes now.

I whip the garrotte around his neck, and inject the tranquilizer as I drag him back to the car. I may not be Superman, but here I'm all-powerful.

Sometimes it's good to be me.

End