

## **File #015**

### **The Arsonist**

**Report by: Detective Rick O'Malley**

**Location: Cleveland, Ohio**

It was a dark and cold night in Cleveland. The city had got caught in the middle of a severe snowstorm which struck most of the northern states. Michigan had gotten twenty inches of snow the day earlier as did Indiana and Illinois which were quickly devastated by the snow storm as by the time the storm ended the storm had claimed over eighty lives in the three states with several dozen people still missing and little did people realize that things would soon only get worse.

The snowstorm had damaged a lot of buildings and telephone lines and most people living in Cleveland were also without power but on this one gloomy afternoon did the trouble really begin. The police and emergency personnel had been cleaning and shoveling the snow off the streets when one of the officers received a call.

“Hey what’s going on?” one officer asked the first officer who received the call.

“Hey Ted, you wouldn’t believe this we just received a bomb threat saying that exactly in one hour that the person would blow up the old Joe’s neighborhood market,” the first officer replied.

“You must be joking Josh. Why would anyone want to bomb a grocery store that has been closed down for years?” Officer Ted Mills replied. Ted was a short bald middle-aged pale looking white man who had light blonde hair and dark brown eyes. Ted had been with the police department for ten years and most of those years he had been working as a traffic officer.

“No Ted. I am not joking. We just received word that somebody did call it in. I’m going to check it out,” Officer Josh Drew said. Josh was a taller and younger white male who was nowhere as pale as Ted was. Josh had dark black hair and equally dark brown eyes and had just started with the department six months earlier.

“Alright I’m going with you Josh,” Ted said as the two officers quickly left for the old Joe’s neighborhood market. It didn’t take the two officers but a few minutes to arrive at the old abandoned store as the old store was only a few blocks away from where they were shoveling snow.

“Well it looks alright to me,” Josh said to Ted as they looked at the store for several minutes and Ted who waited a moment before agreeing finally agreed and a moment right before the two officers could get back into their car the old grocery store blew up right in front of them.

“What the heck,” Ted and Josh said together as they stood in disbelief as they watched the building burn.

“We need firefighters out here as soon as possible. I repeat we need firefighters as a building just exploded into flames. Suspected cause is arson,” Josh said over his radio as the dispatcher immediately informed the fire chief of what happened. The two offices waited for several moments until several firefighters got to the scene before the officers got another disturbing call.

“Not a another bomb threat,” Ted said.

“I am afraid so,” the fire chief replied.

“How many does that make it now?” Josh asked.

“Way too many. Call the Early Detective Agency. We have a serial arsonist here and will need their help,” the fire chief told the two officers as they quickly radioed in the call.

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It was a quite morning as Emma and I decided to try to arrive at the office before anyone else did and for the first few minutes we thought we had arrived first but much to our disappointment Charles arrived at the office an hour before we did. He had been expecting us for as soon as he received a call from the Cleveland Fire and Police Departments asking for help in helping them catching a serial arsonist.

“I see you two have made it rather early. Rather unusual I say,” Charles said.

“Yes Charles, Rick and I needed to do some research before the day got started,” Emma replied.

“Well I hate to break it to you. Your day has already got started so whatever it was you were going to research it would have to wait,” Charles said calmly.

“Where are we going to then Charles?” I asked.

“We are going to Cleveland and helping the firefighters and police there find out who is burning down buildings. When I received the call early this morning the fire chief told me that they already had several suspicious burnings with two of them occurring last night. One of the buildings burnt down was an abandoned grocery store but the other burning was a residence and that arson attack left a family of three dead,” Charles said.

“Did anyone see anything?” I asked again.

“It was still snowing a little when the buildings burst into flames and though no one seen a thing the suspect apparently left short recordings at each site,” Charles said.

“Short messages? Written. Taped and how short,” I asked.

“The recordings are only a few seconds long as the suspect doesn’t say much. He only says a few words and from what I heard over the phone it sounds like he is giving them a message piece by piece but as he lays out each piece he burns another building,” Charles said.

“Does each piece give a clue to where he might strike next,” I asked.

“Not from what I’ve heard and I’ll be honest I really didn’t get to hear it very well. When I tried to listen for some reason my radio cut off several times but when we get there I’ll ask the fire chief to let you two listen, on their devices and see what you think. My radio is old and it might finally be biting the dust,” Charles said. “Now we need to hurry the chief will be expecting us for later in the evening.” We quickly got our things together as we took the first flight to Cleveland.

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The storm that struck Cleveland and the rest of Ohio seemed to stall over the state as it kept pouring down several feet of snow and covering most of the streets and highways in snow and ice. Most people stayed in their homes using candle lights and their fireplaces for warmth and light as most people were without power. Several telephone and electric poles were frozen stiff and knocked down onto the ground snapping several wires into many different directions and causing several small fires to burst out. The firefighters and police officers who were on duty found it difficult to go anywhere or respond to any calls as most of the streets were closed and several of the bridges had went out.

“Lieutenant Moss, with the weather is as bad as it is how could anyone get out there and burn down another building,” one of the younger officers asked. Lieutenant Moss was an older dark colored man who had thin dark hair, dark brown eyes and a neatly trimmed mustache. Lieutenant Moss was extremely strong and was known in the department as ‘The Survivor’ as he had survived despite being shot and nearly killed on eight different occasions. Lieutenant Moss looked at the officer for a moment not angry at the young man for asking but because the serial arsonist yet again burnt down another building despite the severe storm and this time the attack killed an older couple.

