



Agent Peter Dumac in: Ex Marks the Spot

By Buddy Goodboy

Peter Dumac felt his tail bristle almost before he heard the storefront window shatter. He whirled around and caught a glimpse of black leather and a motorcycle helmet before getting shoulder-checked in the stomach. He hit the ground hard.

The figure on him purred with satisfaction. A gloved paw rifled through Peter's suit jacket. It took Peter's gun from his shoulder holster, then found the hidden pocket sewn into his jacket and removed a little nondescript box. The figure watched Peter's chest rise and fall, then stuffed the small box into its jacket pocket and ambled back the way it came.

Moments later, Peter awoke to the sound of sirens. Mustn't get held up. Peter patted himself down. His suit was in bad shape. Glass sticking out everywhere. His Beretta was gone. Wallet and keys were there, but—

The cheetah stopped cold. His shaking fingers groped for the pocket hidden in the lining of his coat—empty. Damn, damn, damn.

He clambered over the shattered storefront, crunching glass as he landed on the sidewalk. A tire track on the road showed a motorcyclist had sped off. He jogged over to his car and sprung the door. He tapped his smartwatch and hit the first speed dial. "Red! I was just knocked out by an unknown assailant. They made off with my gun and the box."

"Say again, Spots? Someone got the drop on you?"

"I wasn't expecting a tail. I tagged the box. Can you track it?"

"Of course. Pulling up the program now. Get moving—police band shows multiple cruisers coming your way. Any idea who you're after?"

Peter slammed the car into gear and let the engine roar ahead. "None. Which way?"

"Left at the light."

Peter growled softly to himself. He'd be lying if he didn't admit his tail was bouncing as he whipped around the turn, and his heart was racing as he closed in on his quarry. The chase satisfied his ancestors, and a toothy grin slid onto his face as a sign of respect and solidarity.

But if he didn't get that box back—well, what was the rest of this for? He frowned and stepped on the accelerator.

"You drive like a maniac, Spots."

"Left or right?"

"Right, then straight two blocks. I might remind you how long it took to build that car—"

The car thundered between a bus and a family minivan, causing gasps and screams in both, and a compressed epithet from Peter's smartwatch.

“—I’m glad I’m not out there with you. I intend to retire in one piece, fat and happy.”

Peter saw a powerful motorcycle in chrome and carbon fiber, with a familiar rider, weaving between crowded lanes. “Found them.”

“Confirmed, Peter, that's the target ahead. Be careful.”

Peter slammed into the next lane and thundered forward. The motorcyclist saw him and swung around, daring him onward. A semi truck started across the intersection between them.

“Red, the seats in this car fold all the way back?”

“Now’s hardly the—oh. Spots, you'll never make it.”

Peter gunned the engine and leaned his seat as far back as it would go.

The car charged. It rammed under the semi. The roof crumpled in a thunderous crash of metal, but the car plowed on. It fishtailed as the roof tore off. Peter pulled himself up. The target was right there—the target was stopped!

He slammed the brakes and skidded just short of the motorcyclist. He smashed into the steering wheel. He wasn't missing teeth, but he was bleeding from his snout. Both his eyes would be blackened. His watch face was cracked.

Leather creaked as the motorcyclist dropped into the seat next to him. Peter couldn't recognize their scent through the heavy smell of blood. There was a metal glint, and his own walnut-and-nickel Beretta was pointed at his heart.

Peter spit a mouthful of blood over what was left of the doorframe. “I want that box.”

“What happens if you don't get it back?”

Peter looked into the blank faceplate before him. “The world ends.”

“I don't think so. I think that you want to let me keep it. The world could be ours.” The cyclist pulled the gun off Peter to lift off the helmet.

Of course. Crystal.

The rabbit shook her head and pulled her ears out of the helmet. Her diamond-white fur shimmered in the moonlight. Her smile was deadly. A cold blue stone glistened where a right eye should be. “Don't think I've forgotten our time together, Mr. Dumac.”

“I haven't either. I still have scars.”

She pulled his face closer. “You and I were so close. You loved me.”

He could almost taste her over the blood in his mouth. “I thought I did. I was wrong.”

She stopped short of kissing him. “You mean it.”

“Yes.”

She growled and slowly scratched his face, splitting the skin and digging a deep furrow into his cheek.

He cried out.

“There's nothing better than this. You're a predator. You want me. To chase me around the world, for as long as we last.”

“The world's so much bigger than I knew—I never realized... how small you are. How small we both were.” Peter's paw snaked back out of Crystal's pocket. He had it. “And that makes it much easier to say goodbye.” He tapped a button on the dash.

The passenger seat ejected, rocketing Crystal into the air.

Peter shifted the car into gear and trundled off.

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Inside the restaurant, Anthony could see *maitre ds* fussing at the front door. A tow truck seemed to be hauling away half a sports car. Anthony was an accountant. He never went to restaurants like this. It seemed unusual.

At the front, a cheetah in a ripped white dinner jacket drenched in blood staggered in and shouldered past a throng of busboys.

Anthony gasped. Peter...?

Peter silently stood before Anthony. He put a box in Anthony's paw and dropped to one knee.