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The Last Coyote

Written by Michael Connelly

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**MICHAEL
CONNELLY**

**The
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‘Any thoughts that you’d like to start with?’

‘Thoughts on what?’

‘Well, on anything. On the incident.’

‘On the incident? Yes, I have some thoughts.’

She waited but he didn’t continue. He had decided before he even got to Chinatown that this would be the way he would be. He’d make her have to pull every single word out of him.

‘Could you share them with me, Detective Bosch?’ she finally asked. ‘That is the purpose of—’

‘My thoughts are that this is bullshit. Total bullshit. That’s the purpose. That’s all.’

‘No, wait. How do you mean, bullshit?’

‘I mean, okay, I pushed the guy. I guess I hit him. I’m not sure exactly what happened but I’m not denying anything. So, fine, suspend me, transfer me, take it to a Board of Rights, whatever. But going this way is bullshit. ISL is bullshit. I mean, why do I have to come here three times a week to talk to you like I’m some kind of – you don’t even know me, you don’t know anything about me. Why do I have to talk to you? Why do you have to sign off on this?’

‘Well, the technical answer is right there in your own statement. Rather than discipline you the department wants to treat you. You’ve been placed on involuntary stress leave, which means—’

‘I know what it means and that’s what’s bullshit. Somebody arbitrarily decides I’m under stress and that gives the department the power to keep me off the job indefinitely, or at least until I jump through enough hoops for you.’

‘Nothing about this was arbitrary. It was predicated on your actions, which I think clearly show –’

‘What happened had nothing to do with stress. What it was about was ... never mind. Like I said, it’s bullshit. So why don’t we just cut through it and get to the point. What do I have to do to get back to my job?’

He could see the anger flare behind her eyes. His total disavowal of her science and skill cut to her pride. Quickly the anger was gone, though. Dealing with cops all the time, she had to be used to it.

‘Can’t you see that all of this is for your own welfare? I have to assume the top managers of this department clearly see you as a valued asset or you wouldn’t be here. They’d have put you on a disciplinary track and you’d be on your way out. Instead, they are doing what they can to preserve your career and its incumbent value to the department.’

‘Valued asset? I’m a cop, not an asset. And when you’re out there on the street nobody’s thinking about incumbent value. What does that mean, anyway? Am I going to have to listen to words like that in here?’

She cleared her throat before speaking sternly.

‘You have a problem, Detective Bosch. And it goes far beyond the incident that resulted in your being placed on leave. That’s what these sessions are going to be all about. Do you understand? This incident is not unique. You have had problems before. What I am trying to do, what I have to do before I can sign off on your return to duty in any capacity, is get you to take a look at yourself. What are you doing? What are you about? Why do these problems happen to you? I want these sessions to be an open

dialogue where I ask a few questions and you speak your mind, but with a purpose. Not to harass me and my profession or the leadership of the department. But to talk about you. This is about you in here, no one else.'

Harry Bosch just looked at her silently. He wanted a cigarette but would never ask her if he could smoke. He would never acknowledge in front of her that he had the habit. If he did, she might start talking about oral fixations or nicotine crutches. He took a deep breath instead and looked at the woman on the other side of the desk. Carmen Hinojos was a small woman with a friendly face and manner. Bosch knew she wasn't a bad person. He'd actually heard good things about her from others who had been sent to Chinatown. She was just doing her job here and his anger was not really directed at her. He knew she was probably smart enough to know that, too.

'Look, I'm sorry,' she said. 'I should not have started with that kind of open question. I know that this is an emotional subject with you. Let's try to start again. By the way, you can smoke if you'd like.'

'Is that in the file, too?'

'It's not in the file. It didn't need to be. It's your hand, the way you keep bringing it up to your mouth. Have you been trying to quit?'

'No. But it's a city office. You know the rules.'

It was a thin excuse. He violated that law every day at the Hollywood Station.

'That's not the rule in here. I don't want you to think of this as being part of Parker Center or part of the city. That's the chief reason these offices are away from that. There are no rules like that here.'

'Doesn't matter where we are. You're still working for the LAPD.'

'Try to believe that you are away from the Los Angeles Police Department. When you are in here, try to believe

that you're just coming to see a friend. To talk. You can say anything here.'

But he knew she could not be seen as a friend. Never. There was too much at stake here. Just the same, he nodded once to please her.

'That's not very convincing.'

He hiked his shoulders as if to say it was the best he could do, and it was.

'By the way, if you want I could hypnotize you, get rid of your dependency on nicotine.'

'If I wanted to quit, I could do it. People are either smokers or they're not. I am.'

'Yes. It's perhaps the most obvious symptom of a self-destructive nature.'

'Excuse me, am I on leave because I smoke? Is that what this is about?'

'I think you know what it's about.'

He said nothing else, remembering his decision to say as little as possible.

