

Detroit Christmas

The Grimnoir Chronicles

by Larry Correia, 1977–

Published: 2011



December 25th, 1931

Detroit. One of the greatest cities in the world. The crossroads of industry and commerce. The American Paris, the City of Champions, Blimp-Town, Motor City, call it what you want, it's one crowded place. Nearly two million people live in Detroit, but as far as Jake Sullivan was aware, only a few of them were trying to kill him at that particular moment in time.

Sure, there might have been others in Detroit that were gunning for him, as he wasn't the type of man that made a lot of friends, but judging from the volume of gunfire pouring through the windows and puckering the walls... *Six*. There were only six shooters.

He could handle that.

"Enough! I said enough!" The gunfire tapered off. One last angry bullet bounced off his cover with a *clang*. "You still alive in there?"

The seven hundred pound chunk of steel plate he'd picked up to use as a shield had worked better than expected. Sullivan checked his body for holes, and finding no more than usual, shouted back, "Yeah, but your boys ain't. You ready to surrender yet, Johnny? The cops will be here any minute."

"You'll be an icicle before then."

The temperature was dropping fast, which meant that Snowball was out there too. Both Maplethorpe brothers were Actives, which was just his rotten luck. Sullivan's teeth began to chatter. He had to finish this before the Icebox could freeze him out. At this range, a clean shot could freeze him solid, but behind cover... even a really powerful Icebox wouldn't be able to steal more than ten degrees a minute from room this big, but it had already been cold to begin with. That didn't leave Sullivan much time.

"Kidnapping, murder." He needed to goad them into coming after him. It was his only chance. "You boys been busy."

"Throw 'em on the list. They can only send me to the gas chamber once," Johnny Bones shouted back through the broken windows. "Are you the Heavy? Is this the legendary Heavy Jake Sullivan, J. Edgar Hoover's pet Active?"

Sullivan didn't dignify that with a response

"Heard you been looking for my crew. How'd you find us? I thought you Heavies was supposed to be stupid?"

"Even a blind pig finds an acorn once in awhile, Johnny." Sullivan picked up the giant Lewis machinegun from the floor with one shaking hand. It was a good thing he'd already been wearing gloves or he would've left skin on the freezing metal. "You ready to go to prison?"

"You know all about that from what I hear. So how's Rockville this time of year?"

The infamous prison for actively magical criminals was in Montana. Sullivan had been an inmate there for six long years. "Cold. Very cold." Some of Johnny Bones' men were going to try to flank him while they were talking. He knew because that's what he would've ordered if their situations had been reversed. Sullivan picked the most likely window, pointed the Lewis at it, and waited. "You'll get used to it. Your brother will be nice and comfy, though."

"We can make a deal," Johnny shouted, trying to keep Sullivan distracted. "It don't have to be like this, with you all blue and frozen stuck to the floor. How about I let you walk out of here, pay you enough to make it worth your time? We'll call it my present to you. Tis the season and all that jazz. I'm in a giving mood. What do you say?"

Someone moved on the other side of the window. Sullivan held down the trigger and let the Lewis roar. Bricks exploded into dust and glass shattered. The man on the other side went down hard.

That left five.

"I'd say you gotta do better than that."

Johnny Bones Maplethorpe ordered his remaining men to open fire and bullets ricocheted off the steel plate. Jake Sullivan was pinned down in a room that was rapidly turning into a walk-in freezer by a gang of hardened criminals led by a vicious Shard. It was one hell of a way to spend Christmas.

Two Days Earlier

"So, Mr. Sullivan, you got any plans this Christmas?"

Sullivan finished counting out the January rent money and passed it over. It was the last ten dollars he had to his name. Paying work had been sporadic lately. "Nothing in particular, ma'am."

"I see," Mrs. Brooks said. His landlord owned the entire building and the diner downstairs. It was obvious the old woman didn't like her tenant much, but Jake Sullivan always paid his rent on time. "I don't want any loudness or carrying on. I know how you Irish get during the holidays with the devil drink."

"Why, Mrs. Brooks, alcoholic beverages are illegal."

"I know all about your disdain for the law, Mr. Sullivan." Mrs. Brooks eyed him suspiciously, then glanced around the office, as if expecting to see a distillery hidden in a corner. Instead there was only a battered second-hand desk, a couple of sturdy wooden chairs, a bedraggled couch, and a few book shelves. "It's only my strong upbringing that's allowed me to forgive your horrific criminal history and your unseemly magic."

The landlord talked a big game, but both of them knew that she'd rent to anybody who could pay in these tough times, and that included convicted felons, less popular types of Actives, or anybody else for that matter. The old lady would rent a room to the Chairman himself if he had ten dollars ready on the twenty-third of each month. "And I won't forget it," Sullivan said.

Mrs. Brooks stepped back and examined the words painted on his door. "Why would someone like you go into this kind of business anyway?"

"I like puzzles..." Sullivan said honestly. "Anything else I can do for you, ma'am?" and before she could even answer he was already closing the door on her. "No? Wonderful. Merry Christmas. Good bye."

The sign on the door read *Sullivan Security and Investigations*. His last security job had been intimidating the union strikers at the UBF plant. Good work that, standing around earning money because you had a reputation for being able to crush a man's skull with a thought. It had paid well too, but that had been months ago. The last investigation job had meant confirming to an angry wife that her husband liked prostitutes. The final bit of money from that one had just paid the rent.

There was other work out there. There always was for a man with his skills, whether physical or magical, but Sullivan was an honest man, and he preferred honest work. There was a difference between being a felon and being a crook, and Jake Sullivan was no crook.

Then there were the government jobs... The monetary payment on those was meager, but completing them meant he got to stay out of Rockville. Sullivan sat behind his desk and reread the recent Bureau of Investigation telegram. It was a bulletin on the notorious Maplethorpe brothers. Their gang had recently gotten shot up in a robbery in Albion, and it was believed they were hiding in Detroit. A Shard and an Icebox, with Power to spare, armed, and extremely dangerous, wanted for bank robbery and murder. The telegram said a BI representative would be in touch if it was felt his services would be needed.

The terms of his early release specified that he needed to assist in the apprehension of five Active fugitives. He wondered idly if the Maplethorpes would count as two... As long as the government's terms hung over his head, he would never truly be free. Sullivan crumpled the telegram and tossed it in the waste basket. Nothing usually came of the telegrams.

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The first client for the month of December arrived just before noon on the 23rd. Sullivan had been reading a *Popular Mechanics* article about a British Cog named Turing and his controversial attempt to build a mechanical man capable of reasoning, when there had been a delicate knock on the door.

Like all Gravity Spikers—or Heavies as most folks insisted on calling magicals of his type—Sullivan's Power enabled him to manipulate the forces of gravity. He was just much better at it than everyone else. A quick surge of Power enabled him to see the nearby world as it really was, shades of mass, density, and force, and it told him that there was a single body in the hallway, approximately one hundred and twenty pounds.

Hopeful that it might be business related, he quickly saw to it that both he and the office were presentable before answering. He stubbed out his cigarette and hid the magazine in his desk. Sullivan checked the mirror, fixed his tie, and ran a comb through his hair. He was built like a bull, had the face of an anvil, and wasn't particularly well-spoken, but that was no excuse to not present well.

The lady in the hall certainly knew how to present well. She was good looking, mid-twenties, brunette, and petite. She was wearing a blue dress, ten minks worth of coat, and shoes that cost more than all of Sullivan's earthly possessions combined. "I need a private detective," she stated, having to crane her neck to see since he was over a foot taller than she. "Are you Heavy Jake Sullivan?"

