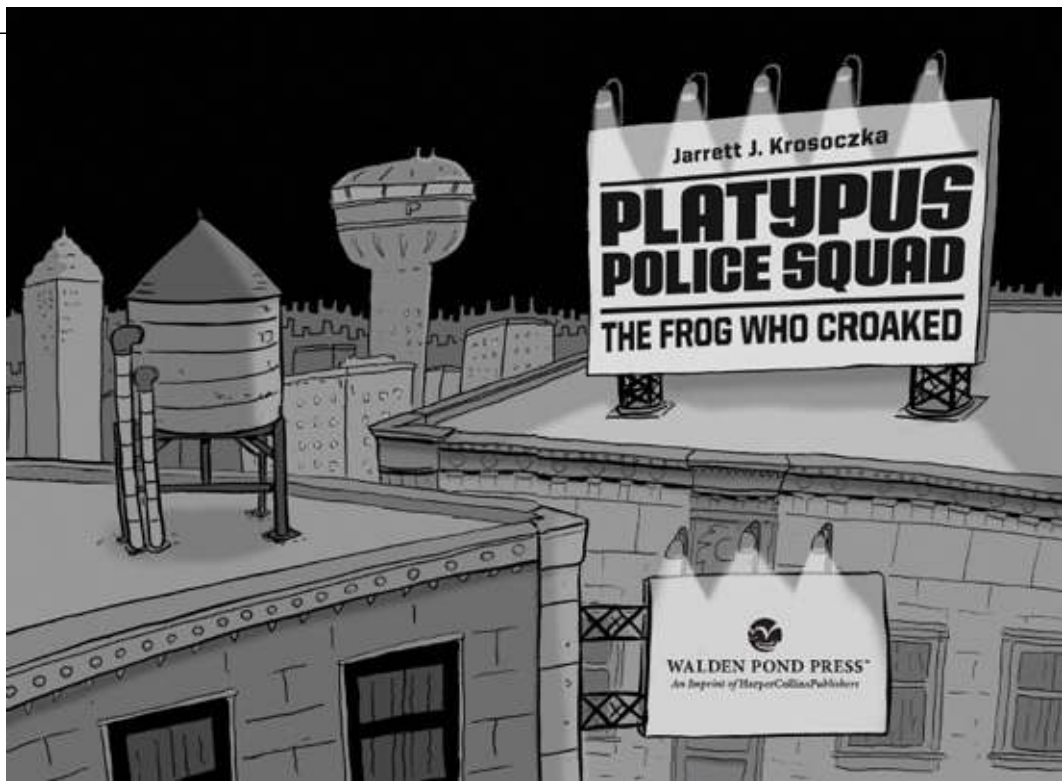


Jarrett J. Krosoczka

PLATYPUS POLICE SQUAD

THE FROG WHO CROAKED





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WALDEN POND PRESS[®]

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DEDICATION



For my girls—Gina, Zoe, and Lucy

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PROLOGUE

This is the city. Kalamazoo City. Population: 75,000. By day, it's a bright, vibrant metropolis, the kind of city where dreams come true. It is a mecca of business, the arts, sports, and cuisine, and, at the center of it all, is the gleaming facade of Pandini Tower, the jewel of Kalamazoo City. Those who don't live here dream of making it here. And those who do, well, they know that there's just no city like it.

But it is a different city once the sun goes down. The criminal element, asleep by day, haunts certain dark corners at night. Especially the run-down old docks on the south side of town, perhaps the darkest corner of all.

