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about 1,500 words

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Duncan in the Storm

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Lightning swarms the sky, crashes of thunder hit, and a body lies in the parking lot next to an old Victorian building draped in darkness. Rain pours around it as the storm swells above.

The man, now conscious, Duncan, awakens in a car. He is in the back seat of a car with a cage separating the front from the back. He tries to rise but stops because of the pain of steel handcuffs on his wrists. Duncan tries to move his legs, but they are bound as well. He spots a double layer of duct tape around his ankles. Duncan anxiously tries to unbind himself but cannot break free. He looks out the window and sees a man in a blue uniform puffing on a cigarette, staring inside.

The uniformed man is tall, and the uniform appears too short for a man his size. The man also wears a nightstick and gun on his waist, which rattles against the glass. He isn't quite looking inside the car at Duncan, but at something behind him. All these signs suggested to Duncan that this was his captor.

Duncan adjusts his legs back again, this time accidentally hitting something fragile behind him. The kick alerts the man.

“What the hell!” says the man, tossing his cigarette in from the rain.

The man enters the front of the vehicle and allows Duncan to make out they are outside an old Victorian building. The man’s head loops around to check on his contents. He frowns and takes a seat behind the wheel.

“It’s about time you’re up, Duncan. I’m Officer Robbins.”

“Who? What am I doing here?” asks Duncan.

Robbins starts the engine. The car peels off out of the parking lot and onto the road, taking chunks of gravel with it. The turn sends Duncan right, then left. He tries his best to hold on to the slippery pleather seats.

“Why am I taped up like this? Where are you taking me? Are you a cop? Am I being arrested?” asks Duncan.

“Sure thing. You’re the thief and I am the cop,” says Officer Robbins with a light-hearted chuckle.

Duncan braces for another sharp turn to the freeway. The fragile object comes into view. It’s a painting.

The painting has smudges across it. The angry sky and beeping lights from the dash provide only a few details from it. It is a painting of an ocean with red streaks on it. A side of his face is wet with red smudges. The painting is still wet, he thinks. The car quickly veers another hard right, toppling him over and the painting somewhere else.

“This is because of the painting?” asks Duncan.

Officer Robbins stops the car at a traffic light, then flips around to check the condition of the painting. Robbins rattles the cage with his nightstick. "Looks fine to me," says Robbins. Duncan glimpses a tattoo on Robbin's arm and it wasn't exactly police issued. The car moves again with Duncan, trying to piece things together.

Signs breeze by. Duncan becomes covered in more and more paint as the ride continues. A speed bump pushes Duncan and the painting forward.

"This is what this is about?" asks Duncan.

"That is your version of the story, Duncan. Whatever choice you made was what made this night happen."

"I'm the one tied up in the back. You are the one with the power here. This doesn't feel like much of a choice to me,"

An unseen cackle erupts from the front seat. Duncan swings his feet to sit upright; the cuffs tighten.

"You're going to be in as much trouble as I am," says Duncan.

Officer Robbins finally stops.

"You can fix that," says Officer Robbins. The Massachusetts State police department sits in front of them.

The rain settles. The streetlamps shine over the vehicle. Officer Robbins turns around and removes his keys from his belt.

“Looks to be worth a pretty penny, don’t it?” says Officer Robbins, with his hand outstretch, keys dangling off his fingertips.

“You didn’t drag me out here like this to walk me in,” says Duncan, reaching behind his head, feeling a sharp throbbing pain. His cuffed hands graze over his hair, which is sticky and wet with a dark-colored liquid.

“Choices, son. You made a choice. I’ve made my choice. What should we do?” asks Officer Robbins.

Duncan thinks hard, but his thoughts are blurry. Lights obscure his vision. The tattoo. The conversation. The way the man speaks all feels too familiar to Duncan. Duncan notices the olive branch being extended.

“If you let me go, then we keep going,” says Duncan, as if drawing from an old conversation.

The cruiser starts up again. Officer Robbins slides the keys to the back and drives past the precinct. Duncan grabs the keys. He releases himself from the handcuffs and uses the keys to slice through the duct tape. Free from restraints, Duncan falls to the side of the cruiser, propping up the painting.

Officer Robbins holds his hand up as the cruiser speeds up to pass the street and pulls onto the highway.

“What is your first name?” asks Officer Robbins.

Duncan stops. He grips the old painting by its dusty frame and holds it to the light. The elegant brush strokes and finished piece show a crew aboard a sailboat caught in a treacherous white and blue storm.

“Whose painting is this?” asks Duncan.

“It is ours. We just have to get out of this storm first,” says Officer Robbins, speeding down the highway back into the storm.

Duncan leans against the window. He forces a smile. Duncan settles the painting to the other side of the vehicle. The red smudges on the painting didn’t resemble paint anymore.

“Robbins, why do I believe we were never going to the police?” asks Duncan.

Robbins keeps his eyes on the road. The storm rages fiercely outside as the cruiser tears hell down the highway. The sound of preceding sirens echo like thunder in the distance.

Duncan shuts his eyes and leans his head back, red streaming down his face.

“Robbins, huh? Guess that makes me Officer Steals.” says Duncan.

Robbins lets out a hearty laugh and winks at Duncan, who’s finally put things together.