“I don’t know but this guy seems to be awfully glad as he is taunting us about it,” the lieutenant said as he turned and began yelling to himself angrily.

“Lieutenant we have another call,” another officer said quietly.

“Who is it?” the lieutenant asked.

“It’s the suspect again sir. He claims he burnt down another house yet again,” the officer said.

“Turn up the volume. I want to hear it on the speaker,” the lieutenant said loudly. The officer wasted no time in turning the speaker volume so Lieutenant Moss and the captains could hear the threatening message of the arsonist.

“The first was an abandoned grocery store, the second was an apartment, and the third was an older home in the downtown area but what building will I strike next? Since you will never guess I will tell you. The building I will strike next will be on the street whose number you’ll find on the top of a face of a clock and the building I will blow up will have an address that ends in the numbers 00,” the voice of the arsonist said before the message ended.

“What does that mean sir?” the officer asked. “I was never good with riddles.”

“That is why you are a traffic officer and not a detective. The number at the top of a clock face is twelve. So, he will be attacking a building on Twelfth Street whose address ends in 00,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“Yes sir but it can be any one of them. On Twelfth Street there are thirteen buildings whose addresses end in 00,” another officer said.

“You’re right but I know the arsonist would waste his time in sending us a message unless his next target was something specific. I used to work with the fire department dealing with cases such as this and the arsonist always start off small and then start getting more aggressive so chances are the building he chose for his next attack will have some significance,” Lieutenant Moss replied.

“Sir, do you mean something like this? I guarantee you this has a lot of significance. Look at the address of 1200 Twelfth Street. It is the bank for most of the downtown area,” the second officer said.

“That’s just great. With the snow pouring down as fast as it is and the streets being closed we’re stuck here. I do wonder how he is burning the buildings to the ground without being spotted in this weather,” Lieutenant Moss said to himself. “I do hope my friend Charles Early and his associates are alright.”

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Our flight to Cleveland had been delayed for several hours as the storm passed over most of Ohio and Pennsylvania. The storm had seemed to increase in size and there didn’t appear to be any end in sight as the three of us watched the airport television.

“We have a news break,” the announcer said as the television started showing us shots of Cleveland. We couldn’t believe it but somehow the arsonist managed to blow up another building even during the storm. “Just several minutes ago an anonymous source sent us this film of the downtown area as one of the city’s main banks was caught on the film blowing up suddenly and burning to the ground rather quickly and in fact it was so quick that by the time the firefighters managed to get there the bank was nothing but burnt ashes.”

“That’s very unusual,” Charles said quietly.

“The arsonist must also be using a special type of chemical which is causing the buildings to burn rather quickly despite the storm,” I said calmly.

“How can anyone get such chemicals without being detected and even if they could where they would get them?” Emma asked.

“Those are very good questions Emma and ones we will need answered as soon as we get to Cleveland,” Charles said as we continued to watch the television as an airport attendant approached us.

“Good news you three my boss said that the storm should be out of the area within the next two hours and when it does he will personally fly you three to Cleveland. Let me know if there is anything we also can do for you,” the attendant said.

“Thanks,” Charles said quietly as the airport attendant went back to the front desk.

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Police in Cleveland were baffled yet again as the arsonist seeming struck at will despite the city going through a bad snowstorm. The storm had slowed down drastically as very small flakes started falling onto the ground so slowly it was as though it wasn’t snowing at all. Lieutenant Moss and several officers managed to get out of the station and by the time they did they were horrified to find that the bank had been burnt down.

“What are we going to do sir? Most of the evidence that might give us a clue to whoever is committing these crimes have probably been now ruined by the snow and ice,” one of the officers asked.

“You’re right. Most of the evidence is under snow and by the time we get to each crime scene the evidence will have been contaminated. I only wish Charles and his two partners were here. He and his wife were extremely good at solving these types of cases, but she died many years ago and now he has two new partners who are just as good I hear,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“I hope so. This is starting to bug me,” the officer said.

“Me too,” Lieutenant Moss replied. “Me too.”

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We were extremely pleased when we were told that we were about to leave for Cleveland. Captain Mark Johnson was originally from Cleveland and he was more than anxious to get there so we could hopefully catch the arsonist.

“I tell you the more that time goes by the more I worry for my family. I don’t want some sociopathic arsonist killing my family,” Captain Johnson said. Captain Johnson was a taller man who appeared to be in his mid-forties. He had dark blonde hair and hazel colored eyes and he had a short beard as well. “The arsonist is striking random targets and the buildings just burn so quickly it’s so unreal.”

“I am not so sure that he is attacking random targets, but we’ll find out for sure when we get there,” Emma said.

“What do you mean by that?” I asked.

“Well Rick if the arsonist is using a special chemical which causes the fire to burn more quickly that means he intends to utterly destroy his target which could be a sign of a personal vendetta,” Emma replied.

“True Emma but before we make any assumptions we need to get to Cleveland and find out the details and see if there is any physical evidence that can help us. These short recordings aren’t giving me any sense of what is happening,” Charles said as we boarded the plane.

“The quicker we get there the better,” I began.

“You said a mouth full detective and I promise I will get you there as quickly as humanely possible,” Captain Johnson said.

“We appreciate that,” Charles said.

