

# BOUNCED

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*To the usual suspects*



*In the beginning, it was simple: I wanted to be a detective and I needed something to detect. How that led CC, Zal and me to everything that happened, and now to this — well, I'm hoping telling it will help me understand.*

*I'm also not sure what it means. Maybe nothing. Wiley Kendall asked me the other day if I'd learned anything from it all. Be careful what you wish for, is what I answered, but I'm not sure I believe that. If you were careful about wishes, there'd be no thrills at all.*





## CHAPTER

# Borsalino Bounce

**M**y career as a detective started with a bad bounce, so maybe I should start there. I'd gone with my friends Zal and CC to the Fidelity Bank on 3rd Avenue. Zal needed to get some birthday money out for a new ball glove, an Arturo Rocinante infielder's model, from Good Sports in the next block. The ATMs were down so he was in line with a lot of others, waiting for a teller. It was a hot Saturday in June and the bank was air-conditioned, so it was fine with me that sleeping turtles probably moved faster than Zal's line.

I was no stranger to banks. My Aunt Jenn, who I lived with, used to be a teller at one. CC had gone to a variety store to get a Popsicle. I waited in the cool inside the bank, by a table with free coffee laid on, passing the time

with Zal's bouncy ball. That ball was pretty zingy, and even though I was being careful with it, just making little tosses, it got away from me and rabbited off across the bank's polished floor.

I spun after it and smacked headfirst into the middle of someone hustling toward the front doors. It was a soft middle. I grabbed the guy in a one-way hug to keep from falling over. He gave a little *oof* of surprise and we danced around for a second, my head in the armpit of his blue coat. I smelled the laundry soap they use on clothes you buy from the Goodwill and glimpsed a green-and-white tote bag from a local grocery in a gloved hand. Then he shook me off, and I stumbled on, yelping "Sorry!"

He was out the doors almost before I could turn around. I caught a glimpse of blue coat and ball cap behind people coming in, the guy kind of hunched over as if I'd hurt him. "Sorry," I called again, which was pretty useless.

A lady with a lemon-sucking frown handed me the bouncy ball. I was slinking back to my spot when another lady, dressed up and with a name tag, strode past with a set of keys and locked the doors.

Turning to everyone, she announced: "Sorry, folks, no cause for alarm, but we've just been robbed. The robber has already left the building. There's no danger. You may leave if you wish, but we ask you to stay if you can. Police are on their way. They may want statements from you."



Naturally, the whole place started buzzing. I hustled over to Zal. He hadn't seen a thing. "I was practising," he said. Zal showed me how he was walking a quarter across his knuckles. He wants to be either a magician or a major-league shortstop. It's all in the hands, he likes to say.

Listening to everyone else though, it didn't take long to realize the bank robber was the guy I'd bumped into. That gave me a little chill, I can tell you. Then, when someone said, "Borsalino Bandit," everyone was talking at once. The Borsalino Bandit had been robbing banks in our city for weeks. He was a bearded guy who wore a big hat to keep his face from security cameras. The cops were so frustrated they'd offered a fifteen-thousand-dollar reward.

"This guy didn't have a big hat," I said to Zal.

"He'd have to change things up a little." Zal squinted behind his glasses as he thought it over. "Or people would suspect him the moment he walked in. It stands to reason."

Zal had nothing to tell the cops, so he left to meet up with CC, who was peering impatiently in the window. We agreed they'd come back for me after he got the ball glove.

I knew I should wait for the police, and I wanted to. I was an important witness, maybe. Plus, it was exciting. I'd been reading a whack of detective stories and this would be a good chance to see how the cops operated — even though I knew from the stories that amateurs and private eyes were almost always smarter.

The police arrived a few minutes later. When they found out about how I'd bumped into the robber, one of them — Detective Yee — asked to take scrapings from under my fingernails, and a whole bunch of questions I really couldn't answer. Then her boss asked me the same stuff all over again. His name was Sergeant Castro. He was a flat-nosed, gum-chewing guy in a grey suit, balding, black-haired and not big, but he looked as if trucks would bounce off him.

“Duncan . . . Fortune?” He peered at the notes he'd been given. We were in someone's little office in the bank. “Why can't cops write neater?”

I didn't know why. Instead, I said again that I was almost thirteen years old and going into grade seven at Studies Institute, that I lived with my Aunt Jenn, why I was at the bank and that I hugged the bank robber.

“Studies Institute?” said Sergeant Castro. “Impressive.” He didn't sound impressed. *Chew, chew, chew*, went his jaw. “You like it?”

“I don't know yet. I'm only starting there in September.” Zal and CC were too. I didn't mention that.

He nodded. “Okay. Business.” He squinted at the notes. “You didn't see the guy's face?”

“No, just his jacket. It was blue. I was chasing a ball,” I explained. It sounded pretty lame. I added, “I think he had a blue cap. I saw that after. And he had gloves, leather work ones.”

“And a shopping tote full of stolen money,” Sergeant

Castro said, chewing some more. He sighed. “Well, we have other descriptions, including a green cap and a black one, and a brown one, but we’ll get something from the cameras. Anything else come to mind? A fancy belt buckle? Shoes? A smell?”

“Laundry soap,” I remembered, “from the jacket. Like the kind you smell on clothes from the Goodwill.” I stopped. I didn’t want Sergeant Castro thinking Aunt Jenn and I got all our clothes there. We didn’t, just some. “And french fries, maybe.” I hurried on, “He had a soft middle.”

Sergeant Castro nodded glumly and worked his gum. “You’re making me hungry. Well, on the bright side, no one got hurt.”

“Was it the Borsalino Bandit?” I asked.

Sergeant Castro shrugged. “Wouldn’t we all like to know. Could be a copycat.”

“Is there really a fifteen-thousand-dollar reward?”

“That there is, Duncan, but I’m afraid your evidence is a little thin to qualify. Anyway, I doubt we’ll be in touch again, but here’s my card. Call the number on it if you think of anything else. And thanks for trying. I can tell you’re the kind of kid who’d do his best to help us. Have fun at SI. I think you’ll enjoy it.”

“How come?”

“Went there myself. If they still have it, avoid the tuna noodle hot lunch.”

Zal and CC were waiting outside. Zal was wearing his new glove. CC was pacing, in spite of the heat.

“Finally,” she said. “What did you tell the cops?”

“There wasn’t much to tell. Anyway, that’s not important.” The rest just spilled out: “That had to be the Borsalino Bandit. There’s a big reward, right? I want to catch the Borsalino Bandit.”