"That's me." He didn't much care for the nickname, but it would do. At least that meant she knew he was an Active and was okay with the fact. It wasn't the kind of thing you advertised to most respectable clients. The general attitude was that Heavies were good for lifting things and that was about it. "Please come in."

"Thank you, Mr. Sullivan." Her blue eyes were red from crying. Her manner was resigned and tired.

He closed the door behind her. She was graceful, like a dancer, as she walked in and took a seat. He went to the other side of the desk and settled into his massively reinforced chair. Sullivan weighed far more than he appeared to, a byproduct of his magical experimentation, and he'd gotten tired of breaking chairs.

"So what brings you to this neighborhood?"

"You came highly recommended." The lady glanced around the room. There was a single light bulb wired into the ceiling and the whole place seemed dingy and small. It was times like this that he wished he could afford a real office instead of this rotten dive. Judging by her get up, she could hire whoever she felt like, but apparently she was undeterred by the shabbiness of her host or his office. "I need your help."

"Sure," he answered. "I'm afraid I didn't get your name."

"Emily Fordyce. I'm here about my husband."

So it was another jilted wife case. The rock on her wedding ring was huge, but in his experience the size of the rock seldom corresponded to a husband's loyalty. "I'll be glad to help, Mrs. Fordyce. What's wrong with your husband?"

"He's missing," she answered with a sniff. "He was abducted."

Sullivan perked up. His day had just become far more interesting. "Really?" She was obviously money, so he asked the logical question. "Has there been a ransom demand?"

"There's been no ransom, and the police say that he's certainly dead."

Sullivan urged her to start from the beginning. Arthur Fordyce had not returned from his office days ago. Yesterday his automobile had been found in a ditch just outside of the city, where it had been hidden by the snow. A great deal of dried blood had been found on the seat. The car was otherwise undamaged.

Emily became increasingly upset as she spoke. Sullivan offered her a smoke to calm her nerves, but she turned him down. He took one for himself. "Your husband have enemies?"

"Oh, no. Everyone loved Arthur. He was a sweetheart."

"He gamble? Owe anyone money?" She shook her head in the negative. Those minks didn't buy themselves. "What did he do for a living?"

"He was a Healer."

Sullivan stopped, match hovering just below his suddenly forgotten cigarette. "A Healer?"

Emily nodded. "He's an Active and very skilled. He works freelance, fixing anyone that can afford his services. The finest families in the city have used him."

Healers of any kind were rare, Active Healers with significant amounts of Power were especially so. They were talking about somebody who could cure any illness or mend any wound with a touch. Someone who was literally worth more than their weight in gold. "I've never actually spoken to a real live Healer... Who were your husband's recent clients?"

"Arthur didn't speak about many of them. You see... sometimes influential people need to be discreet..." *Rich guys with syphilis*, went unsaid. "I know he did do a Healing for an unsavory man recently who may be some sort of criminal. His name was something Horowitz."

That was a bad sign if it was who Sullivan was thinking of. Abraham Horowitz was a local legend amongst the bootleggers, but it did give him a place to start. Sullivan spent the next hour learning everything he could about the last days of Arthur Fordyce. When he'd exhausted his questions and Emily looked like she would begin crying again, Sullivan decided that she needed to get home.

"Yes, that's probably a good idea, but we've not yet talked about your fee... Whatever it normally is, double it. I'm prepared to write you a check in advance."

He'd need operating money, but his pride didn't like taking money for work unperformed. "That's not necessary, ma'am."

"I've got more bank accounts than husbands. Just find him."

"All right, then. I'll do my best, Mrs. Fordyce," Sullivan promised.

Emily pulled a handkerchief out of her purse and dabbed her eyes. "I know you will, Mr. Sullivan. You came highly recommended."

Sullivan certainly hadn't performed many jobs in her neck of the wood. The Fordyces lived over on mansion row in Woodbridge. "Who recommended me?"

"Arthur, of course."

Sullivan didn't know what to make of that response. "Your missing husband..."

"I'm sorry, that must sound rather crazy." His expression must have confirmed the idea. "Not recently obviously. No, it was because of a newspaper article several months ago. It said you helped the government capture some Active madman."

"I know the one." He had gotten a brief mention in the papers after he'd helped the BI arrest Crusher Marceau in Hot Springs. There had been no mention of Jake being a recently released convict, thankfully, because that would have sent J. Edgar Hoover into an apocalyptic fit.

"Arthur knew right away who you were and said that if we ever had need of a private detective, then you would be the only man for the job because you didn't know the meaning of the word *quit*. You see, he had a lot of respect for you. Arthur was in the First Volunteers during the war too, Mr. Sullivan. I believe every survivor of the Second Somme knows who you are."

Sullivan was humbled. His respect for Arthur Fordyce had just grown tremendously. Very few Healers had bothered to join the Volunteers. "Men like your husband saved a lot of lives over there."

"Arthur led me to believe that you saved even more, Mr. Sullivan... Now please do it again, and if my husband has been..." She choked on the word, then couldn't finish. Sullivan came around, but he didn't know the first thing about how to comfort a grieving woman. Luckily, she waved him away. "I'm fine... I'm fine. I'll be going."

Sullivan opened the door for her. Emily stopped, and her voice grew unexpectedly hard. "If Arthur is *gone*, then I don't want the men who did it arrested, I want them *gone* too. Do you understand me, Mr. Sullivan? If they hurt him, I want you to hurt them right back, and if you do so I will double your fee again. I want you to do to them what Arthur said you did to the Kaiser's army."

Sullivan closed the door behind her. Rage at the men who might have made her a widow notwithstanding, Emily didn't know what she was asking for. He wouldn't wish the fate of the Kaiser's army on anyone.

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It was snowing when he left the office.

Arthur Fordyce's automobile had been towed to a police lot. A quick phone call to a Detroit P.D. officer who owed him a favor got Sullivan inside for a quick look. The car was a ritzy '29 Dusenbergs roadster. The paint gleamed with tiny flecks of real gold. Ostentatious, but fitting for a Healer. The only thing that spoiled the perfection was the gallon of blood someone had left to dry on the leather seats.

Most of the blood was on the driver's side, like it had pooled around a body. No wonder the law was assuming it was a murder instead of a kidnapping.

Sullivan was still poking around the Dusenbergs when there was an angry cough from behind. He turned to see Detective Sergeant Ragan. "Afternoon, Detective."

"What're you doing in there, Sullivan?"

He'd cultivated a decent enough relationship with many of the local cops, but not all of them. Ragan was in the latter category. An old fashioned, hard drinking, tough guy, Ragan didn't like magicals, and he especially didn't like ones with reputations for having *accidentally killed* a law enforcement officer, even if the officer in question had been a murderous piece of work. "Mrs. Fordyce hired me to find her husband."

"Find her husband's *body* is more like it..."

"Who you think did it?" Sullivan asked, still going about his business.

"Whole case is fishy. I'm thinking the wife had him popped, just to get the insurance money. Fellow like that's bound to have a hefty life insurance policy."

Sullivan snorted. "That's rich."

"Why am I even talking to the likes of you? Get out of there! That's evidence." Sullivan climbed out of the car, quickly hiding the handkerchief he'd used to wipe up some blood. "You can't be in here. Who let you in?"

"Nice fella. Forgot his name. About this tall..." Sullivan held his hand out about shoulder height then moved it up and down six inches.

"You private ops are a pain in the neck. I ought to have you arrested for tampering with evidence."

That would never hold, but Sullivan definitely didn't want to spend Christmas in a cell. It was time to go. "My apologies, Detective." Sullivan tipped his hat and walked away.