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We were glad that we were finally heading to Cleveland. All that I could think about was the case involving the arsonist. Many questions were being asked but very few answers were being given at the moment I quietly said to myself. Emma slept for the most part during the flight while Charles read as he usually did on flights. The flight to Cleveland took us several hours and when we arrived we were greeted by two young officers.

“Ah, you finally made it you three have been expected. I’m Officer Stacy and this is my partner Officer Brown,” the first officer said. Officer Stacy was a tall dark colored man who had neatly braided hair and dark brown eyes. Officer Stacy had just graduated from the academy last year and had only been working for the department for the last nine months. Officer Brown was an older dark colored man who was mostly bald and had dark brown eyes. Officer Brown also had just recently graduated the academy. He was as tall as Officer Stacy but he was much quieter.

“Sorry about that. We had a few storm delays,” Charles said.

“That’s alright. We figured as much. The storm has been bad here too but that hasn’t stopped an arsonist from blowing up and burning down buildings to the ground,” Officer Stacy said.

“What do we know about him?” Charles asked.

“There isn’t much that we know about who the arsonist is or may be but at every crime scene he leaves a few second messages taunting us and giving us a hint where his next attack will be,” Officer Stacy said. “In fact we were caught off guard a little earlier as the arsonist called the station and told us he was going to blow up the bank but he made the call so quick that it was untraceable,” Officer Stacy said.

“Or he could have made a call from a payphone,” Charles added.

“Did he also leave a message at the bank scene?” Emma asked.

“We’re not sure. We didn’t go to the bank scene but those who did have probably already returned back to the station and they would be able to tell you,” Officer Stacy said.

“Alright let’s go to the station then,” I said as we quickly got into the car with Officers Stacy and Brown.

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The scene at the police station was extremely solemn as while Officers Stacy and Brown were bringing us to the station the arsonist struck yet again this time at an old pawn shop. Several of the officers were watching the television as the reporters were at the scene and showing the scenes of destruction. I looked at the television for a second and the old pawn shop that had been blown up a few moments earlier looked as though it had been completely demolished.

“How can anyone burn these buildings up so quickly and get away?” one of the officers asked another one.

“Hey Emma, Charles,” I said as both turned to me. “Do you suppose the arsonist might be using a time device like a time delayed bomb that would detonate at a specific time?”

“Yes, that would be possible and the arsonist if real familiar with chemistry might actually be able to put the highly explosive chemical into the bomb which when detonated would cause the fire to spread and burn extremely quickly,” Emma replied.

“But who would have such access to such weapons and how would they get them past the police,” I asked.

“A very good question detective and that’s assuming the arsonist is using a bomb to completely destroy the buildings,” Lieutenant Moss asked as he approached us.

“Well sir how do you know he isn’t? It just appears to me that the burn downs are just too quick for it to be started by a non-explosive means,” Emma asked.

“Well maybe detective. We do need to look at all possibilities. The fact is Detective Stevens in the last few days there have been at least five take downs that we know of,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“When did these arson attacks begin Lieutenant?” Charles asked.

“The attacks began shortly before the snowstorm started hitting us,” Lieutenant Moss replied.

“But the way the attacks are going Charles it seems like the perpetrator knows the neighborhood extremely well and with the storm hitting it made his escape a lot easier,” Emma said as Charles and I turned to Lieutenant Moss.

“Lieutenant how is any of these burnings related,” I asked.

“Looking at the crimes without any information the only thing that they have in common is that all five of them have occurred in the downtown area,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“Meaning that chances are whoever is responsible is from this part of the city,” Emma replied.

“Did any of your officers or firemen find anything that might be useful?” I asked quietly.

“It has been storming so hard that most of us haven’t been able to really anything but those who have gotten to the scenes said by the time they arrived there the buildings had nearly burnt to the ground leaving behind only little pieces of debris,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“Whoever committed these crimes really wanted to cover their tracks. So what are we going to do Charles?” Emma asked.

“First I think we need to go and see the last burnt down building which I believe was the bank,” Charles said as Lieutenant Moss confirmed.

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We wasted no time in going to 1200 12<sup>th</sup> Street which was the bank that had been burnt down earlier in the day. We looked at the entire area which was mainly snow and small pieces of

burnt wood and small debris. We looked for nearly an hour hoping that we could perhaps savage anything that would help us track down our arsonist.

“It doesn’t look like much is left,” Emma said as she started looking through the burnt debris as she turned to Lieutenant Moss. “Is all the places like this?”

“Yes, and mostly ashes when we got here,” Lieutenant Moss said bluntly. Charles walked up to where Emma was kneeling at as he picked up a small piece of dark colored paper.

“What’s that Charles?” I asked as he showed me the small piece dark colored paper and before I could say anything Emma quickly found a small tape with the label ‘MESSAGE’.

“Charles, Rick I just found this,” Emma said as she showed us the tape.

“Ah that’s just great another tape-recording message probably no more than a word or two,” Lieutenant Moss said irritably. “It is very irritating not knowing who the arsonist is or knowing how we can stop him. In fact earlier today the arsonist called us and left us a message basically taunting us and frankly saying he would blow up the bank and we couldn’t stop him and now all we got is a small dark piece of paper and a recorded message.”

“Rick, I don’t know what this dark piece of paper is yet but I do think it is a very important clue that we need to check it out and also we need to see what the fiend says on this message,” Charles said as he and Emma stood up facing Lieutenant Moss. “I take it this was the downtown’s main bank where everyone used.”