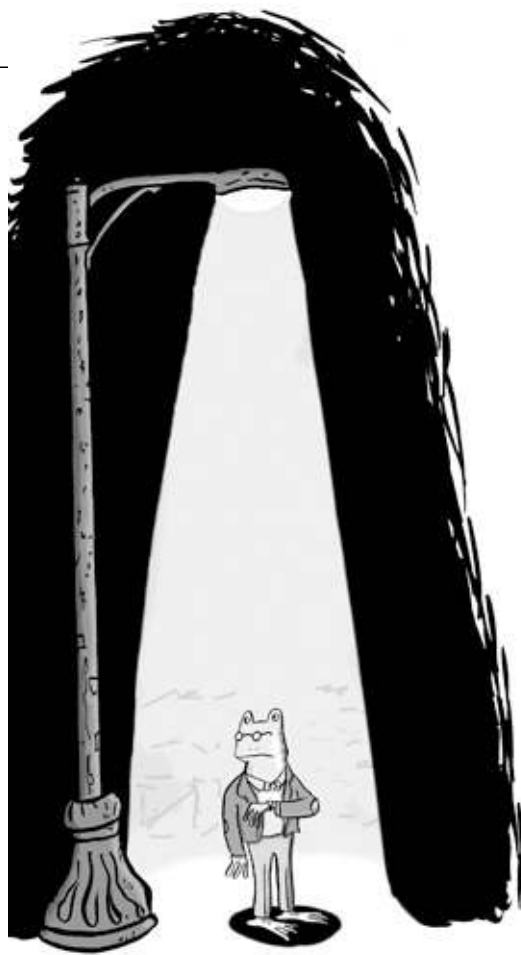


On one particular evening, a rather dapper-looking frog stood looking very much out of place among the riffraff who nightly roamed the docks. He was dressed like a teacher. In fact, he was a teacher. Professor Hopkins.

A lone, flickering streetlamp on the easternmost pier was the only light source. Shadows scattered across the wooden planks like ghosts at the ready to snatch one's soul.

Professor Hopkins nervously checked his watch. Three minutes past eleven. The professor was on time, but the guy he was meeting wasn't.

Finally, a whisper came from the shadows. "You come alone, like we said?"



The voice could scarcely be heard, but Professor Hopkins jumped with fright, the dock creaking beneath his feet. “Y-y-yes,” he said, composing himself.

“Keep it down!” said the voice. “You should know better by now. You got the money?”

Professor Hopkins nodded and, his hands shaking, pulled an envelope from inside his jacket.

“You’re going to drop it right under the streetlamp,” said the voice. “I’m going to take the dough and leave you the goods. Any sudden moves, the deal is off, got it?”

“Okay,” said the professor, stepping forward and putting the envelope down in the glow of the unsteady streetlight. He heard footsteps, and a furry hand reached out and picked up the envelope.

“Sweet,” said the voice. A duffel bag, bursting with something heavy and damp, dropped to Professor Hopkins’s feet. “Here’s what you asked for. Now, don’t you go telling nobody where you got this. Someone asks you, I don’t know you, and you don’t know me.”

And with that, he was gone, the thumping of receding feet soon swallowed by the still night. Professor Hopkins exhaled, took off his jacket, and dropped it on top of the duffel bag. Perspiration ran down his face. He cleaned his glasses on his dress shirt. Only when he was sure he was alone did he take out his cell phone and begin dialing a number.



“It’s me. I have the fish. We need to—”

But before Professor Hopkins could finish his sentence, a car roared out of a nearby warehouse, its headlights blazing a path toward the eastern pier. The professor watched in horror as it picked up speed and barreled toward him. As it bolted past the streetlight, the professor caught a momentary glimpse of the driver.



That would be the last thing Professor Hopkins saw on the pier that night.
Welcome to Kalamazoo City.



THE ZENGO HOUSE, 6:45 A.M.



Detective Rick Zengo's alarm clock buzzed, but he was already wide-awake. He turned it off, took a deep breath, and sprang up from bed, shoving aside his blankets. Push-ups, sit-ups, tail flexes, and jumping jacks. He felt great. No, he felt awesome.

His outfit for the day was carefully draped over his chair—new jeans, a sharp collared shirt, and his lucky leather jacket. He dressed slowly, inspecting himself in the mirror. His tail was looking excellent today. He gave it a wag.

Zengo switched on the radio and tuned in to Z94.3. The bass of hip-hop beats filled Zengo's bedroom as blood pulsed through his veins. He opened the window, letting fresh air stream into his well-organized, enormous, immaculate room. The familiar view from his second-floor bedroom sprawled out before him. Rows of houses with well-maintained yards. Lush greenery adorning the

concrete blocks. And beyond that, the skyline of the city he pledged to protect.

It was his turn now.

The temperature was on its way down as fall settled in, a welcome change from the sweltering heat of the summer. Zengo grabbed his watch off the dresser, careful not to disturb his collection of coins stacked perfectly by type.



The bathroom was outfitted with the latest high-tech furnishings from his father's home remodeling company. Zengo brushed his mouth plates, polished his bill, and then opened the vanity mirror, selecting one of the neatly placed bottles of fur product. He squeezed a dab out onto his webbed flipper and with a quick flip of the tufts of his coiffure, he was ready for his day. He smirked at himself in the mirror and thought aloud, "I'm going to be the flyest platypus on the force." He struck a few poses, imagining how he'd look to the bad guys when he took them down.

