

“THE WEB FILES”

By Margie Palatini

6:32 A.M.

My partner, Bill, and I were working the barnyard shift. It was peaceful. Quiet. Then we got the call.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo!”

“A lot of squawking going on down in the coop area, Ducktective Web. Looks like fowl play. Report says feathers are flying. Chief says we should check out the chicks.”

“Chicks?”

“Check.”

“Let’s fly.”

DUM DE DUM DUM

6:35 A.M.

The hen’s house.

We knocked on the door. She answered.

“P’awk! P-p-p-awk! P’awk! P’awk! P’awk!”

“Just the facts, ma’am. Just the facts.”

“I’ve been robbed!” she clucked, unruffling her feathers. “Robbed, I tell you. Robbed! Robbed! Robbed!”

“So you’re saying that you were robbed, is that right, ma’am? What exactly is missing from the nest, ma’am? Eggs, ma’am? Chicks, ma’am?”

“P-p-peppers,” she said with a flap.

“Peppers?” I asked.

“My perfect purple peppers that were just about ready to be pickled.”

“About how many perfect purple almost-pickled peppers would you say were pilfered, pinched, and picked? A bushel?”

“P’awk! P’awk!” she squawked. “No --- a peck! A peck, I tell you! A whole purple-pepper-pickin’ peck!”

“Have any idea who would pick a peck of your perfect purple almost-pickled peppers?”

“Not a clue,” she clucked.

I turned to Bill and gave a quick quack. “Round up the usual suspects.”

DUM DE DUM DUM

9:06 A.M.

Headquarters was hopping.

A miss named Muffet had just been tossed off her tuffet and a gal named Peep was missing some sheep. I noticed that three little kittens had lost their mittens. They began to cry. I wanted to help. I couldn't. I had pickled peppers to worry about.

We had Horner in the corner and were trying to make Little Boy Blue quack.

“Okay, Blue Boy. Quit blowing your horn. Time to make hay. Suppose you just tell me where you were this morning.”

“I'm innocent, I tell you! Innocent!” quivered the kid. “I was under the haystack. Fast asleep! Honest. Ask anybody.”

“Sure. Sure. I've heard that bedtime story before. Got any witnesses?”

My partner shook his head. “No. The sheep were in the meadow. Cows were in the corn.”

Things looked black for the boy in blue. And then ... we got another call.

“There's been some horsin' around reported down near Barn and Pen,” said Bill. “Looks like another robbery.”

We put the kid out to pasture.

DUM DE DUM DUM

10:43 A.M.

Corner of Barn and Pen.

Bill and I talked to the horses.

“Whoa! Whoa! You there,” I called out. “Like to ask you a few questions if you don't mind, sir.”

“Na-a-a-ay. Not at all,” he answered.

“What do you know about a peck of unlawfully picked perfect purple almost-pickled peppers?”

“Peppers? Peppers? A peck of purple peppers? Not a thing. But somebody just hightailed it out of here with a tub of my tarest tasty tomahtoes!”

“Tomatoes?”

“You say to-may-toes I say to-mah-toes.... Somebody just hauled the whole thing off!”

“And find my lettuce while you’re at it, too!” sighed a sheep. “Somebody just lifted a load of my luscious leafy lettuce not ten minutes ago! This is ba-a-a-d! Really ba-a-a-d!”

My partner looked at me and scratched his head.

“Peppers? Tomatoes? Lettuce? ... What do you make out of all of this, Web?”

There was only one thing to make out of all of this. “Salad.”

DUM DE DUM DUM

11:47 A.M.

The squad room. My partner and I were still trying to quack the case, but we didn’t have any idea whom to I.D.

“Rats!” said Bill.

“That’s it!” I shouted.

There was only one suspect who was sneaky enough, wily enough, and tricky enough to pick a peck of perfect purple almost-pickled peppers, take a tub of tasty tart tomatoes, and lift a load of luscious leafy lettuce.

12:22 P.M.

My partner and I were hot on the tail of ... That Dirty Rat.

DUM DE DUM DUM

12:46 P.M.

A real hole –in-the-wall.

“We know you’re holed up in there, you Dirty Rat. Let us in.”

He did.

“Eh, what’s up, Duck?”

“There’s been some trouble down on the farm,” I said. “What do you know about a rash of recent robberies?”

“Robberies? Robberies?” said the rat rather innocently. “What makes you think I know anything about a robbery? I’m no cheesy snitch.”

“Can it, Ratz,” I said. “You’ve been in nothing but garbage for years.”

The rat grinned.

“Okay. Sure. Sure. Go ahead, flatfoot. Look anywhere you want,” he said with a smirking smile. “But make it quick, Quacker ... you’re interrupting my lunch.”

“Lunch, eh, Rodent?” I said, taking a gander at his table.

“Hey, what’s going on here?” the rat hissed. “You’re not going to pin this rap on me. Where’s your evidence, you waddling webfoot? You got nothing on me. Nothing, see? I’m clean! Clean, I tell you. Clean!”

I picked a piece of lettuce from under his chin.

“Not clean enough, you Dirty Rat.” I smelled his breath. Just as I suspected. Garlic mayo. “Book him, Ducko. His salad days are over.”

“Over? Over? But they can’t be over!” he cried as he was cuffed and led away. “I haven’t even had my dessert!”

My partner gave me a pat on the back. “Looks like you quacked another one, Web. But how did you ever figure it was him?”

”Just played a hunch he ate the evidence for lunch ... and forgot to use his napkin and brush his teeth. He’s a dirty rat. He never did have good hygiene.”

DUM DE DUM DUM

The Dirty Rat was tried and convicted on three counts of vegetable vagrancy, offensive bad breath, and not using a napkin to wipe under his chin.

He was sent up the river and was sentenced to six months of farm labor with time off for good behavior, better table manners, and clean teeth.

CASE CLOSED

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