

# Fate Has Been Kind

by C. T. Martin



It was still dark, just before the morning twilight when she passed him on the street, already sweating profusely from her jog. The bald man had hoped not to be seen, but it didn't matter, he told himself, she would never suspect him of anything.

With stealth, he crept up to the building and went inside. The door opened with ease and the intruder began to look around. *Ah! She had moved it. The cadet must be learning something after all.* He didn't want the apartment to look as if it had been rummaged through, and it was imperative that no fingerprints, hair or footprints be left. His silent feet, wrapped in homemade moccasins, flew back and forth across the floor as he searched with haste, knowing his window of time had shortened.

Approaching the kitchen his eyes noticed a new fixture on the ceiling, the only item that was not in disrepair. His instincts told him to open the refrigerator. He was right.

The store owner had never intended that things would end this way. The young woman who lived across the street was nice enough, but she was also a cadet. A cadet with the very department that looked for discrepancies, the kind of some details that would be sent up to more discerning eyes. It was those eyes of experience that he was concerned about, and it was then that he knew her investigation must be stopped.

He called in a favor from his more organized friends. He got out of the muscle end of the business long ago and didn't keep up with who had good reputations of being able to handle this

sort of thing. However, his source was trusted and provided excellent service. They left the woman untouched, but put just enough pain in her male visitor to send a message. Even though he was a fellow cadet, they failed to connect it to the case they were working on. Like most attractive women, she had an ex-boyfriend, an ex with a violent history, and she of course thought that he somehow was involved in the assault.

Unfortunately for the man who hired out this job, the cadet didn't get the message and continued her probe into the extortion money. It wouldn't be long before she or her instructors would unveil the trail of millions of dollars in payments that led to his very successful apparel shop. With most of his competitors out of business the evidence would point to him like a one way street.

When he had found his prize, the twilight had just barely began to show, the air was still and cold, the ground heavy with dampness, most people unaware of their surroundings. *Still thinking like a cadet and not a professional*, he thought, shaking his head as he wired the back of the refrigerator. With the fire and subsequent explosion, not a trace would be left of anything. No trace of the stale food and sour milk, the wiring, explosives, and most important of all, the files that she had so carelessly hidden.

He regretted that the timer would set things off by the time she returned to take her shower, but he did what had to be done. As he returned to his own home and prepared to open his shop, he reflected on that naive little smile of her's that he would surely miss.

Approximately two hours later chaos was everywhere. No one suspected that the sirens, shouting, and running in the streets were now the main events of a show that he had started early that morning.

"Yes, I know Teresa very well," said Mr. Kong. He shivered in the cold morning air, gazing across the street at the plumes of smoke and the red lights of the ambulance fading away in the distance.

Anxious to obtain the more personal side of this story, the reporter encouraged him to tell her more. "Oh, wow. What is she like?" she asked.

"Teresa is a very good person, gentle and kind. I own that clothing store right across from her building. She and her boyfriend visit me quite frequently. Unlike most people today, Teresa is courteous and respectful."

"That's wonderful Mr. Kong. It must have been a miracle that she escaped from this fire alive!" The reporter patted him gently on the shoulder as his head tossed and fell in saddened reflection.

"Yes it really was," he said, pausing to control his emotions. "You see, her building manager knew those smoke alarms were old and not functioning properly. Although he promised to fix them next month when he returned from being on holiday, I begged her to replace the one in her

flat right away.”

“The firefighters say it was only because of the smoke detector that she is alive. Evidently she took your words to heart.”

“Yes, thank God she did. When I heard the explosion,” his voice choked up with emotion, “I thought it was too late for Teresa. But then I saw her trying to squeeze through that window.”

“Oh, so then you were the one who pulled her out?” she inquired with burgeoning interest.

“That’s what they tell me, but I only acted on reflex, it was no big deal. I was so frightened for her. She would have done the same thing for me.”

“What a kind thing to do Mr. Kong. I’m amazed at your bravery! Most people would have been too afraid to approach a burning building.”

“Fate has been kind to us all today.”