“This was the bank most people use but the main offices are in the business section of the city,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“We need to go there. They might have copies of tapes of what occurred at this particular bank. Quite a few banks do that now and perhaps if they do it might show us our perpetrator,” Charles said.

“Call the bank president and tell him we need to see security videos of the bank in downtown if they have it,” Lieutenant Moss said over his radio as he turned to us and spoke. “Anything else we can be of assistance while we are here?” Charles started to speak but was interrupted by a radio announcement.

“Attention all officers and firefighters there has been another building blown up this time it is located at 1290 Main Street,” the radio announcer said.

“Emma, you and Rick go the main bank and see if there is anything on those tapes that might lead us to the arsonist. The lieutenant and I will go and check out where the arsonist just blew up. I admit this guy is good but eventually they all slip up,” Charles told Emma and me. We wasted no time as we quickly left the scene to go the main bank offices.

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The bank’s main offices were extremely busy as dozens of people lined up inside waiting for any of the tellers to help them and within seconds of entering the building Emma and I were greeted by the bank president and the chief of security of the bank.

“Greetings detectives my name is Daniel George and this is the chief of security Megan Donaldson. How may we help you detectives?” the bank president asked. Daniel George was a short older hefty man who had very little hair and large glasses covering his light blue eyes. He had a small white mustache and had a rather quiet and soft voice when he spoke. Megan Donaldson was a tall white young woman who appeared extremely fit and she also had mahogany colored hair and dark brown eyes.

“Ah yes Mr. George one of your banks was destroyed by an arsonist we need to see the

security tapes to see what happened or find out who might have been responsible,” Emma said.

“Ah yes you may look but I doubt you’ll find anything useful. We’ve checked a dozen times and still haven’t found anything useful,” Mr. George said as he turned to the chief of security. “Meg take these two detectives to the security room and let them inspect everything? Perhaps they may find a clue that we’ve overlooked.”

“Yes sir,” Megan said as she took us to the security room and showed us the security cameras and videos to every one of their banks in the region.

“Thank you Meg. We will let you know what we find,” Emma said as we began pulling the tapes and looking at several tapes of the bank that had been blown up earlier.

Emma and I looked at several tapes for several hours looking for anything that might help in finding out what happened but all we could see was that business went as usual on the last few days before the attack. Emma put in another tape and much to our surprise the tape had been mainly erased leaving only a few minutes of recording.

“Emma, we need to take this tape back and see if we can get the erased part restored,” I said. “I know someone back at home who might be able to. He is an expert electronic engineer.”

“Have I met him before?” Emma asked. As my phone started ringing again as I picked it up.

“Rick this is Charles. I need you and Emma to come back to the station. I think we might have found something,” Charles said over the phone.

“Understood,” I said.

“Did you find anything?” Mr. George asked.

“Possibly, we need to take this tape with us. There are a few minutes that appear to have been erased,” Emma said.

“Erased,” Mr. George said, appearing shocked. “Well by all means do take the tape. And find out for me how it got erased.” The chief security guard approached as we were getting ready to leave. “Ah, Megan, I am glad you are here. Before the detectives leave could you explain how part of the tape they have now got erased.”

“I thought it was a malfunction on the part of our cameras. I did not think too much of it,” Meg said.

“It’s possible. But we’re taking it and seeing what can be done. Perhaps it might shed a clue onto who is doing this,” I said.

“Good and when you find out who is responsible let me know. I would like to talk to him myself,” Mr. George said.

“We’ll bring back the tape,” Emma yelled as Mr. George and Meg nodded as we left the bank.

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The case was seemingly become more mysterious by the moment. First the recordings at the crime scenes, then the mysteriousness of how the arsonist is getting around the city when the police and first responders are having a difficult time moving through the city. The tape’s mysterious erasure of as Megan said a malfunction of the camera also bothered me. We were getting more questions than we had answers and I did not like it one bit. We quickly arrived back at the station where Charles, Lieutenant Moss and several other officers were anxiously waiting for us.

“What did you find Charles,” I asked.

“Well that dark piece of paper I found at the scene was the leftover of a negative that accidentally showed part of the perpetrator’s face and the tape recorded message Emma found only said ‘WEST DEPARTMENT STORE’ which turned out to be where we went to when we received the call,” Charles said.

“So did you also find a message there too,” I asked.

“Yes we did but we haven’t played it yet,” Lieutenant Moss said as he put the tape and began playing it and we all listened as the voice of the arsonist began to speak.

“I AM TOP GUN,” the voice said quickly before the tape ended.

“Top gun but what does he mean by that?” I asked.

“Top Gun is the name of a local weapons store not but about ten minutes from here. Perhaps if we hurry we might get there before the arsonist burns it down,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“Let’s go,” Charles added.

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Trying to catch this arsonist was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. So far we have had no luck even finding out who the lunatic was much less capturing him. We quickly raced to Top Gun hoping it was not too late though something in the back my mind told me we would be. Charles and Lieutenant Moss called the owner to let him know what was happening. When we arrived at the location a few minutes later much to my surprise, and to the surprise of Charles and Emma and the other officers the shop hadn’t been blown up and that the owner was waiting for us.

“Howdy folks,” the man said.

“Surprise. Surprise,” I said, with disbelief in my voice.

“I agree,” Emma added.

“It looks like we made it before he blew up his next intended target. How long does he usually wait between blowing up and burning targets?” I asked.