"Honey," Zengo's mother shouted as he turned down the stairs. "You're going to be late!"

"Ma, I'm already ready."

His mother had his hot chocolate waiting for him in the kitchen, just as she did every morning. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. I just know how much this day means to you. Look! I put your hot chocolate in your favorite mug!"

Zengo looked hard at the clown's face plastered on its side. It used to be his favorite mug. It was the one he got from the Kalamazoo City Circus when he was seven. Sometimes his mom forgot he was a grown platypus. He gave her a hug, and pulled a stainless steel travel mug from the cabinet.

Zengo's dad entered the large, modern kitchen, sweaty and dressed head to webbed toe in running gear. The morning newspaper sat in a pile on the kitchen table, the crossword puzzle already completed. Zengo glanced at the clock. Seven twenty on the button. His dad was like a machine. He had been going on the same run every morning for twenty years, and was never more than a minute off.



"Finally up, lazybones? Today's the big day, isn't it?" Zengo's dad toweling himself off as Zengo's mom gave him a glass of ice water. "Shouldn't you get moving? It's your first day on the force, aft

all. Remember: if you're not fifteen minutes early, you're fifteen minutes late."

"I've got time, Dad; the precinct is only ten minutes away." Zengo tipped the milk to fill his cereal bowl, but poured too much, spilling milk across the counter. "Aw, man!"

"I'll get that, honey." His mom was quick with a sponge, wiping down the counter. "Here, let me."

She poured him a new bowl of Fruity Pops and put it on the table, where wheat toast and a glass of orange juice were waiting. "Sit, dear; you'll need a good meal to start your day."

Zengo chomped away, trying to ignore the commercial that was blaring on the TV. He wished his family would eat a meal in silence for once. To make matters worse, it was the same annoying commercial that had been playing for weeks.

"PANDINI ENTERPRISES," shouted the announcer. "YOUR CITY, BETTER!" Zengo watched pictures of all the Pandini businesses flash past on the screen. "Black and White, the highest-rated restaurant in the southeast according to *D-Vower Magazine*; Bamboo, the hottest club and lounge in the city; Roar, the most state-of-the-art gym and sports training facility in the world; and soon ... the all-new Kalamazoo Coliseum, home of the Kalamazoo City Sharks!"

Next came the image of Pandini Tower, the tallest and most garish building in the city. Then Frank Pandini Jr. himself, the purveyor of all this wonderfulness, walked onto the screen, flashing his winning smile. He was probably the best-known person in town—thanks to his never-ending television and radio ads, his billboards, and the sports teams he sponsored.

Zengo cringed as Pandini opened his mouth to speak. "HELLO, NEIGHBORS! I'm Frank Pandini and I'm here for you. Remember my motto: YOUR CITY, BETTER! And if I haven't seen you already, I'll be seeing you real soon." Before the commercial ended, Pandini gave a wink to the camera.

Zengo was disgusted. He reached over to the flat screen his dad had installed under the cabinet and snapped it off. "You can't turn around in this town without seeing that panda's mug," he grumbled, sitting back down.

"Now, Ricky, he's done a lot for this city," said Mr. Zengo, as he took a sip of coffee from his Pandini Enterprises-branded cup. "He's brought it back to life. I remember when I married your mother and she wanted to move back to her hometown, I thought it was the worst idea in the world. This place was a real no-hoper. A dead end."



Zengo had grown up hearing these stories about the bad old days, when crime bosses ran the show and kept honest people from getting ahead. The story was so familiar that he knew, word for word, what his mother would say next.

"If it wasn't for my dear pop, this would be a ghost town," she said, dabbing her eye with the edge of her apron. "He lost his life taking down Frank Pandini Sr."

Zengo slammed his mug down on the table. "That's just it. Why are we all so thrilled about

everything that louse's son does? I just don't trust Frank Pandini Jr."

"If 'like father, like son' was true in every case, my boy," laughed Mr. Zengo, patting his midriff, "you'd be out running every morning with me and eating fruit salad instead of gorging on junk food."

This was an old routine, too. It was time to change the subject. "I wonder who I'll get for partner," Zengo said. "I hope he's cool."