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Sometimes prejudices make life harder than it needs to be. Sullivan was fairly certain that if Ragan was running the official investigation then there was no way in the world that he'd resort to consulting a Finder. Ragan distrusted magic, and besides, any clues divulged through magical means wouldn't be admissible in a court of law. Sullivan didn't have those issues. He just wanted to find Arthur Fordyce and get paid.

To be fair, it wasn't just about the money this time. Fordyce was a fellow veteran of Roosevelt's First Volunteer Active Brigade. Sullivan had never associated with any of the unit's Healers, other than to dump wounded soldiers onto their tables. The valuable Healers had been kept as far from the front as possible, while the dime-a-dozen Spikers were always where the bullets were flying. Healers were officers, Sullivan had been an enlisted man, but despite those differences, they'd both shared a little slice of hell in the biggest battle in human history, and that made them brothers.

Sullivan would have done his best no matter what, that was just his single-minded nature, but Fordyce wasn't some anonymous victim. He was First Volunteer, and that made it personal.

The fourth best Finder in Detroit lived in a humble home in Brush Park. Sullivan couldn't afford the other three. A reliable Finder demanded a premium wage. Finders existed in that nebulous grey area of Active popularity. The public considered them useful but scary. At least Finders were far more well-liked than their more powerful cousins, the Summoners. Most religious types simply wouldn't tolerate them or their alien Summoned.

It didn't help that Finders tended to be a few bricks shy of a wall. Talking to disembodied spirits all day tended to do that to a person. Bernie was all right though... Usually.

Sullivan knocked and only had to wait a minute to be let in. Bernie was a pudgy, unshaven, wild-eyed fellow, and today was wearing some pajamas that had seen better days. "Sullivan! Good to see you, my boy."

"Nice hat, Bernie."

Bernie's head was wrapped in tin foil cone. "Keeps some of the voices out," he explained. "I picked up a screamer this morning. Poor thing won't shut up. You know how it goes."

"No. Not really."

"Come in! Come in!" Bernie dragged him inside. The interior of the home was filled with stacks of newspapers and at least a dozen mangy cats. Bernie kicked stray felines out of the way as he led Sullivan to the living room. "Did you bring me a present?"

"I got you a sandwich." He passed over a paper sack. Bernie had a reputation for forgetting to eat when he was on a Finding, and Sullivan needed him focused. Sullivan then pulled out the red-stained handkerchief. "And this."

Bernie took the handkerchief. "Oh..." He sounded disappointed. "I meant a Christmas present."

"Sandwich isn't good enough? Well, if you Find me the body that blood came out of I'll give you fifty bucks. This is a rush job."

The Finder studied the stain. "Half up front... And you still owe me a present."

"Fair enough." Sullivan had cashed Emily Fordyce's generous advance check already and he counted out the bills. "What do you get for the man that's already got everything?"

"I'm almost out of tin foil." Bernie shoved a particularly ugly cat off the couch and took a seat. He placed the handkerchief on the stack of newspapers, that judging from all the dirty plates and dishes stacked on it, served as his table. "Rush job, eh? I've got just the spirit for you. Strongest thing on her plane. I call her Mae, 'cause you know, she kinda reminds me of this poster of Mae West I got. Bringing her in burns up all my Power for a few days, but she works real fast. I'm warning ya, if this body ain't close, it could take time."

Sullivan leaned against the wall. His overcoat was black and he didn't particularly want to cover it in cat hair. "If you can do a Finding for me today I'll get you *two* rolls of foil."

Bernie rubbed his hands together greedily. "You got a deal, but lots of things can go wrong. If the body is buried real deep, takes time. If the thing I'm Finding is behind iron... If it's been cut into little bits and scattered, or if it's been burned to ash, or if—"

“Just do your best, Bernie.” Sullivan settled in to wait. He knew how erratic this method was, but when it worked, it worked really well. They’d used the disembodied creatures of the Finders as scouts during the war. Nobody knew where the creatures came from exactly, they tended to be flaky, but they could cover a lot of ground and see things a person couldn’t.

Bernie concentrated on the handkerchief, scowled, confused, then cheered up as he remembered he was wearing a hat. He took the tin foil off and went back to concentrating. “That’s better. Here comes Mae.”

The lights flickered and the house shook. Stacks of newspapers tumbled. Cats screeched and ran for cover. At first Sullivan thought that they were having an earthquake, but then the wind hit, sending the curtains billowing across the room. Sullivan stumbled back as his fedora was blown off.

“Ain’t she a good girl? Yes, she is. Mae’s my good girl.”

Bernie hadn’t been lying. This one was a doozy. Sullivan had been around many summonings, but this was the first time he’d actually been able to see the shape of the vaporous creature, even if it was only for an instant. The thing hovered in the center of the room, a weird conglomeration of winged hippopotamus and six-legged porcupine with four glowing eyes, and then it was gone as quickly as it had appeared.

The curtains and blowing trash settled. Sullivan picked up his fedora and brushed away the cat hair. “Impressive critter... Though I don’t see the resemblance to Mae West.”

Bernie put his tin foil hat back on. “Beauty’s in the eye of the beholder, Sullivan.”

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Mae had told Bernie that it was going to take awhile. Arthur Fordyce wasn’t close, which meant she needed time to roam. Sullivan was still holding out hopes that Fordyce was alive, he was a Healer after all. Despite the volume of blood, Sullivan could only assume that Healers could fix themselves like they could fix everyone else, provided Fordyce was conscious or had Power enough to do it. Hopefully the demon-hippopotamus-porcupine ghost would come back with good news.

In the meantime, Sullivan had another lead to follow.

Abraham Horowitz ran with the Purple Gang, and the Purple Gang ran most of Detroit. Predominately Jewish, they were strongest on the east side, but there wasn’t a criminal activity in this city that they didn’t have a piece of. Mostly they stuck with bootlegging, tried to limit their killing to competitors, and kept the petty crooks under heel well enough to keep the law happy. They were tough enough that even Al Capone knew it was easier to just buy from them than to go to war.

If you saw a boat on the Detroit River with gunmen on it, then it probably belonged to the Purples. Nobody brought Canadian booze across the river except for the Purple gang, and if you got caught trying it, you’d get boarded, robbed, and sunk... And swimming is difficult with a .45 slug in your chest. The locals called them the Little Jewish Navy, which meant that Abraham Horowitz probably held the rank equivalent of admiral.

The snow had gotten worse and the worn-out tires on Sullivan's old Ford didn't get the best traction, so it took him awhile to get across town. Horowitz's base of operations was at a sugar mill on the river's edge. The mill was legitimate. The hoodlums hanging out in front of the business office obviously were not.

Sullivan stopped the car and got out. The sun was going down and taking the last bit of warmth with it. He threw on his scarf and gloves, but left his coat open in order to get to the .45 automatic on his hip. He knew some of the Purple's muscle since they'd also worked the UBF strike, so wasn't expecting any trouble, but with these types violence was always in the air.

Three men were loafing on a bench at the top of the steps. To the side, the rollup doors to the sugarhouse were open and two burly men were throwing burlap sacks onto the back of a truck. He didn't even need to activate his Power to know they were like him. The way that each of them were effortlessly lifting four or five fifty-pound sacks at a time told him that the workers were fellow Spikers. A bunch of guys sitting around smoking while Actives did all the work... Figures.

The Purple thugs got off the bench when they saw him coming up the stairs. The lead tough intercepted him before he could reach the door. The kid was barely old enough to shave, but had already developed a street swagger, but everyone was tougher when they had two buddies standing behind them. He tossed his cigarette into the snow. "Whadda you want?"