“His last blow up was about four hours ago and he usually waits six hours to do so again,” Lieutenant Moss replied.

“Which gives us two hours to search the premises before he strikes,” Charles said.

“Do you mind if we look around sir?” Charles asked.

“Don’t mind if you do,” the owner said as he opened the door. “Please be careful.”

“We will. Thanks sir,” Charles said as the four of us went inside and started searching the gun shop.

Top Gun’s shop was not a very large shop. I didn’t know exactly what we were looking for but I quickly wished I hadn’t found it as I looked and saw a bomb attached to the wall at the back of the store.

“Look at this. I found what we were looking for,” I said as Emma, Charles and Lieutenant Moss ran toward where I was standing.

“A bomb,” Lieutenant Moss said as he tried to take the bomb off the wall.

“Don’t touch it sir. The bomb has a motion detector. Any slight movement of the bomb before I disarm the motion detector will cause the bomb to explode and kill all of us,” I said as I turned to Emma. “Emma hand me one of your hairclips please.”

“Why?” Emma asked.

“Don’t worry about it. Just please do it,” I replied. Emma quickly reached into her pocket and got one of her hairclips.

“It’s a good thing I had that with me,” Emma said.

I quickly bent it and started using it to slowly disarm the motion detector. It didn’t take long to disarm the motion detector as I quickly opened up the bomb and much to my horror Emma was right about someone being an expert at chemistry and using a chemical as one of the circuits in the bomb. I look around and also saw a magnetic circuit and if either one went off the bomb would explode.

“This is not good,” I shouted as I also looked and saw we only had thirty minutes left to disarm the bomb.

“What is it?” Emma asked.

“Well, you were right Emma. Whoever is bombing these buildings must be an expert with chemicals. I’ve seen these kinds of bombs but not since I left the organized crime division in Ireland,” I said loudly as I opened up the bottle which had the chemical in it and at once I knew the chemical was an acid. “Oh crap. This is a very special kind of acid that is only used when you want to utterly blow up and destroy something. It is a very rare chemical and it has been banned in most countries including the United States because of its destructive nature. It is classified as one of the unknown elements because it is that rare and I’ve only seen it one other time and that too was when I was in Ireland.”

“How do you know it’s the same kind that you saw in Ireland?” Charles asked.

“Believe me Charles this chemical has a very distinct smell to it and once you smelled it you won’t forget the stench it releases,” I said as I turned again and spoke to Emma. “Hey Emma, now I’ll need a bottle of your contact cleaning solution you always carry with you.”

Emma said nothing as she handed me the bottle and I quickly turned the bottle down and squeezed a few drops into the acid as I handed Emma her contact cleaning solution back.

“What’s happening Rick?” Charles asked as we watched the acid turn from a greenish yellow color into a clear white color. It wasn’t instantaneous but it was rather quick as I began trying to figure out how to disarm the magnetic circuit. I quickly remembered what I learned in science class about magnets and polarization and that opposites attract and that similar polar charged objects will retract as I took out my cell phone and destroyed it as I took out the magnet in it as I took the magnet and began hovering it over the magnet in the bomb and within seconds the bomb completely shut off with a minute to spare.

“Great job Rick but now you don’t have a phone,” Emma scolded.

“I’m sorry but I needed to disarm the bomb before we all became shish kebabs. I’ll get the phone replaced,” I replied. She seemed to smile at that moment as Lieutenant Moss and Charles seemed to be relieved.

“Let’s take this thing back to the lab and find out more about it and let’s try to get a picture of our half-faced fiend,” Charles said.

“Perhaps it also has a message too,” Emma said.

“Most likely,” I added. “This guy does not appear to change his MO.”

“But where is it?” Emma asked.

“I did not see a recording device,” I replied. As soon as I finished saying those words a hidden recorder which had been connected to the bomb fell onto the ground.

“As you were saying,” Emma, sarcastically replied.

“Alright smart mouth,” I said playfully.

“Enough of the playing,” Charles said. “We need to get this back to the station.”

“Yes sir,” I said as we got into the car.

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I was glad we were able to disarm the bomb at Top Gun. The owner was glad as well as he did not become victim to the arsonist as many others had been before. We raced back to the station. Knowing we were running out of time several experts quickly disassembled the bomb and started trying to study it as we took the tape with the message and played it.

“So you fools found out my secret. You found I’ve been bombing the buildings with bombs made of a special type of chemical found only in certain parts of the world. You fools may figure my secret out, but you will never catch me but now for my next target. 1264 Main Street. Chao,” the voice taunted as the recording quit.

“That’s us. The police station is 1264 Main Street. He just threatened us with a bomb. Get all personnel out of her at once,” Lieutenant Moss ordered as everyone began clearing out of the building. “Detective Early, you and your two partners stay with me. We’re going to find this bomb together and you know how to disarm it quickly.”

None of us wasted time or words as we searched throughout the entire station. We searched for what seemed an hour and nearly gave up hope before Rick turned and saw that the bomb had been planted in the chief’s office.

“This man is nuts,” Emma remarked.

“I do wonder how our criminal got in here unless he is one of our own,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“That may be but how many of your men have advanced chemistry training,” I asked as I disarmed the motion detector.

“None that I’m aware of,” Lieutenant Sommers replied.

“Are you sure? Either someone in the department has advanced chemistry training or knowledge of this particular chemical or your department has an impostor,” I said.