'Well, let's continue then,' she said. 'You've been on leave ... let's see, Tuesday a week?'

'Right.'

'What have you been doing with your time?'

'Filling out FEMA forms mostly.'

'FEMA?'

'My house was red-tagged.'

'The earthquake was three months ago. Why have you waited?'

'I've been busy. I've been working.'

'I see. Did you have insurance?'

'Don't say "I see," because you don't. You couldn't possibly see things the way I do. The answer is no, no insurance. Like most everybody else, I was living in denial. Isn't that what you people call it? I bet you had insurance.'

'Yes. How bad was your house hit?'

‘Depends on who you ask. The city inspectors say it’s totaled and I can’t even go inside. I think it’s fine. Just needs some work. They know me by name at Home Depot now. And I’ve had contractors do some of it. It’ll be done soon and I’ll appeal the red tag. I’ve got a lawyer.’

‘You’re living there still?’

He nodded.

‘Now that’s denial, Detective Bosch. I don’t think you should be doing that.’

‘I don’t think you have any say about what I do outside my job with the department.’

She raised her hands in a hands-off manner.

‘Well, while I don’t condone it, I suppose it serves its purpose. I think it’s good that you have something to keep you occupied. Though I’d much rather it be a sport or a hobby or maybe plans for a trip out of town, I think it’s important to keep busy, to keep your mind off the incident.’

Bosch smirked.

‘What?’

‘I don’t know. Everybody keeps calling it the incident. It kind’ve reminds me of how people called it the Vietnam conflict, not the war.’

‘Then what would you call what happened?’

‘I don’t know. But incident ... it sounds like ... I don’t know. Antiseptic. Listen, Doctor, let’s go back a minute. I don’t want to take a trip out of town, okay? My job is in homicide. It’s what I do. And I’d really like to get back to it. I might be able to do some good, you know.’

‘If the department lets you.’

‘If you do. You know it’s going to be up to you.’

‘Perhaps. Do you notice that you speak of your job as if it’s a mission of some sort?’

‘That’s about right. Like the Holy Grail.’

He said it with sarcasm. This was getting intolerable and it was only the first session.

‘Is it? Do you believe your mission in life is to solve murders, to put bad people in jail?’

He used the shoulder hike to say he didn’t know. He stood up and walked to the window and looked down on Hill Street. The sidewalks were crowded with pedestrians. Every time he had been down here they were crowded. He noticed a couple of Caucasian women walking along. They stood out in the sea of Asian faces like raisins in rice. They passed the window of a Chinese butcher shop and Bosch saw a row of smoked ducks hanging whole, by their necks.

Farther up the road he saw the Hollywood Freeway overpass, the dark windows of the old sheriff’s jail and the Criminal Courts building behind it. To the left of that he could see the City Hall tower. Black construction tarps hung around the top floors. It looked like some kind of mourning gesture but he knew the tarps were to hold debris from falling while earthquake repairs were made. Looking past City Hall, Bosch could see the Glass House. Parker Center, police headquarters.

‘Tell me what your mission is,’ Hinojos said quietly from behind him. ‘I’d like to hear you put it in words.’

He sat back down and tried to think of a way to explain himself but finally just shook his head.

‘I can’t.’

‘Well, I want you to think about that. Your mission. What is it really? Think about that.’

‘What’s your mission, Doctor?’

‘That’s not our concern here.’

‘Of course it is.’

‘Look, Detective, this is the only personal question I will answer. These dialogues are not to be about me. They are about you. My mission, I believe, is to help the men

and women of this department. That's the narrow focus. And by doing that, on a grander scale I help the community, I help the people of this city. The better the cops are that we have out on the street, the better we all are. The safer we all are. Okay?'

'That's fine. When I think about my mission, do you want me to shorten it to a couple sentences like that and rehearse it to the point that it sounds like I'm reading out of the dictionary?'

'Mr – uh, Detective Bosch, if you want to be cute and contentious the whole time, we are not going to get anywhere, which means you are not going to get back to your job anytime soon. Is that what you're looking for here?'

He raised his hands in surrender. She looked down at the yellow legal pad on the desk. With her eyes off him, he was able to study her. Carmen Hinojos had tiny brown hands she kept on the desk in front of her. No rings on either hand. She held an expensive-looking pen in her right hand. Bosch always thought expensive pens were used by people overly concerned with image. But maybe he was wrong about her. She wore her dark brown hair tied back. She wore glasses with thin tortoiseshell frames. She should have had braces when she was a kid but didn't. She looked up from the pad and their eyes locked.

'I am told this inci – this ... situation coincided with or was close to the time of the dissolving of a romantic relationship.'

'Told by who?'

'It's in the background material given to me. The sources of this material are not important.'