"I want to talk to Mr. Horowitz."

"You got an appointment? You don't look like you're here to buy sugar."

"Tell Mr. Horowitz it's about a mutual friend, Arthur Fordyce."

The three thugs exchanged a look that told him they recognized the name, but the kid didn't budge. "Who're you supposed to be?"

"Jake Sullivan." He looked over the group. Unfortunately, he didn't recognize any of them. "Isadore Lebowitz around? He can vouch for me."

"Buddy, Izzy got put in the ground weeks ago. He ain't vouching for nobody ever again."

"I hadn't heard."

They were starting to fan out around him. "He got shot in the teeth. If you was his friend, you should'a knew that," said the second thug as he walked behind Sullivan. The sharks were circling.

"Mr. Horowitz said no visitors," said the last, this one with the bleary eyes of someone on the weed. "Not till the bone man leaves town."

"Shut up, idiot," hissed the second.

Sullivan didn't have time for inter-gang nonsense. "Why don't one of you guys go ask Mr. Horowitz if he wants to talk to me."

The kid snickered. "Yeah? Well, he's busy. You should come back... oh... never." His buddies all had a good laugh at that. "Now beat it 'fore we beat *you*."

Sullivan's magic was collected in his chest, waiting. He'd saved up quite a lot. He activated the Power, using just a bit of his reserves, and tested the world around him. The weed head had something dense enough in the small of his back to be a pistol. The leader had something metal in his pocket. The Spikers loading the truck both stopped and looked over his way, having sensed the subtle flux in gravity.

"I'm not leaving until one of you asks Mr. Horowitz if he'll talk to me."

The leader glared at him and the look in those cold eyes said that he'd seen a fair share of blood spilled in his young life. "Last chance to walk away," he said.

Sullivan took his time taking out a cigarette, putting it to his mouth, and striking a match. The thugs watched him light up, incredulous as he took a puff, held it for a moment, then let it out. "Last chance to get your boss."

He had to hand it to the kid. He was fast with that straight razor. It came out in a silver flash. "You know what time it is now, big man?"

Sullivan shrugged. "Can't say I do."

The kid held the razor low at his side. "Now's the part where you say you don't want any trouble."

"Does that ever work?"

"Nope."

The kid lunged. The razor zipped out like a striking rattlesnake. Sullivan grabbed his Power and twisted gravity. When in a hurry there was no time for finesse. A small piece of the world *broke*. Up was down and down was up. The kid's feet left the ground as he tumbled, surprised, toward the overhang. He slammed into the sheet metal cover overhead. Sullivan let him hang there for a moment, just so that he could know he'd barked up the wrong tree, before cutting his Power. The kid hit the concrete in a shower of dust and snow.

Sullivan turned just as the weed head went for the gun under his coat. He had plenty of Power stored up, and it never hurt to make an example of idiots, so Sullivan drastically lessened the strength of gravity around his target before he slugged the punk square in the face. Weedy left the ground, flew back to the end of Sullivan's range, then fell and bounced down the steps. A little nickel-plated pistol went skittering off into the snow.

There was one Purple left. He was just standing there, too flummoxed to move. Sullivan removed the cigarette from his mouth and pointed at him. "Like I said... *I'll* wait here while *you* go tell Mr. Horowitz."

The punk jerked open the doors and ran for his life. Sullivan looked over to see the two Spikers coming his way. One of them had picked up a length of pipe. "Brothers, you don't want to try me. I may be like you..." Sullivan let a bit more of his Power slip so they could feel the obvious surge. Gravity distorted. Falling snow stopped and hung in mid air. The workers looked at each other, surprised at the display of control. Sullivan cut it off before he wasted too much precious Power. The snow resumed falling. "But I've got *way* more practice."

The Heavies returned to their truck, but they kept an uneasy eye on him. The punk at the bottom of the stairs was moaning about the condition of his face. The kid with the razor was out cold. That's what they got for picking a fight with someone who'd survived Second Somme *and* Rockville. Sullivan took a seat on the bench and finished his smoke.

Two minutes later the door opened again. This time four Purples filed out and they all trained shotguns on him. "Mr. Horowitz will see you now."

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Abraham Horowitz sat behind a giant oak desk, thick arms folded, and prepared to listen to Sullivan's request. The bootlegger was a steely-eyed killer, past his

physical prime now, but this was a man who'd grown up busting heads and collecting protection money. This was not somebody to short change, so it was probably wise to start with an apology. "Sorry about your boys downstairs, but I didn't do anything until the kid tried to carve me a new smile."

"Well, they should have asked me first. There was no need to be impolite to guests. Bad for business." Horowitz grunted. "From your rep I'm surprised you didn't just kill 'em all. You're a living legend. Way I hear it, you got a early release 'cause you're so good at it... You cut a deal with the enemy to take down dangerous Actives, right? You wouldn't happen to be here on the government dime, are you, Mr. Sullivan?"

"No, sir. Far as I'd tell anybody, you run a sugar mill, that's all. As for the enemy, any man would make a deal with the devil to get out of Rockville. It's a hard place. I just do what I've got to get by, same as anybody."

"I'd appreciate it if no Purples ever show up on your list, Mr. Sullivan, 'cause that could be *unpleasant* for everybody."

If one of the Hoover telegrams had a member of the Purple gang on it for him to help catch, Sullivan would make damn sure he had plans to get the hell out of Detroit real quick afterwards. "I'd like that very much too, sir."

"Respect... Let me tell you, I wish you would'a taken Isadore's job offer after the UBF strike. A Heavy like you could make a lot of money working for the Purples. My Heavies down there said you're downright frightening how much Power you got."

Of course he was good; he'd done nothing but practice the entire time he'd been in Rockville. "You honor me, Mr. Horowitz, but I'm just a simple man," Sullivan said.

"Isadore said you were a whole lot smarter than you talked, too. My people appreciate an educated man, especially a self-educated man such as yourself. Izzy, may he rest in peace, said you read books like some sort of professor."

"Reading's my hobby. Keeps me out of trouble."

"Seems like a man who's avoiding trouble wouldn't end up in the middle of it so often."

"Just curious I guess... Like I'm curious about Arthur Fordyce. His wife hired me to find him."

Horowitz chuckled. "I liked old Arthur. You're probably wondering how we knew each other. Well, let's just say that Arthur didn't care much who he Mended as long as their dollars were green. Last time I used him was 'cause I'd started losing my vision and couldn't feel my toes. He fixed me up good as new and told me to quit eating so much sugar. Ha! Not with this sweet tooth." Horowitz pounded one meaty hand on the desk, then he paused and frowned. "Well, shit... Now that he's gone I might have to cut back... Arthur did other things for the Purples too. If one of my boys got shot and I needed him back in action quick, I'd go to Arthur. He was good at pulling bullets out but not asking about who put them in, if you get what I'm saying. Son of a bitch charged an arm and a leg, though."

"You know who might have taken him?"

The gangster shrugged. "Lots of folks. Maybe somebody who needed something fixed couldn't afford to pay an arm or a leg. Sick folk can get mighty desperate."

"These are desperate times," Sullivan agreed. Detroit was better off than most of the country, but even here there were tent cities growing on the fringe. Lots of people were out of work, hungry, and hurting.

Horowitz made a big show of studying Sullivan for a long time. "Maybe not just sick folks get that desperate... Come to think on it, maybe I know somebody else who couldn't afford a Healer, but might need a Healer real bad... Maybe I could tell you something that would help us both out of a jam."

He was looking for an angle, but men like Horowitz always were. "I'm listening," Sullivan said.