Zengo's dad sat back in his chair. "Well, Sergeant Plazinski knows what he's doing. You just listen to him, Ricky. Keep your head down, and all those detectives are going to be calling you sergeant in a few years! Just like your granddad."

"Actually, he was a lieutenant, dear," said Mrs. Zengo.

Zengo looked at his mom, who smiled at him encouragingly. He ate one more bite of his cereal, downed his juice, and grabbed his travel mug.

"All right, I'm off. Wish me luck, guys!" he said.

"Good luck, honey!" his mother said.

His father raised his cup of coffee. "Do us proud, Ricky."

Zengo stopped in the doorway. "I will, Dad. You'll see."





PLATYPUS POLICE SQUAD HEADQUARTERS, 7:58 A.M.



Platypus Police Squad headquarters was an impressive building, a wide structure made of concrete, glass, and steel. Zengo knew it hadn't always been this way. In his grandfather's day, the precinct was a fraction of the size. They barely had a budget for pencils, let alone the latest in forensic equipment. All that changed the day that Frank Pandini Jr. came back to town. After making his fortune and erecting Pandini Tower, Pandini's first charitable donation went to renovating and expanding the facilities for the Platypus Police Squad. Pandini bought and knocked down the adjacent run-down apartment buildings, and donated the land to the police. It was the least he could do, he said, considering his father was responsible for so much of the old Kalamazoo City.



Zengo stopped at the portrait of his grandfather, Lieutenant Dailey, in the foyer. After giving it a snappy salute, he turned a corner and ran right into the hustle and chaos that was Platypus Police Squad headquarters. Cops and detectives and lawyers were running back and forth across the floor, perps and witnesses were being shuffled from office to office, cell to cell. Zengo was overwhelmed by the scene. Maybe he was even just a little distracted. In any case, his next move was not fly at all.



“Yeee-OW!” cried the old-timer he had banged into. “Watch where you’re going!”

The contents of Zengo’s mug were now splattered across the front of the senior detective’s shirt. Zengo looked at his mug in horror; he apparently hadn’t screwed the top on tightly.

“Aw jeez, oh man. I’m really sorry about that.” Zengo attempted to dab the guy’s tie with tissue from the nearby desk, but he just smeared around the brown liquid, making the mess worse. He hoped this detective wasn’t someone important.

“I’m. Covered. In. Coffee!” the old-timer said through gritted teeth. The veins in his forehead were nearly bursting.

“Nah, man. I don’t drink coffee; that’s hot chocolate.” Zengo raised his mug. “Start my day, every day, with a cup of hot chocolate with extra chocolate sauce and a handful of mini marshmallows. Start right there, let me run and get some paper towels.”

“Forget the paper towels, junior. I’ll take care of it myself.” He stalked away.

“Sorry ...,” called Zengo to the retreating back. *Not a great way to start off the new job*, he thought to himself. Officers and detectives continued to run past him in a never-ending rush. Where was he?

supposed to go?

~~“Are ... you ... the ... new ... guy?”~~ said a secretary, standing up slowly from her desk. Zengo hadn't even noticed her before.

“Yes, ma'am,” said Zengo.

“Go ... see ... Sergeant ... Plazinski,” she said, pointing to a frosted-glass door at the back headquarters.



Zengo screwed the lid on his travel mug tightly, downed what was left of his hot chocolate, straightened his shirt and jacket, and headed for the sergeant's office.

Sergeant Plazinski opened the door even before Zengo had a chance to knock.

“Rick! Come on in!”

The sarge headed back to his desk, and Zengo shut the door behind him. It was much quieter here than it was out on the floor. Plazinski motioned for Zengo to take a seat on one of the orange plastic chairs in the middle of the office, while he perched on the corner of his desk. The wall behind him was covered with certificates and awards.

“It's great to have you here,” Plazinski said. “Top marks from the academy, dean's list every year ... You're going to fit right in, my boy. And I've teamed you up with one of our veterans, whose partner just retired. Corey O'Malley's been here for years. Cut his bill back when Pandini Sr. was running this town, back when you couldn't walk the streets in daylight, let alone at night. He even started out as a beat cop, working under your grandfather.”



That sounds promising, Zengo thought. The old pro and the hotshot rookie, teaming up, busting some crime. O'Malley must be one tough guy if he was on the force when Zengo's grandfather was running the show. He wondered how many push-ups he could do.

