

To Catch a Thief

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Rated G

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Summary: “Harry just might be the unluckiest thief in Metropolis.”

Many thanks to Carol M, who inspired this little vignette with an amusing news article, and was also kind enough to beta it for me and suggest a title. It feels so good to be back in the vignettes game!

My motives were simple: I needed money. There’s nothing simpler than that. And since I’ve been between jobs for the past — well, seventeen years or so — I decided to look into some ... alternate means of income.

This was my first gig, and I wasn’t very bright. I knew that getting caught would be very bad, and so I tried to play it safe. This job should have been easy. It was a run-down neighborhood, very low security. The building owner had a crowbar and that was about it. I’d spent the day before snooping around, watching who came and went, and deciding what rooms to hit.

First floor. Old lady with a cat. Not much to take, but easy pickings. I got a nice surprise, though, when I found a diamond necklace in one of her drawers.

Second floor. Single mom with two kids. I almost didn’t go for it because they own a dog, but luckily, they all decided to go on vacation or something.

Top floor. Now ... there’s where I hit trouble. This *should* have been easy — the guy lived alone, and was hardly ever home. I picked the lock the way my friend Nick showed me, and slipped inside all nice and quiet like. I was practically a mouse.

This guy had some surprisingly neat stuff — a couple of masks and knickknacks that looked like they might be from some foreign country, like Africa. I was looking for the good stuff when, all of a sudden, I heard somebody clear his throat behind me.

Now like I said, I wasn’t very bright. I probably should have had a weapon or something. Though, I could have sworn I saw this guy leave just two hours ago, and nobody but me came through the door ...

I turned around, getting ready to either fight or run for my life. My stomach tried to pull my intestines into my esophagus when I saw who was standing there, arms folded, dressed in the most brightly colored spandex I’d ever seen east of LA.

Crap.

He looked kinda tired, and really, really annoyed. I smiled and tried to make a show of putting the knickknack back, accidentally knocking a few things over. That’s about when he grabbed me by the collar of my black turtleneck, and we flew off to the police station.

Let me tell you now, jail sucks. I managed to get along okay thanks to some connections and my charming people skills, but I still wouldn’t exactly dream of going back. Luckily, they let me out after a couple years, instead of making me serve ten.

I was back on the streets in time to see my sister’s wedding.

One nice thing I’ll say about the slammer, though, is you meet people. I met a guy named Rudy — very smart. He taught me a few tricks of the trade.

I probably should have paid more attention.

To be fair, the building had gone through some changes, and I had been up the river for a long time. I went up the stairs with a wierd feeling of deja vu.

This time, I started at the top floor. It’d be easier to work my way down, Rudy told me, instead of hauling my loot to the roof and back.

It was my lucky day. Everything was in boxes, conveniently labeled. L Bath. C Bath. Kitchen. S.

S? What the heck was S?

My hair stood on end when I heard some giggling come from the bedroom. Nobody was home! I swear!

There was another giggle and then a low moan, and my heart started beating again when it became clear that they just might be distracted enough for me to get away. Ignoring the boxes, I turned and headed straight for the door ...

One of those stupid boxes sent me sprawling. It hadn’t been taped shut, and so when the stuff spilled out, I caught a glimpse of that African mask-thingy from my first bungled caper.

The moaning suddenly stopped. There was no hiding the noise, so I went ahead and swore as I struggled up to my knees. I was still on all fours when I saw those stupid red boots stop right by my face.

Son of a -----!

Just like that, we were off to the station again.

I’d thought two years was a long time. That was nothing. I spent nearly a decade rotting away in my cell — I couldn’t even amuse myself by scratching tally marks on the wall, because some jerk had already filled it with their own depressing calendar. Honestly, did the guards never clean in here? I missed my nephew’s graduation, my niece’s birth, and my sister’s divorce. By the time I got out, I was ready to kiss the ground.

I made up my mind to stay out of that neighborhood. Deciding a complete change of scenery was in order, I managed to find a nice, quiet little piece of suburbia. I cased it for a few days, and then came back while everybody was at a neighborhood watch meeting.

One brownstone caught my eye. Lights all out, no car in the driveway, and no dog. All it needed was a sign that said “Rob Me.” I peeked through the windows before making quick work of the door.

If I were Santa Clause, I’d have found the jackpot. Toys were laying around all over the place. I picked up a doll, briefly wondering if my fence was a Bendy Wendy collector, then chucked Wendy aside. Not worth my time.

Electronics were always good. I made my way towards the entertainment center.

Something squeaked under my foot.

I looked down. Under my shoe was a little stuffed rabbit. It made a sad little wheezing sound as I slowly lifted my foot off it.

The hairs on the back of my neck started tingling. I turned around. Sure enough, there he was, arms folded, wearing just his boxers and a t-shirt.

I sighed and let out a curse. He glanced upstairs for a second then went back to glaring at me.

“If I swear off crime forever, will you let me go?” I asked, keeping my voice down.

He shook his head.

You get used to jail after a while. They gave me a new cell this time, and I was able to scratch a line for each dull, miserable day that went by. By now I was on a first name basis with most of the guards and half of the inmates. My sister wrote to tell me about the new love of her life, with a note that my nephew was

getting into trouble.

I met a guy named Gary. He was okay. He'd been in longer than I was, if that were possible. He was pretty smart, too.

"I'm telling ya, Harry," he said one day, "you've got to aim for the old people. They're the ones with all the money, and practically easy pickin's. We should case some retirees together. You know, once we finally get out of here."

I thought about what Gary said. It sounded very smart.

Then I did some mental calculations.

Now, I'm not very smart. I admit that. But I like to think I'm not a total idiot either. I went back to my cell and wrote my nephew a letter, telling him to keep out of trouble and get a job.

So now I need another alternate source of income. I thought about writing a book or something. "The Man Who Kept Trying to Rob Superman."

Yeah, I know.

Who'd ever wanna read *that*?

THE END