"You ever hear that old saying, kill two birds with one stone? You got to find somebody and I don't get to eat sweets because the only Healer in Detroit is gone... and maybe, just maybe I know somebody who might have taken poor old Arthur. Maybe there is this crew mucking around in my area, robbing banks where they shouldn't be, but maybe this crew have been muscle for another group that the Purples don't want to mess with. Maybe this crew works with the Mustache Petes..." Sullivan knew that the Mustache Petes were the Sicilian-born gangsters that ran New York. The word was that Purple gang had an uneasy truce with them. "Maybe this crew was caught robbing a bank and got themselves shot to bits by policemen over Albion way. Maybe they'd be desperate enough to steal a Healer... Maybe this is something I'd like to take care of myself, but my hands are tied on account of business reasons. What do you say to that?"

That's a lot of maybes. The last BI telegram had said the Maplethorpe gang had gotten hit in Albion. They certainly wouldn't be above kidnapping. "That's very... forthcoming of you, Mr. Horowitz. If this crew was to get rolled up by the law they'd be out of your hair."

"You find your man, this other crew goes away. Two birds, one rock. Bam. As long as you never said where you heard it from..."

"Of course. How about you let me know where this crew is and I'll go get your favorite Healer back?"

"Doubt it. Johnny Bones enjoys killin' too much, likes to cut on people so they die slow, and his brother Snowball's damn near as mean. The second he got his crew Mended, Arthur probably died. Let me put the word out. As soon as I know where that crew is I'll be in touch."

Sullivan knew when he'd been dismissed. Horowitz didn't offer to shake on their deal. As far as the gangster was concerned selling out Johnny Bones was like taking the garbage out to the curb for pickup. Sullivan stood to leave.

"One last thing, Mr. Sullivan. When you come up against Johnny, you're gonna have to kill him fast. Shoot him, squish him with your Power, whatever you got to do. Don't try to talk to that crazy Shard. He's sly. He'll cut you to pieces or his crazy brother will freeze you just to watch you shatter like glass. Mark my words. Take them fast or you'll regret it."

* * * * *

Sullivan debated his next move. Mae was still coming up with nothing. If Horowitz was right, Arthur Fordyce was probably already dead. Until he got a lead

on where the Maplethorpes were holed up, he was at a dead end. If Horowitz was wrong, he was wasting his time.

Well, not exactly wasting... Which was why Sullivan's last stop for the evening was at the Detroit office of the Bureau of Investigation. Horowitz wasn't the only man that liked to kill two birds with one stone.

The BI office was near the Fisher Building. The giant art deco skyscraper was impressive, even if they were turning the lights down at night to save money now. It was late, the snow was still falling, and most everyone had gone home for the night, so Sullivan left a note for the agent in charge of the manhunt to contact him.

He got home around 11:00. Sullivan's mind was too spun up to go to sleep, so instead he found himself pulling out a book he'd purchased last year on the history of the First Volunteer. He'd found it a fairly accurate, yet rather dull account of the events in question. To be fair, it would be rather difficult for some academic historian to chronicle the unrelentingly bleak meat grinder of the trenches, the sheer mind-numbing spectacle of Second Somme, or the final march into the blackened ash wasteland that had been Berlin.

Even though Sullivan had been the most decorated soldier in the unit, there was only one picture of him, and it was a group shot of some Spikers taken somewhere in France. All of them were tired, dirty, starving, cold, suffering from dysentery, wearing their rusting Heavy suits, carrying their Lewis guns, and lucky to be alive. The book only had two pages about the Gravity Spikers. That was it. All that fighting, all those sacrifices, condensed into *two* lousy pages, and sadly one of those pages was mostly about his own exploits. He didn't deserve his own page. He'd just been lucky. Of the men in the photo, only ten percent had come home alive.

But it wasn't bitter reminiscence that had caused Sullivan to open the history book. There were photos for most of the officer corps and Sullivan was looking for one in particular. When he found Captain Arthur Fordyce's entry at first Sullivan thought that he'd found the wrong picture... He checked again, just to be sure, and it was correct. Fordyce certainly didn't look like what he'd expected.

Fordyce had to be in his sixties in the picture, and it had been taken back in 1916... Fifteen years ago... *Has it really been that long?* Sullivan had been so young that he'd had to lie about his age to enlist, and he was quite a bit older than Emily Fordyce now. For that reason Sullivan had been expecting a younger man. That was not such an odd thing, especially for a man of Arthur's success, to have such a young beautiful wife.

Too damn young to be a widow.

He fell asleep after midnight, which made it Christmas Eve.

* * * * *

Sullivan checked on Bernie and his cats in the morning, but still nothing from Mae. Bernie said that was a very bad sign, meaning that the target was not in an easy to find state, as in above ground or in one piece. Since he was actually a little worried about Bernie's health, Sullivan made sure to drop off another sandwich.

The BI agent in charge of the manhunt had Sullivan come into the office to talk. Most of the G-men tolerated him, a couple respected him because he was very good at his job, and a few openly despised him for being an ex-con. But like it or not, when it came time to arrest somebody who could bend the laws of physics, Sullivan was damn handy to have around.

The head of the Detroit office was a weasel named Price. He was a ticket-puncher, a man who existed primarily to get promoted. Price loved getting in the papers. Hoover didn't like sharing the spotlight with his underlings, but Sullivan had no doubt that Price would end up in politics as soon as he got an arrest big enough to make headlines.

The agent in charge of the manhunt was a homely fellow by the name of Cowley, fresh off the morning dirigible from D.C. Apparently he was one of Hoover's personal favorites. Which inclined Sullivan to dislike him automatically. Sullivan briefed the agents about what he'd heard, though he was careful never to mention the Purple gang.

Despite looking like he'd be much more comfortable behind a desk, Cowley had listened intently enough that Sullivan had come away suspecting that the agent might actually have a clue about being a decent cop. He also didn't seem dismayed to find out that Sullivan was an Active. Cowley's primary concern was that if Arthur Fordyce was alive, he be returned safely. Price was mostly worried about how the arrest of the Maplethorpes would play in the news, but rescuing a Healer... Sullivan could see the wheels turning there.

Cowley showed him sketches of the members of the crew. He memorized the names and faces, but since none of them were Actives, he wasn't as worried about them. Kidnapping was a local matter, not a federal crime, but both Maplethorpes were on the most wanted list, so it was agreed that if Sullivan helped capture them it would count as two against his quota. He made sure he got that in writing.

* * * * *

The rest of the day was spent chasing leads to nowhere. Nobody had heard anything, and if they had they weren't talking. He placed a telephone call to Mrs. Fordyce to inform her that he was still looking, but had no real progress to report. He'd tried to sound encouraging but failed.

When darkness fell, Jake Sullivan returned to his office to prepare. His magic was ready, Power built up in his chest, just waiting to be used to twist gravity to his will. But Power burned quickly, and once it was gone, it took time to replenish. So that meant guns.

One of the Lewis Mk3 machineguns he'd brought back from France was kept hidden under the floor boards of his office. He dragged the huge weapon out, cleaned and oiled it, and loaded the huge drum magazines from boxes of military .30-06 ammunition. Twenty-six pounds of lethal steel, the Lewis was big, ugly, and effective, sort of like Sullivan. It was a lot of gun, but the BI hadn't specified that the Maplethorpes needed to be taken alive.

He'd fought his whole life. He was good at it. As a soldier for his country, as an inmate for survival, and now as a... *what am I?* Somebody who didn't know anything else? A slave to the G-men? *No.* It was better if he told himself that he

was doing this one for a young widow and to avenge another First Volunteer. It seemed more pure that way.