"Oh, about that, Sergeant," said Zengo in a low tone. "I'm kind of hoping we could keep the fact that I'm Lieutenant Dailey's grandson more or less on the down-low. You know what I mean?"

The sergeant smiled. "Want to make it on your own, son? Not on Lieutenant Dailey's coattails?"

Zengo shrugged, a little embarrassed. "Something like that."

"Sure thing," said the sergeant. "Our little secret. I know how you must feel. Those are some pretty big shoes to fill." He stood up. "Let's go. I'll introduce you to O'Malley. He'll show you the ropes. And it'll be good for him to work with some new blood."

Zengo stood up so quickly he dropped his mug. "Oops," he said as it clattered on the floor.

"Take your time, kid," said the sergeant.

Zengo followed Plazinski, scanning the crowded room for the toughest-looking guys on the force. *bet O'Malley is built like a brick wall, his neck as solid as a tree trunk,* Zengo thought as they broke off from the main path and approached a desk.

"Corey O'Malley, meet your new partner, Rick Zengo," said Plazinski.

Oh no.



Detective O'Malley swiveled in his chair and locked eyes with Zengo. Zengo couldn't help but stare at the huge hot-chocolate stain that covered his new partner's shirt and tie. Zengo opened his mouth but no words came out.

O'Malley stood up. "Hello, rookie," he said as he waddled over, offering his hand to shake. Zengo took it, standing dumbly. O'Malley gripped his hand so hard, Zengo thought it would snap right off.

There was an empty desk across from O'Malley's. "Here's your station," he said, gesturing toward the recently vacated chair. "Take a seat."

Zengo finally found his tongue. "Sorry again about your clothes, man."

O'Malley laughed, but it sounded a little forced. "I'd need to wash them eventually." He sat back down at his desk and turned to his computer. Zengo wanted to say something else, but didn't know what.

"Good luck, you two," Plazinski said, and left.

Zengo sat in his desk chair and gave it a test swivel. Smooth. He opened each drawer. None of them stuck. Sweet. He beat a little rhythm on the desktop, wondering what would happen next.

Two other guys in plainclothes, probably detectives too, came up to O'Malley's desk. They glanced at Zengo with a combination of curiosity and unfriendliness. But their focus was on O'Malley, still typing on his computer, his back to them.

"Sure gonna miss McGrath, won't ya, O'Malley?" said one.

"Yeah, twenty-five years on the force," said the other. "Who are you going to lean on now to keep your tail clean?"



O'Malley ignored them.

"I'm talking to you, O'Malley," said the first again.

O'Malley glanced over his shoulder, annoyed. "Diaz? Lucinni? Shouldn't you guys be out heading up the clean-up detail from the police horse parade?"

"Listen, we all knew who carried the weight with you two," sneered Diaz. "Even if it's you who are literally carrying more weight these days." He poked O'Malley in the belly.

"Now there's a new number-one detective partnership on the squad!" said Lucinni.

"Diaz-Lucinni REPRESENT!" they shouted in unison as they high-fived. Then they stood there looking very pleased with themselves.

O'Malley caught Zengo's eye and shook his head.

The secretary who had shown Zengo where Plazinski's office was came slowly around the corner pushing a mail cart.

"Whatcha got there, Peggy?" asked Diaz.

She pulled out a stack of phone messages and put them on Lucinni's desk. She put another stack on Diaz's desk. They stared at them as Peggy slowly began to speak.

"Lots ... of ... folks ... calling ... in ..."

Diaz and Lucinni looked at each other, then back at Peggy, who was gearing up to finish her sentence.

"... about ... illegal ... fish."

Zengo perked up. He loved fish. Herring, especially—it was a bit of a delicacy in Kalamazoo City. His parents picked up some variety of fresh fish every week.

"Bunch of bologna!" said Lucinni, flipping through the messages. "If I had a dollar for everyone who claims to have a lead on illegal fish dealers, I wouldn't need this job." He added the new messages to a huge pile of messages on top of his filing cabinet. "Everyone in this stinkin' town thinks they're experts on stinkin' synthetic fish."

"These ... people ... seem ... very ... upset," continued Peggy.

"Mackerel, cod, flounder, herring, scallops, haddock ... everyone's got a story," added Diaz. "Look, Peggy, we appreciate your concern, but Lucinni here and I have the situation under control. We've been on the case for the last few weeks. We get a ton of calls every day. We get the point. Everyone is getting swindled. If they just patronized the licensed fish retailers, like our PSAs have been telling people to, we wouldn't be wasting our time with these phone calls."