“Are you saying we have an infiltrator in our midst and that a master of disguise criminal has been cleverly bombing buildings right under our noses?” Lieutenant Moss replied.

“Rick, you’re not saying it could be the Alphabet terrorist,” Emma asked.

“No Emma. I don’t believe that the Alphabet terrorist even though he has been known to blow up places,” I said.

“How can you be sure Rick? He admitted to Emma that he was a chemist at one time? Isn’t he originally from England and hasn’t he also been to Ireland where you said you seen these kinds of bombs before,” Charles asked.

“The Alphabet terrorist is originally from England and yes he has been to Ireland and several other countries as well. I did say I seen these bombs when I was in Ireland but I didn’t say that the chemicals came from Ireland. When we investigated similar attacks in Ireland several years ago it was discovered that the chemical in question could only be found two places in the world Australia and Korea,” I said.

“Well isn’t there any way if we can find out whether the Alphabet terrorist has been there or not,” Emma asked.

“Sure,” I said as I entered the information into the computer and much to our disappointment the computer produced negative results. “I’m sorry everyone according to the worldwide criminal record base there has been no record of him ever going to either one of those countries and it does say this that every country he has been to he has committed crimes in. Also, another factor to consider the Alphabet terrorist is usually more methodical in his approach to committing crimes. This criminal appears to have a vendetta,” Rick replied.

“Well so did the Alphabet Terrorist. Did you forget Rick that I was raped and had to watch him kill my grandparents because the Alphabet terrorist had a vendetta against my grandfather,” I asked.

“True. The Alphabet terrorist did have a vendetta, but here is something else to consider. The Alphabet terrorist, Emma, also usually commits sex crimes or at least one rape or sexual assault during his crime spree. We have not seen such crimes during this crime spree. Plus, the crimes have not been done in Alphabetical order which we know he loves to do hence his name,” I argued.

“Good point,” Emma conceded.

“If it is not the Alphabet terrorist then who is the suspect?” Charles asked.

“We will find out soon enough,” I said.

We continued to look through the entire station for the bomb that was planted. We looked and searched from the top floor to the bottom floor where the evidence room was located. I had nearly given up hope in finding it until I went into the men’s bathroom and saw the bomb strapped to the window looking out.

“Charles, Emma, come here,” I shouted. Charles and Emma and Lieutenant Moss quickly raced into the men’s bathroom.

“Good job. Can you disarm it?” Lieutenant Moss asked.

“Does a spider have eight legs?” I replied.

I quickly wasted no time opening the bomb up. It was exactly like the one in Top Gun so disarming it would take even less time. Emma, fortunately had another hair clip and gave me more of her contact solution to help me disarm the bomb.

“Emma, I need your phone too,” I said.

“Man,” Emma complained but she gave me the phone. “Lieutenant Moss, while I finish this can you enlarge the picture we have of our mysterious man?”

“Sure thing,” Lieutenant Moss said as he quickly went to enlarge the picture.

“Now what,” Emma asked as I finished disarming the bomb.

“We wait,” I replied.

“That is a phone you owe me mister,” Emma said.

Emma at first gave me that serious look of hers I dreaded but I quickly realized she was playing and teasing as she began smiling and cutting up again.

“Don’t worry I will get you that phone,” I replied. Lieutenant Moss came back with the picture a few moments later and when I looked at it even though I saw only half of his face my worst fears came true.

“What’s wrong Rick?” Emma asked as she saw that I became worried at that moment.

“The man who is in the picture reminds me of a man I faced off once in Ireland. His name was Jack Boggs. Jack was an expert in chemistry much like the Alphabet terrorist but he belonged to a cartel that was stationed in Ireland. Jack of course was their leader and during one of my cases over there we raided his home and took everything and everyone there except for him. It seemed like he flew the coop the moment he heard we were coming, and he made everyone else face the music and after that I had never seen him again,” I said quietly.

“Did we find any prints on any of the bombs or items we confiscated?” Emma asked.

“The lab is still working on that but based on the way this guy has done these crimes I seriously doubt it,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“I agree with you sir. Jack is an expert at what he does, and he rarely messes up to where it would cost himself and in fact often times in the past he would disguise himself which made

trying to catch him even more difficult,” I said bluntly.

“So, he is a master of disguise criminal as well,” Lieutenant Moss said.

“Yes. In the last case that I did involving him Jack Boggs would disguise himself as politicians, police officers or other people. Tracking him down even while he committed his crimes then was as difficult then as it is now,” I said quietly.

“But the question is why he chose Cleveland to commit these bombings? There must be a particular reason,” Emma asked.

“Well maybe if we can catch him we’ll ask. For now, we need to wait for the fingerprints and hope that he doesn’t commit another bombing until then,” Lieutenant Moss said. “Charles you will come with me and Detective O’Malley and Detective Stevens you will go to the downtown businesses and show them the picture and see if you can find out anything about the man.”

“Yes sir,” Emma and I said together.

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Emma and I went back to the downtown business section going through all the businesses and talking with people who might know anything about the arsonist. No one seemed to know much of anything until we entered an old coffee shop and talked with the owner and one of the customers in there. The owner, Jonathan Thomas was an older man who originally was from Ireland and had moved to the United States in the 1980’s. He was short and had dark black hair and dark brown eyes which were covered by glasses. Jonathan Thomas had once been an attorney before moving to Cleveland and opening up the coffee shop.