'Well, they are important because you've got bad sources. It had nothing to do with what happened. The dissolving, as you call it, was almost three months ago.'

'The pain of these things can last much longer than that.'

I know this is personal and may be difficult but I think we should talk about this. The reason is that it will help give me a basis for your emotional state at the time the assault took place. Is that a problem?’

Bosch waved her on with his hand.

‘How long did this relationship last?’

‘About a year.’

‘Marriage?’

‘No.’

‘Was it talked about?’

‘No, not really. Never out in the open.’

‘Did you live together?’

‘Sometimes. We both kept our places.’

‘Is the separation final?’

‘I think so.’

Saying it out loud seemed to be the first time Bosch acknowledged that Sylvia Moore was gone from his life for good.

‘Was this separation by mutual agreement?’

He cleared his throat. He didn’t want to talk about this but he wanted it over with.

‘I guess you could say it was mutual agreement, but I didn’t know about it until she was packed. You know, three months ago we were holding each other in bed while the house was shaking apart on the pad. You could say she was gone before the aftershocks ended.’

‘They still haven’t.’

‘Just a figure of speech.’

‘Are you saying the earthquake was the cause of the breakup of this relationship?’

‘No, I’m not saying that. All I’m saying is that’s when it happened. Right after. She’s a teacher up in the Valley and her school got wrecked. The kids were moved to other schools and the district didn’t need as many teachers. They offered sabbaticals and she took one. She left town.’

‘Was she scared of another earthquake or was she scared of you?’

She looked pointedly at him.

‘Why would she be scared of me?’

He knew he sounded a little too defensive.

‘I don’t know. I’m just asking questions. Did you give her a reason to be scared?’

Bosch hesitated. It was a question he had never really touched on in his private thoughts about the breakup.

‘If you mean in a physical way, no, she wasn’t scared and I gave her no reason to be.’

Hinojos nodded and wrote something on her pad. It bothered Bosch that she would make a note about this.

‘Look, it’s got nothing to do with what happened at the station last week.’

‘Why did she leave? What was the real reason?’

He looked away. He was angry. This was how it was going to be. She would ask whatever she wanted. Invade him wherever there was an opening.

‘I don’t know.’

‘That answer is not acceptable in here. I think you do know, or at least have your own beliefs as to why she would leave. You must.’

‘She found out who I was.’

‘She found out who you were, what does that mean?’

‘You’d have to ask her. She said it. But she’s in Venice. The one in Italy.’

‘Well, then what do you think she meant by it?’

‘It doesn’t matter what I think. She’s the one who said it and she’s the one who left.’

‘Don’t fight me, Detective Bosch. Please. There is nothing I want more than for you to get back to your job. As I said, that’s my mission. To get you back there if you can go. But you make it difficult by being difficult.’

'Maybe that's what she found out. Maybe that's who I am.'

'I doubt the reason is as simplistic as that.'

'Sometimes I don't.'

She looked at her watch and leaned forward, dissatisfaction with the session showing on her face.

'Okay, Detective, I understand how uncomfortable you are. We're going to move on, but I suspect we will have to come back to this issue. I want you to give it some thought. Try to put your feelings into words.'

She waited for him to say something but he didn't.

'Let's try talking about what happened last week again. I understand it stemmed from a case involving the murder of a prostitute.'

'Yes.'

'It was brutal?'

'That's just a word. Means different things to different people.'

'True, but taking its meaning to you, was it a brutal homicide?'

'Yes, it was brutal. I think almost all of them are. Somebody dies, it's brutal. For them.'

'And you took the suspect into custody?'

'Yes, my partner and I. I mean, no. He came in voluntarily to answer questions.'

'Did this case affect you more than, say, other cases have in the past?'

'Maybe, I don't know.'

'Why would that be?'

'You mean why did I care about a prostitute? I didn't. Not more than any other victim. But in homicide there is one rule that I have when it comes to the cases I get.'

'What is that rule?'

'Everybody counts or nobody counts.'

'Explain it.'

'Just what I said. Everybody counts or nobody counts. That's it. It means I bust my ass to make a case whether it's a prostitute or the mayor's wife. That's my rule.'

'I understand. Now, let's go to this specific case. I'm interested in hearing your description of what happened after the arrest and the reasons you may have for your violent actions at the Hollywood Division.'

'Is this being taped?'

'No, Detective, whatever you tell me is protected. At the end of these sessions I will simply make a recommendation to Assistant Chief Irving. The details of the sessions will never be divulged. The recommendations I make are usually less than half a page and contain no details from the dialogues.'

'You wield a lot of power with that half page.'

She didn't respond. Bosch thought for a moment while looking at her. He thought he might be able to trust her but his natural instinct and experience was that he should trust no one. She seemed to know his dilemma and waited him out.

'You want to hear my side of it?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Okay, I'll tell you what happened.'