The Lewis went into a canvas bag. He went downstairs, ordered a late dinner, and waited. Burning Power was like hard physical exercise, so he treated himself to a real good meal in preparation. Mrs. Brooks was glad for the business and didn't even enquire about why the usually frugal Sullivan suddenly seemed to be Mr. Big Spender. A ten year old serving as a Purple gang runner showed up while he was polishing off his coffee, gave him a note, and took off.

Sullivan read the address, finished his drink, put out his smoke, and left a generous tip. It was time again to go to war.

* * * * *

The address was for an auto parts factory on Piquette. Like many other businesses in the area, it had recently been shut down and the workers laid off. He parked a block away and went in on foot. Between the lousy weather, the fact that most of the surrounding businesses were closed, and that it was late Christmas Eve meant that there wasn't anyone around. Regular folks were eating hams, singing carols clustered around the fire, or some such thing, not spying on an abandoned factory through a hole in a fence.

After an hour of miserable cold a blue Dodge rolled up to the back door and a man got out carrying grocer's bags. The lights of the city reflected off the snow clouds enough to give him plenty of pink light to see by. He recognized the lean, broad-shouldered fellow making his way to the back door from one of the sketches Agent Cowley had shown him as one Bruno Hauptmann, a German immigrant and member of the gang. This was the hideout, all right. Hauptmann was walking with a bad limp. He knocked on the back door and a few seconds later it opened and he disappeared inside.

Location confirmed, he debated calling the BI. There was strength in numbers, but the only person Jake Sullivan trusted was Jake Sullivan. The G-men would probably just get in his way, but at the same time, if he got killed, he didn't want the kidnapping trash to escape. Finally, caution won out and he hurried back to the phone booth he'd parked by. The switchboard put him through to Cowley. He gave them the scoop, then reminded the G-man to make sure the rest of his boys knew not to shoot at him. The cavalry was on the way.

But he'd never been the type to wait around for cavalry. Sullivan removed the Lewis Gun from his car and headed back to the factory.

They might be watching through the long row of windows, so best to move quick. He reached the fence, and using just enough Power to lighten himself, leapt cleanly over the barrier. The door was solid by any measure, but not built to withstand someone like him. Not even pausing, Sullivan lifted one big boot and kicked the door wide open. The interior was dim, lit only by a single shielded lantern. Hauptman and another man with one arm in a sling were caught flatfooted just inside, stuffing candy bars in their faces.

Sullivan leveled the machinegun at them. "Hands up."

“Cops!” The stranger went for the revolver stuck in his waistband. Sullivan moved the gaping round muzzle over and simply shot him dead. The body hit the cold concrete without so much as a twitch.

The .30-06 had been deafening against the metal machinery surrounding them. Ears ringing, he turned the gun back on Hauptmann. “Your friend was an idiot. Let’s try that again.” Terrified, the kidnapper reached for the ceiling. “Better.” Sullivan looked down the rows of darkened machines, but there was no sign of anyone else inside. He picked up the lantern and lifted the cover, filling the space with light. Sullivan walked around a big hydraulic press. There were several mattresses and blankets on the floor, but the rest of the gang was out.

Damn. “Where’s Fordyce?”

“Who?” Hauptmann asked.

“Don’t play stupid.” Sullivan concentrated. Using Power in big bursts was easy, fine control took more concentration. He gave Hauptmann another two gravities. The German grimaced and stumbled against the wall. “Talk. Where is he?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“You wanna end up a pancake?” Sullivan dropped one more gravity on him. Hauptmann screamed as bones creaked. “Don’t be a baby. I do pushups in that.” The kidnapper was surely feeling it. “Where’s the Healer?”

“I don’t—” Hauptmann’s head sprayed red as the window behind him shattered.

Sullivan instinctively flung himself to the floor. A muzzle flashed outside as someone worked a Tommy gun across the glass. He needed cover, fast. There was a thick steel plate leaning against the hydraulic press. With no time for finesse, he grabbed the plate, surged his Power so hard that it felt light as a feather and jerked it around to use as a shield.

Sullivan cursed himself for turning up the lights. *Dummy.* The others must have returned and seen them inside. Bruno Hauptmann was a few feet away, missing a chunk of skull, just staring at him while his brains leaked out. At least that guy’s kidnapping days were surely over.

The bullets kept on hitting the plate in a seemingly never ending stream of hot lead. They’d get tired soon. Sullivan checked his pocket watch. Cowley’s men should be here any minute. Then he noticed the time.

Well, Merry Christmas to me.

* * * * *

The BI rolled up, ready for a fight. They just hadn’t expected the fight to be ready for them. The first car to arrive was hit immediately. Bullets pierced the radiator, the windows, but luckily not the two agents inside, who bailed out, took cover behind their vehicle and returned fire. A Detroit police car arrived from the opposite direction thirty seconds later. It too took fire from a member of the Maplethorpe gang armed with a stolen BAR. Within a minute two other cars had arrived, and the street collapsed into the a chaotic gun battle that the morning papers would describe as the Detroit Christmas Massacre.

However, Special Agent Sam Cowley was not thinking about how this would play out in the media. That was his bosses’ job. Cowley was too busy being pinned down behind the rapidly disintegrating engine block of his car as an automatic

weapon poked holes in it. The Maplethorpe gang had a reputation for using overwhelming force during their robberies, which is what made them such high profile targets. Most of them were vets of the Great War—from both sides—and they knew how to work together. The responding officers were outmatched as the gang moved out of the factory’s parking area, using the low brick walls for cover, taking turns shooting while the others moved or reloaded.

A nearby officer cried out and dropped his pistol. The gun metal gleamed with ice crystals. Cowley gasped in pain as he was hit with a surge of unbelievable cold. Snowball was attacking. Cowley rolled out from under the car but couldn’t spot the Active. He got a bead on one of the gang and emptied his .38 at him. He couldn’t tell if he’d struck the man or not since he ducked behind the factory wall and disappeared.

There was an unholy scream. Cowley turned to see that Johnny Bones had flanked them. The Shard ripped his claws free from an officer’s belly, then he came at Cowley, grinning, his skull flowing and twisting under his skin. Terrified, the agent broke open his revolver, punched out the empties, and tried to reload with numb, shivering, fingers. Johnny Bones aimed his Thompson at Cowley.

Then it was as if someone had thrown an invisible lasso around the Shard and yanked him sideways. Johnny flew through the air and collided violently with a light pole. The Tommy Gun clattered away. The Shard got up slowly as his bones returned to their normal shape. “Kill the Heavy!” he ordered.

The parolee, Sullivan, burst through the window and rolled through the snow as a wave of force tossed the criminals every which way. Sullivan rose, cutting down his enemies like an avenging angel, wielding a giant black rifle that ripped an unending stream of thunder.

“The big one’s on our side!” Cowley shouted.

Sullivan ducked. The wall above him was instantly frosted over. Even from across the street Cowley could see the ice particles striking the Heavy, but the Icebox was behind cover and he didn’t have a shot. But cover didn’t matter to Sullivan. Grimacing through the frostbite, he focused in on the Icebox’s position and Snowball Maplethorpe *fell* into the sky. Sullivan calmly shouldered his machinegun, like a sportsman shooting waterfowl, and blasted the Icebox out of the air.

“*Mikey!*” Jonny Bones shrieked as his brother was riddled with bullets. Sullivan must have cut his Power, because Snowball dropped back to the Earth, to lay crumpled, staining the snow pink. “You son of a bitch!” Bones took a few steps forward, then realized that the rest of his gang was in a bad way. The Shard turned and ran down the street.