"We've put the word out," said Lucinni. "But everyone thinks they're so smart—they think they can bend the rules and buy fish on the wet market, save a few bucks. If they just listened to us, there wouldn't be any illegal fish in KC."

"Right. So thank you, Peggy, very much"—Diaz slowly took Peggy's hand—"but the next time a call comes in about somebody getting sick because they ate synthetic fish, stick it in a file somewhere and don't bother us with it. It's taking our attention away from the real crimes of Kalamazoo."



"Ohhhhkay," Peggy said, and slowly turned her cart around. O'Malley got up to help her. When she had finally moved out of earshot, Lucinni muttered, "Someone needs to dust off that relic and bring it to an antique store."

"High five!" said Diaz, and the two slapped webbed flippers.

O'Malley spun around. Even Zengo jumped. "Hey, take all the shots you want at me, but you leave Peggy alone. She was here before you punks even made it to the academy, and she'll be here long after you've retired."

"O'Malley's right," said Zengo. The three of them turned toward him. "I mean, turtles live a real long time."

"O'Malley, you're a little testy this morning," said Lucinni, ignoring Zengo. "Maybe you didn't have your morning doughnut?"

"Or your morning dozen?" asked Diaz, poking O'Malley again.

"Hey, what's that all over your shirt?" asked Lucinni, as he took O'Malley's tie in his flipper. "Didn't have McGrath around to put your coffee in your sippy cup for you?"

“ALL RIGHT. THAT’S IT.” The whole floor stopped and turned as O’Malley stuck his finger in Lucinni’s face. “I’m not in the mood for you two monotremes flapping your bills at me!”

“How about me? Can I flap my bill at you, O’Malley?” said Plazinski, suddenly appearing behind them.

Diaz made a slight turn to Lucinni, raised his flipper a half inch, and mouthed, “High five.”

“Don’t push me, Diaz,” the sergeant continued. “You and Lucinni have some cases you should be working on, I assume? Or should I reconsider the mayor’s request that we lose two detectives from the force?”

Diaz put his flipper down and made for his desk, with Lucinni close behind.

The sergeant looked at the rest of the floor until everyone got back to work, then turned to O’Malley and Zengo. “We’ve got a situation out on the docks. Looks like a messy one. I want you two to get on it right away.”

Zengo stood up, kicked his chair by accident, and set it spinning across the floor, where it bumped into the edge of O’Malley’s desk, spilling a cup of cold coffee across the morning newspaper.



“Oops,” he said, shrugging in apology.

“Let’s go, kid,” sighed O’Malley, heading for the door.

Zengo tried to mop up some of the coffee, then gave up and hurried after his new partner.



KALAMAZOO CITY STREETS, 11:00 A.M.



Zengo could barely contain his excitement as they drove to the docks. The unmarked squad car was totally sweet. There were sirens and an intercom, and a flashing light could be stuck on the roof with a magnet. The squad car was even outfitted with the most up-to-date laptop. He eyed the police-bar radio and the dashboard like it was his birthday party right there in the car. As he was looking at it, the radio crackled to life.

“Car one fifty-three, officers on scene are requesting an update on your position, over.”

O’Malley, his eyes on the road, reached for the mouthpiece, but Zengo was quicker.

“That’s a big ten-four, Dispatch, car one fifty-three is currently—”

“Give me that,” O’Malley said quietly as he snatched the mouthpiece away from Zengo. “Car one fifty-three here, coming up on the coliseum now. We’ll be pulling into the shipping area in si

minutes.” He replaced the handset. “Rule number one, rookie,” he said, turning to Zengo. “No one touches the radio but me, got it?”

Zengo slumped down, frustrated. They were probably moving about five miles an hour. He hated being stuck in traffic.

The Kalamazoo Coliseum loomed large up ahead. A huge billboard beside the stadium read:

**It’s YOUR CHANCE to name the new home
of the Kalamazoo City Sharks!
A Pandini Project—Your Sharks, Better!**

Beside the stadium was a huge construction site where workers were preparing to knock down the old stadium and build the new one.

Zengo rolled his eyes. “Look at that billboard. What is it with Pandini? I can’t get him out of my fur!”