“Ah yes I know him. The man is Jack Boggs,” Jonathan said.

“How can you tell sir it’s only half of face?” Emma asked.

“Miss, when you have been doing law for thirty five years you know who you dealt with and I can tell that is Jack Boggs by his distinct scar on his right cheek,” Jonathan said as he showed us the scar which was on the man’s face in the picture.

“I do wonder how we all could have missed that,” Emma asked me as she turned to the older man to speak again. “Pardon me sir but how do you know him?”

“Ah Miss I was the attorney who prosecuted him for arson in England. He lived close to where we were at the time that I prosecuted him for burning down several houses,” Jonathan Thomas said.

“So, you moved from Ireland after the trial because you feared he would retaliate once he got out,” I asked as the older man nodded.

“Revenge can’t be the only reason that Jack is bombing places here. I mean if he wanted to kill Mr. Thomas he would have already done it by now and finding out where your enemies live isn’t too hard anymore,” Emma said to me quietly. Another man who was sitting beside where we were standing turned to us and spoke quietly.

“Pardon me you two but I do have something. The group that Jack led split up after they broke out of prison. Most of them are still on the run hiding here in the United States and yes I know they came here as my cousin who is a police man in Ireland told me that they have proof that they did come to the United States and warrants have been issued for their arrest,” the second man said.

“How many of them are suspected of coming into the United States and how did they

manage to enter the country?" I asked as I turned to Emma. "It was my belief that the United States reserved the right to deny anyone with a felony entrance to the country."

"That's true young man. Very good but there are ten of them who entered illegally and they only got here because they had help from the inside and according to street sources all ten of them have separated," the second man said.

"Thanks for your time. We need to be going," Emma said as we left the coffee shop. We had barely got out of the coffee shop when we received a call from Charles.

"What's wrong Emma?" I asked as I saw her hang up her new phone, I got her a couple hours before.

"The bowling alley was blown up and there fifteen people in there when the bomb blew. Fifteen people killed and the arsonist again left a message that said 'YMCA'," Emma replied.

"Oh gosh now the arsonist is trying to kill people. The YMCA will have more people in there than any of his previous targets," I said as Emma began calling the YMCA and warning people to get out as they just received a bomb threat.

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I did not like to speed. Normally when Emma and I were in the car together I normally let her drive, but this time was different. This time kids' lives were at stake too and I wanted to take no chances. I sped like I had never sped before and Emma, let's just say to my surprise was not frightened by my driving as I thought she would have been. She understood the need to get there quickly. We arrived at the YMCA a few minutes later and fortunately for us we managed to get everyone out of the building as Charles, Lieutenant Moss and several other officers arrived.

"Oh good news Rick," Charles said. "The fingerprints on the bombs and other materials found at the crime scenes do in fact belong to Jack Boggs and the judge has signed a warrant for his arrest."

"That's great Charles but now comes the hard part and that's to catch him," I said. I was the first to enter checking everywhere for the bomb or anything suspicious.

Emma and the others slowly entered the building as they also began checking for anything suspicious while I entered the gym looking for the bomb. I had begun looking through the gym when I heard a voice speaking directly to me.

"I didn't expect to find you here but while you are here it is just you and I. It has been a long time for you and me and now I must say it is over for you and your pesky friends. It is such a shame that I couldn't find the other one who helped put me away though I know he lives in Cleveland and his name is Jonathan Thomas. Yes he was the prosecutor in my case just as you were one of the arresting detectives. I think you two deserve a much more personal touch but for now seeing you and your friends die will be enough. The bomb you seek is here in the gym but it is at the top of the basketball goal and one more thing it has only one minute before it blows" the voice said.

"We know who you are Jack but the one thing that bothers me is why attack other people when it was just who helped put you away. They had nothing to do with it," I yelled.

"You may know who I am but that will be another reason you all will be dead. I always cover my tracks you see and eliminating those who might try to stop me. You better hurry and get out if you want to live as you now have only forty-five seconds," the voice said again.

"A voice recording," I said realizing Jack was not here. It was a trap meant for me and the others. I started shouting and screaming as loud as I could. "Get out here. Get out of here."

The bomb is about to explode.” Everyone quickly got out of the building before it blew.

I was the last one to get out helping the others escape and though I escaped the blast with my life I quickly fell onto the ground in pain as I looked and saw my left leg had been nearly blown off by the enormous blast of fire. Emma who saw what happen quickly screamed and cried as she approached me and saw the severe burns on my left leg. I looked up and though I was in severe pain she always managed to keep my mind off the pain. It hurt me worse to see her in pain and tears than the pain from the burns.

“Please don’t cry Emma. Be as brave as you usually are and catch the sociopathic arsonist before he hurts anyone else. I am here for you,” I said.

“I will be brave, and I swear I will catch the arsonist. I just want you to know before you go that I love you,” Emma said as she hugged me tightly crying for a few seconds before kissing me.

“I love you too,” I said as medics came and put me into the ambulance. I looked at her for one more minute before they closed the doors and took me to the hospital. Charles and the other officers looked throughout the entire area for anything when a few moments later one of the officers found a plane ticket.

“Hey Detective Stevens, look at this. It is a one-way ticket to Ireland,” the officer said as he handed Emma the ticket. Emma looked at the ticket for a moment before she opened it and saw that it belonged to Jack Boggs and his flight was at 4:30 p.m.