Sullivan dropped his now-empty machinegun and took off after Johnny Bones. Cowley closed the cylinder on his Smith & Wesson and aimed at the fleeing Shard. “Stop,” Sullivan ordered, and as the big man ran past he said, “We need one alive.”

* * * * *

He’d fought a Shard in Rockville once. Just another punk with a chip on his shoulder, thinking that if he could off the toughest guy on the block that would

somehow make him king. Sullivan had ended his life, just like all the idiots before him, and all that came after, but it had been a valuable learning experience.

Shard magic worked on a biological level. Their skin was remarkably tough and elastic, their bones could change shape and density as they desired. They were rare, and loathed by the public, considered disgusting freaks... Sullivan felt bad for them, but that was still no excuse for kidnapping. Disfiguring magic or not, Johnny Bones was done.

A police car roared into the next intersection, sirens blaring. Johnny slid to a stop in the middle of the street. He looked around, but there was nowhere left to run. He saw Sullivan coming with a .45 raised in one hand. Desperate, Johnny spread his arms wide. "I ain't got no gun. You gonna shoot me down like a dog in the street, Heavy?" His breath came out in a cloud of steam.

"Where's Arthur Fordyce?"

"You killed my brother!" Johnny struck himself in the chest. "Come on, finish it. I ain't going to Rockville and I ain't going to the chair."

Sullivan's Power had burned too hard for him to do anything fancy with it. He didn't dare try the trick he'd done to Hauptmann. He'd probably just accidentally splatter Johnny all over Detroit. "Tell me what you did to Fordyce."

Johnny Bones started walking toward Sullivan. "If you don't got the balls to shoot me down like a man..." The Shard's fingers were suddenly twice as long as normal and ended in points like needles. "I'll just take you with me."

Sullivan sensed that there were G-men coming up behind him. "Hold your fire and stay out of this," Sullivan ordered, and even though he wasn't in charge of these men in any way, when he used his sergeant's voice, men knew not to question. None of the cops said a word as Sullivan put his Colt back in the holster. "I'll kill you clean, Johnny, but not until you tell me what I want to know."

The Shard swung. His Power-fueled body was a killing instrument. Sullivan ducked away, narrowly avoiding the claws. Johnny slid sideways as Sullivan twisted gravity, but his own Power was overheated and scattered. It lacked force, and Sullivan couldn't risk giving him a good spike without killing the man. Sullivan raised his fists and the two Actives circled, looking for an opening.

Johnny came at him with a flurry of potentially lethal jabs. It would have been intimidating to anyone else. Calm, Sullivan timed it, cocked his fist back, and slammed the Shard square in the face. Johnny's entire skull seemed to squish to one side. He reeled away and Sullivan saw his chance. He slugged Johnny again and again. The Shard wasn't the only one with a magically hardened body, but Sullivan's came from years of exercising in increased gravity until his bones were dense as stone, and now he used them to beat Johnny *down*.

He pressed the attack and drove a fist deep into Johnny's guts, knocking the air right out of his opponent. "Not used to somebody who can fight back, huh?" When Johnny went to his knees, Sullivan circled, came from behind, wrapped one arm around Jonny's throat and used the other to pin the Shard's elbows to his side. Sullivan hoisted the much smaller man into the air and choked the shit out of him. "*Where's Fordyce?*" he shouted in Johnny's ear.

There was a sudden piercing heat through Sullivan's left forearm. He grunted and let go, stepping away as the bone spike pulled through his muscle. Blood came gushing from the wound and splattered the snow. Johnny raised his arm. A

narrow shard had extruded from Johnny's elbow and it was painted red. Sullivan looked at the hole in his arm. "Haven't seen that before."

"You killed my brother, you bastard..." Johnny gasped, blood running freely from his nose and down his shirt. He charged and Sullivan struck him square in the throat. Johnny hit the ground with a gurgle.

"Yeah. Your Power don't do much for the soft bits... Where's Fordyce?"

Johnny Bones' face was purple as he staggered to his feet. "I don't know who you're yappin' about. You keep saying that name. Means nothing to me."

"The Healer you kidnapped."

Johnny stopped and started to laugh like Sullivan had just said the funniest thing ever. "Him? You think I took *him*?" The laugh grew harsh and desperate. Johnny knew his time was up. "You been played, Heavy. Check my boys. We ain't had no Mending..."

The man he'd shot in the factory... His arm had been in a sling. Hauptmann had been walking with a bad limp. This crew had never had a Healer... Sullivan had played the chump.

People had come out from somewhere into the street to see what was going on, kept back only by the circle of lawmen. They stood there, two Actives, having fought like gladiators for the crowd. Sullivan surveyed the cops and the witnesses, sighed, and let his injured arm hang limp at his side.

The Shard faced him, eyes desperate, seething with Power as more stabbing chunks of bones stretched his skin. Nothing left to use, he was going to burn it all. Misshapen and jagged, Johnny no longer looked human.

"Stand down, Shard. It don't have to be like this." Sullivan drew his .45.

"Maybe before you used my brother as skeet... Ain't got nothing to live for now."

Johnny Bones bellowed as he charged. Sullivan extended his hand and fired three times.

* * * * *

Sullivan gave the BI his statement. He got read the riot act by Special Agent in Charge Price, who was more upset about having to talk to the bloodthirsty press than he was that three police officers had been severely wounded. It was going to take some spin to say that a running gun battle in the streets was a good thing, but at least he did have a pile of dead gangsters to show for it. Surprisingly, Agent Cowley stuck up for Sullivan, said that they'd been unprepared for how much firepower the Maplethorpes had brought to bear, and that they shouldn't have driven right into a bullet storm.

Sullivan was kicking himself for calling the BI to begin with—he should have just handled it himself—but he was even more mad that he'd been set up. They plugged the hole in his arm and wrapped it in a bandage. Just a new scar to join the constellation of old scars... There would be no fancy Healings on the taxpayer's dime for some dumb Heavy.

Cowley had come up to him at one point and thanked him for saving his life. Sullivan wasn't used to gratitude from official types and didn't really know what to say in return. The exhausted agent took a seat across from him. "Sure has been one heck of a night. Not just for us, but all over town... Sounds like one of your

local gangs decided to clean house too. One of them Purples got hit. Abe Something-witz.”

“Horowitz?”

“That’s the name. Tough guy from what I was told. Had to be an inside job since they got him at home. No sign of forced entry, so he let them in. Pow. Single bullet right in the back of the head. Found him in the kitchen with a bottle of wine open and a glass in each hand.”

Sullivan clammed up on the topic. Cowley thanked him again for saving his life and left to send a report to his superiors. Then after another few hours of answering the same questions over and over again, Sullivan was free to go.

About damn time. He had questions of his own that need to be answered.

* * * * *

“Mae found your body. You owe me twenty-five bucks and a present.”

Sullivan was in a phone booth not far from the police station. “Dead or alive?”

“Not just dead, but sliced into pieces dead,” Bernie answered. “That’s why it took Mae so long to find him.”

Sullivan groaned and rested his forehead on the cold glass. It had all been for nothing. “Where?”

“All over the city. Five, maybe six different places so far. Maybe more she hasn’t found yet, but I told her that was good enough. Mae found the first piece in a deli uptown. She says most of him had already been eaten.”

Chopped into pieces and... “Did you say *eaten*?”

“Yeah. Of course. People ate him.”

What kind of sickos was he dealing with here? “Bernie, you’re telling me somebody chopped up Arthur and *ate* him?”

“Yeah... Why’s that so weird?” Bernie chuckled. Sullivan didn’t see what was so damn funny, since there was a gang of cannibal lunatics on the loose in Detroit. “Huh... Arthur. That’s a funny name for a porker.”