“He’s been pretty busy the last year or so,” agreed O’Malley. Traffic crawled to an even slower pace.

Compounding the traffic problem, a huge crowd trying to get to the ticket window had spilled out onto the street. “What’s up with this?” said Zengo.

“Pandini is selling off parts of the old stadium to raise money for the children’s hospital,” said O’Malley. “Totally forgot that was happening today.”

Zengo scoffed. “Really? A children’s hospital?”

“What? You don’t think sick kids need medicine? It’s a win-win. The hospital gets the funds it needs, and the die-hard baseball fans get a piece of history. And the new stadium is going to be beautiful. I think it’s great that our athletes are getting a stadium that they and their fans can be proud of. And the tickets are set to remain cheap. Brings the city together. Time was when the poorer folks and the richer folks lived on opposite sides of the city and didn’t intermingle at all.” O’Malley stepped on the brakes again to avoid running down an ecstatic fan. “I could do without all the traffic jams from the construction, though.”

Now the squad car had stopped completely. Zengo tapped his foot. They were never going to get to the docks. He wished O’Malley would do something.

Or maybe it was up to him.

Zengo slapped the light onto the roof and flipped on the sirens.

The cars in front of them instantly started moving out of the way, and, like a stampeding herd, the

crowd outside the coliseum scattered, shoving and knocking one another over.

“WHAT are you DOING, ROOKIE?” shouted O’Malley.

Maybe that wasn’t such a good move. Zengo turned off the sirens. “Sorry, partner!” he said. “Thought we were in a hurry is all.”

“Rule number one: I’m the senior detective in this car,” said O’Malley. “I say how fast we go, not you. *Especially* when I’m driving.”

“I thought rule number one was no one touches the radio but you.”

O’Malley turned onto a side road. “Rule number two, we’re on a case. We’re trying to travel below the radar here. You want everyone in town to know that we’re cops? The key is to keep as low profile as possible. Got it, rookie?”

“Yep,” said Zengo.

“Rule number three, and this is where your real education begins, junior: we need to stay tuned at all times. We watch with our eyes and our ears. We stay focused on the city, listen to its sounds, smell its smells, feel its pulse. We need to know what it’s thinking, anticipate what it’s about to do next. Detective work is about using your instincts, staying a few steps ahead of the unexpected.”



Zengo understood, but there was a problem. “Yeah, I know, but—”

“No buts!” chastised O’Malley. “Detective work is all about keeping your bill to the ground.”

“Old lady,” said Zengo, his throat tightening.

“What did you just call me?” O’Malley’s brows crossed.

“O’Malley, little old lady. There’s a—”

“Are you even listening to me, rookie?”

“LITTLE OLD LADY CROSSING THE ROAD! O’MALLEY, WATCH OUT!” Zengo pulled at the wheel, and the detectives swerved just in time.

O’Malley unbuttoned his jacket as his heart rate quadrupled. “Yowzer. That was a close one!” he said. He glanced in the rearview to see a little old lady shaking her cane.



Zengo folded his arms and smirked. “What was that last bit, about paying attention?”

The radio crackled again. “Where are you, one fifty-three? You’re taking all day! What’s your ETA?”

“PDQ!” said O’Malley. He flipped the sirens on, threw the light onto the roof, and stepped on the gas. “Rule number four, you gotta know when to put pedal to the metal. They’re expecting us at the docks!”

As they finally sped through the streets, Zengo thought, *Sheesh, I would have been there a half hour ago.*



THE DOCKS, 11:28 A.M.



Ten minutes later, Zengo and O'Malley pulled up to the downtown docks. Even during the daytime the docks were dank and dreary. Dockworkers carried crates off and on boats, and the air was filled with the sounds of distant foghorns. Zengo wasn't used to this, having grown up in the heights, far away from the poorer areas on the east side of Kalamazoo City. He shivered. It seemed ten degrees colder by the water, not to mention the stench! It hit Zengo so hard in the face that he gagged. It was the kind of stink that would linger on his clothes for days. He was starting to wish he hadn't worn his lucky leather jacket.

The easternmost pier was teeming with cops and the forensics team. They all turned as the two detectives stepped out of their car. Zengo put on his mirrored sunglasses. It was showtime. Time to solve a crime and show everyone who the new sheriff in KC was.

As they walked toward the group, O'Malley whispered, "Now listen, kid: Don't go saying

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