“Charles, it looks like Jack is going to fly out of here now that he knows were on his trail,” Emma said as she handed Charles the ticket.

“It seems like our criminal has made his fatal mistake. He must have this if he wants to board the plane. We don’t have much time though so we need to hurry,” Charles said.

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Charles, Emma, Lieutenant Moss and several dozen officers quickly raced to the airport. The waited patiently for a few hours waiting to see if anyone suspicious looking would be going through the airport checkpoints. Security was tighter than usual given the call Lieutenant Moss had made to the airport before they arrived.

“How will we know when he shows up? For all we know he might be in disguise and we might not ever find him,” Emma said.

“Lieutenant Moss Emma’s right. For all we know he could be coming up here dressed up as an officer and in fact I’m betting that is how he planted the bomb in the chief’s office. No one would suspect that their own could be capable of doing such,” Charles said to the lieutenant.

“But the question is if he can dress up like anyone then how can we tell who is who? We can’t just go and search everyone,” Lieutenant Moss asked.

“Well chances are he won’t be taking much of anything with him as he would be trying to make a quick and quite escape without being noticed and if he knows we’re onto him he might try anything to get past security so we can look,” Emma said as they continued looking as people kept going in and out of the airport. All was going well and things seemed normal until about 4:15 p.m. when a man passed through the security gates when the metal detector went off.

“Stand back,” the security guards told the man. The man was extremely impatient and became extremely angry when the officers told him to walk away from the metal detector. The security guards after conducting a thorough search finally found a gun inside the man’s jeans.

“You know guns aren’t allowed onto the planes unless you are an air marshal, FBI or

other federal authority,” the security guards said as the man suddenly pulled a badge out of his pocket.

“Alas you fools I am a federal air marshal. Now if you let me go. I have a flight to catch,” the man said angrily as he showed the security guards the badge.

“I have a strange feeling,” Emma told Charles and Lieutenant Moss as she slowly approached the security guards and the man. The man who was listening to the radio as it was announced that a serial arsonist may be trying to leave the area in disguised waited patiently as the security guards tried to confirm his identity but as soon as he saw Charles and Emma approach he started running toward the plane.

“Stop the impostor,” the security guards yelled as the man kept running to board the plane.

“We better hurry. If he boards the plane and it takes off we will never be able to get him,” Emma said as she and Charles kept running after the man. Several other security guards started chasing the man as well as he turned around and began shooting at them.

“Stop where you or I’ll kill you all,” the man said loudly as he pointed his gun into the air and shot it. Charles had taken his gun out and shot at the man but the man moved and dodged the bullet. He quickly returned fire a second time but this shot hit Charles in the thigh. Charles fell onto the ground in pain. Emma turned around and shot at the man and hit him in the arm as he tried to board the plane and when he tried to turn around and shoot at her she and several of the security guards tackled him onto the ground. She finally handcuffed him as she and the guards lifted him onto his feet as she grabbed him angrily.

“Now I’m going to ask you one time,” Emma asked the man angrily as she unmasked him and revealed to everyone his true appearance. Jack Boggs was a tall white man who had extremely dark black hair with dark brown eyes and a short black mustache. He was muscular and his voice was extremely rough and hateful especially when he spoke to Emma. Charles had never seen her as angry as he was now and thought for one moment she would lose her temper but she didn’t as she asked Jack a few questions. “Why did you do this? Why did you nearly kill my boyfriend and blow off one of his legs off with one of your explosion? WHY?”

“You fool your pathetic boyfriend Detective O’Malley speaks too much. He had to be silenced. He is lucky that the explosion didn’t kill him. He is a troublemaker. He helped put my entire gang in prison while we were in Ireland. He is a prick and you are starting to sound like him too. The world has enough pricks in there that you can make a line of them and wrap the world twice. I hate pricks and I hate those who support them and I hate you and I hate him,” Jack said angrily. “Someday I will escape prison and I will come hunt you down along with all those responsible today for my arrest.”

“The only one responsible for your arrest is you. My grandfather once told me that we’re all responsible for what we do so I suggest you take responsibility for what you’ve done,” Emma said as he spat in her face.

“Go to-,” Jack began.

“I would not do it,” Charles said as he slowly stood up.

Jack again spat on Emma. She wiped it off her face as she turned to the security guards and other police officers. “Get him out of my sight.”

“Let’s go,” the guards said. The security guards and police officers took Jack Boggs into custody as Lieutenant Moss and Charles approached her.

“Well done Emma,” Charles complimented. “Oh, I just received a message that Rick is expected to make a full recovery, but it will take time.”

‘Well done you two. I want to thank you two and Detective O’Malley for helping solve this case,’ Lieutenant Moss said happily. We stood there for a moment not saying a word until he again turned to us. ‘Who would have ever suspected the terrorist Jack Boggs would be responsible?’

‘Someone would have eventually figured it out,’ Emma said.

‘Eventually but after many more killings. You, my friends have saved many lives today,’ Lieutenant Moss said. ‘As for me I must go back to my precinct.’

‘See you around,’ Charles said.

Charles and Emma stood there for several moments even after Lieutenant Moss followed the other officers and Jack Boggs back to the station.

‘You know Emma Rick would be proud,’ Charles said as he turned to her.

‘Yes I know. Let’s go. I’ve had enough for one day,’ Emma said as Charles and her left the airport and went to the hospital.