“Porker?” Fordyce hadn’t been fat.

“Porker. Pig. You know, oink oink, pink with a curly tail... Oh... Wait... Mae says he was one of the white with brown spots kind.”

The blood in Fordyce’s car... He hadn’t given Bernie any details about the case, just asked him to find the body that the blood had come from. “Thanks, Bernie,” Sullivan mumbled as he returned the earphone to the cradle.

* * * * *

The Fordyce home was the nicest one on a very nice street. The sun hadn’t been up for very long when Sullivan arrived, left arm bandaged and throbbing, to bang on the door. The butler tried to shoo him away, but Sullivan pushed his way inside and told the man in no uncertain terms what would happen if he didn’t get Mrs. Fordyce. The butler threatened to call the police. Sullivan said good.

After being escorted into the study, he took a seat on an overstuffed couch and waited, reading the spines of the hundreds of books on the walls. The collection made him envious. Emily Fordyce joined him a few minutes later, still tying the

waist sash of an oriental silk robe. Her hair was undone and hung to her shoulders.

“Late night?” he asked.

“Yes, I’ve just been so worried.” But they both knew that’s why she hadn’t gotten much sleep. “Have you any news?”

Sullivan shook his head. “You’re a real piece of work, lady.”

Emily stopped. “Why... Whatever do you mean?”

“You can drop the act. I know I’m not the one that did *all* the killing last night. So how long have you known Horowitz? Must have been long enough that he wasn’t scared to turn his back on you.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You sent me to Horowitz. He sent me to Bones, who was such a rabid dog that you figured there was no way he’d be taken alive for questioning. Horowitz wanted him gone and Bones was as good a scapegoat as you’d ever find. Then you shot Horowitz because the only way two people can keep a secret is if one of them’s dead.”

The shocked expression that briefly crossed her lovely face said that he’d gotten close enough. She tried to play indignant. “How dare you accuse me!” She pointed at the door. “Get out!”

Sullivan stayed planted on the couch. “Why the pig blood?”

“How—” She caught herself too late. Emily’s arm fell. “If you knew Arthur, you’d know that the pig was appropriate. Well, I do say... You are smarter than you look.”

“Just a bit,” Sullivan said. “I’m assuming you had Horowitz stage the crime scene. You don’t strike me as the type that likes getting your own hands dirty.”

Resigned, she walked around behind the ornate desk and flopped into Arthur’s wide rolling chair. “Not usually... The authorities had to declare that Arthur was dead before I could collect his insurance. I wanted to be elsewhere at the time for an alibi.”

Sullivan looked over at the giant painting of Arthur Fordyce hanging over the fireplace. “So, where’s your husband?”

She shrugged. “Argentina, I think. He’s run off again with one of his many mistresses. *Again*. The man’s seventy-five with the libido of an eighteen year old sailor. He does this all the time. He’ll be gone for weeks, sometimes months, before he crawls back, begging forgiveness.”

It was actually more surprising that he was alive than that he was a philanderer. “But why make it look like he was dead if he’s coming back?”

“Timing, Mr. Sullivan, timing. I had to be ready to act as soon as he ran off again. Arthur is declared legally dead. I get the insurance money, which is significant—let me tell you—I clean out the accounts and I leave the country. The jerk comes home to find out he’s dead and broke. Serves him right.”

“If you hated him so much, why didn’t you just leave him?”

“I married that old fool for his money. I just didn’t realize how awful *long* a Healer can stick around.” She rolled her eyes. “I divorce him, I get nothing. It’s hard to poison a Healer slow enough to make it look natural. They just keep making themselves better. Believe me, I thought about just shooting him in the night and blaming it on robbers. The kidnapping was Abe’s idea.”

“How’d you know Horowitz?”

Emily was looking around the desktop for something, suddenly she swept aside a book to reveal a small revolver hidden beneath. “Ah ha!” she shouted as she reached for it. She’d shoot him, say it was self defense or something... but Sullivan’s Power had recovered from last night’s escapade. He slammed multiple gravities down on the little gun. Emily tugged on it, grunting and pulling, but she couldn’t budge it. “Damn you, Heavy!”

“Unless you’re secretly a Brute, you’re not going to lift that piece...” He took out a smoke and struck a match. “So how’d you know Horowitz?”

Red faced, she gave up. “I was a dancer in one of his joints. That’s how I met Arthur... Arthur met lots of girls through Abe. I was just the first one sharp enough to catch him. Ugh... I can’t believe I’m admitting that.”

“I can see why. You do put on a great show.”

“Five years later, the old bastard was still kicking so we hatched this little plot... Timing was perfect, Arthur left again, and there was a crew that Abe wanted gone anyway to blame. Plus they were too stupid to get taken alive, and even if they denied it nobody would believe a filthy Shard. Should have been perfect.”

“Arthur didn’t recommend me at all. Horowitz did.”

“Sure, you and Arthur were in the same unit, but he didn’t know you from Adam. Abe couldn’t tip the cops off without implicating himself. He said you had a killer’s rep and you were motivated to keep the G-men off your back. Two birds, one stone he said.” She gave the revolver one last pensive tug. “So what now?”

“I decide what do with you.”

Emily was thinking hard and that was dangerous. “Abe got greedy, but once the insurance comes in, I’ve still got his share.” She rose from the seat and walked over to Sullivan while untying the sash on her robe. Stopping in front of him, she let the silk hang open, revealing that she wasn’t wearing much of anything underneath. “Poor little me... Defenseless against a big strong man like you. Oh, have mercy, Mr. Sullivan... I can make it worth your time.”

“I bet you could...” Sullivan blew out a cloud of smoke as he examined the dancer’s body. Emily waited, smirking. This was a woman who was used to getting what she wanted. He stood up, gently took the edges of her robe in hand, appeared to think about it for just a second, and then covered her back up before stepping away. “But that would’ve been more tempting if you’d tried to seduce me *before* you tried to shoot me.”

“You no good—“

Sullivan looked toward the ceiling. “Mae! It’s time to go.” There was a sudden blast of wind as something stirred in the room. Emily’s hair whipped wildly and she had to struggle to keep her robe shut. The fireplace popped and sparked as something flew up the chimney and disappeared.

“What was *that*?”

“That’s Mae, a disembodied spirit. I brought her with me. Sweet girl, considering what she looks like. I had her record our talk and she’ll be able to show it to anybody with a Finder.”

“But... No judge will allow that. No jury is going to take the word of a demon, you idiot. You’ve got nothing. I’ll deny this whole thing. You’re a felon and a stupid Heavy. I’m somebody now. Nobody will believe the likes of you!”

“I’m not going to show it to the law, girl. I sent her to the *Purple gang*...” Those two words hung in the air like the smoke from his cigarette. “I’m sure they’re mighty anxious to know who murdered their admiral.”

“No...” Emily sank to her knees. “Oh no.”

“I’ll be keeping your advance because I did solve the case.” Sullivan paused briefly on his way out the door. “And if I were you, I’d start running. Considering those Purple boys, you’re gonna want a head start.”

Outside, he could still hear the screams of frustration and the breaking of furniture but the sounds faded as he walked down the steps to his automobile. He needed to get some sleep, but first he owed Bernie some tin foil.

The snow had really cleaned the air. There were kids running in the road, pulling each other on the sleds they’d just found under the tree. The people next door had built a snowman. It was a beautiful morning. Sure, he’d been tricked, lied to, stabbed, and had killed several men, but they’d had it coming, and he’d knocked two more off of J. Edgar Hoover’s to-do list. So all in all, not too shabby...

As far as Christmases went, he’d had worse.

