

Bike Noir

The year was 1947. It was a miserable mid-May day. The kind of day that gave you an excuse to do nothing but smoke and lounge with your feet propped up on your desk. It was also my day off. The name is Rogers.

Richard Rogers. Private investigator. Paid sleuth and bloodhound. I was the kind of guy that enjoyed the grey weather. I was also the kind of guy who gets few personal calls, my only close friend being a Mr. Jack Daniels.

And, being a man of my own social expectations, you can imagine my surprise when my office door hit the wall and a figure emerged.

She entered with a gust of cool wind and walked with such a sway in her hips and her gams, I was afraid the dame would throw her back out. She had a head of silky blond hair and eyes so brown you'd swear they'd been dipped in chocolate. She struck me as the kind of girl who goes through men more often than she goes through shoes.

"I got myself in a bit of a jam," Her voice rolled like honey off her tongue and floated like smoke across the room. "I hear you're the man to go to."

"I'm assuming this isn't the kind of jam that goes on toast?"

"This isn't a time for jokes. I've been robbed."

I took a long drag from my cigarette and flicked the ashes into yesterday's cup of coffee. "I'm all ears, doll face."

"My name is Sawyer Saunders. My husband, Danny, runs the antique shop down on 42 and 6th. It's just something to make ends meet. We never had any big buyers until earlier this week. A woman comes in all gussied up in furs and tassels and asks about Danny's bike out in front of the shop. Apparently collecting old bikes is a hobby of hers."

"Sounds more like a mid-life crisis." I remarked dryly

"Danny told her that it had been in his family for a while and he had just taken it to get tuned up. The broad up and says she'll give him five hundred clams for it.

"Me an' Dan's jaws nearly hit the floor. We agreed to sell it and the woman said she'd be back at the end of the week to pay us and pick it up. We locked it up in the back of the shop, went home and when we came back the next day, the bike was gone."

“This is starting to sound like police work to me, sweet cheeks. Any old scumbag coulda’ jimmied the lock and made off with it. Besides, it’s my day off.”

“Danny would have been able to tell if someone had tampered with the lock. When the police came in they checked it too. The locks were perfectly fine. Only Danny had the keys. Our shop ain’t got no windows or back doors. There’s only one way in and it’s with his keys and they were with him. The police are still looking but nothing’s turned up. We need that money, now more than ever. If we don’t get that bike back we might as well pack our stuff and start beggin’”

Tears started spilling over and I cringed at the sight. Nothing gets to a guy more than seeing a pretty dame crying. Even a hard shell like yours truly.

So I took the case, much to Mrs. Saunders delight. I was at the shop’s door the next day, binding myself tightly in my jacket; cursing like a sailor. Just my luck that it had to rain today. I was the kind of guy to enjoy grey weather, but *indoors*.

Finally, the door opened, revealing a twig with pale skin and bright red hair. He introduced himself as Daniel Saunders. How this shrimp got such a babe for a wife, I’ll never know. Next to him was a equally red haired boy, about eight or nine, which he announced was their son, Frankie.

I looked around the shop with a eyebrow held high. I was convince a bomb had gone off by the looks of the cluttered junk that crowded the joint. Walking from one side of the place to the other without knocking any crap over was a case in itself. I made my way to the back of the shop and called back to the man. “Hey, Saunders. When you came back to the shop and found the bike missing, was any of this,” I gestured to the mounds of nik-naks. “...Lovely décor out of place or knocked over?”

Mr. Saunders made his way over his merchandise with practiced ease, his son following close behind, holding tightly onto his father’s pant leg. “No, I’m sure of it. We all know this place like the back of our hand. Nothing but the bike was touched that night.”

The gears in my head were whirling faster than a steam engine. I was ready to ask for more information on the bike, when familiar voice made it’s way across the room and assaulted my ear like a cheese grater.

“Well if it isn’t Old Richie Rogers!”

I cringed and replied sourly. “Inspector Collins...”

“You got some nerve showing your ugly mug here.”

“Nice to see you too.”

The half witted inspector stumbled his way over the refuge and artifacts until he was close enough to shove his suspicious visage close to mine. “We got this case covered Rodgers. Why don’t you stick your nose somewhere that it’s invited.”

I resisted the urge to give the ratfink a taste of knuckle. “I was invited here, Ben. Apparently you and your boys ain’t doin’ your job fast enough for the clients preference.” I resisted the urge to smirk at the scowl that smeared across the Inspector’s mug.

“I’ll have you know we’re hot on the trail at the moment and will have the bike back by the end of the week.”

“That’s very impressive, Benny,” I said sweetly, whist lighting a cigarette “I’ve already got a hunch who our culprit is, actually. And Sawyer should be coming in with- Ah! There she is now.”

The shop door opened and in waltzed Sawyer with a bright smile and a rusty old bike at her side.

I didn’t stay to witness the look of astonishment on both Collins and Mr. Saunders’ face. Once the bike was back inside I maneuvered my way around and out of the shop.

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“Well, how’d you do it.?”

“Hmm? Do what?”

Inspector Collins scowled and slapped the morning paper onto my desk. I stayed reclined back with my feet propped up and my hands linked at my head. I didn’t need to look to know what it said. I bet Collins knew too, but he read it out anyway.

“ ‘Private investigator Richie Rogers saves the day once again.’, So how’d you know it was the kid?”

“Elementary, dear Collins.”

He was bristling like a wet cat. “I’m waiting...”

I looked up at the Inspector and gave him a smug smirk. “When Mrs. Saunders was done givin’ me the long and short of it, I went down to the shop myself to give it a once over before it could rain and muck up any leads. I checked all the alleys and back ways and found some tire tracks. I followed em’ till they lead me to a dumpster down on 31th street, where the old bike was stashed. I called up Sawyer and arranged to meet the mister. Whoever stashed the bike had to be familiar with the store and have access to the keys, so...?”

“The kid!” The inspector finally exclaimed. Then he let out a loud laugh and shook his head at me, like I was some kind of world wonder. “Only you, Rodgers.”

I rolled my eyes and let my hat fall over my eyes. “Little Frankie just couldn’t part with the old thing. Rode it every day and stashed it when he couldn’t. Anyway, it was a fun ride while it lasted, but I’ll be expecting a nice cut of those five hundred clams before the week is out.”

Thus concludes the case of the Saunders and their priceless bucket of rust. Turned out to be nothing but a case of a young boy and his favourite toy. In the end all we can really say is that one man’s trash is another man’s treasure. And one young boy’s bike is another detective’s pay check waiting to happen.