

ANOTHER FINE MESS

by Sharon Dickerson

(a BATB/Night Court/Ghostbusters crossover)

No one ever said that working for the DA's office would be easy. In fact, she had resigned from corporate law because she wanted to contribute something more meaningful to the world than enhancing some corporation's profit margin. But night court was more of a challenge than she'd anticipated.

After the first dozen prostitution cases, she knew the routine; she almost had the sentencing memorized - \$55 and time served. They'd had more than their share of unusual cases, thanks to several conventions whose guests had celebrated too enthusiastically during their trip to the Big Apple. *'High Society'* took on a new meaning when she arraigned several inebriated lords and ladies in full medieval splendor. Her ears still rang from the metal detector's unexpected encounter with three suitcases containing chain mail.

She'd barely glanced at the docket for the second session, so she stayed behind while the others descended en masse to eat lunch. Though they'd made her feel welcome - almost overwhelmingly so in Bull's case - Catherine decided to take a working lunch. Since this was her first assignment to municipal court, she wanted to check on the proper procedures.

Not that this court followed anything remotely resembling any standard procedure she'd studied in law school. Still, she was here to do a job.

Judge Stone and his court crew

"Miss Chandler?" Bull loomed over her like an amiable golem. "You didn't come down to lunch. I could run down and get you some. They had my favorite - tuna melted on rye."

She opened her mouth to correct him, then thought better of it. Recalling the cafeteria food, his description might be right after all. Instead, she smiled. "No, thanks. I brought my own."

"Oh...." Bull glanced past her towards the judge's chambers. "I gotta get back to work. All rise!"

As she obeyed, Catherine quickly looked at the public defender. Christine Sullivan's attention was focused on her briefs, as she skimmed the file, her expression grew more and more incredulous.

"Gonna catch some flies, Miss. Sullivan?"

Her mouth snapped shut as she peered at Judge Stone. "No, Your Honor. But this ..."

Suddenly, the doors at the back of the courtroom crashed open. ***'You point that thing at me one more time, and they're gonna be huntin' YOUR' ghost!'*** snarled bailiff Ros Russell, as she escorted two malefactors in front of her.

The blonde man did not look up from the device whose antennae remained lowered, his shorter partner glanced fearfully from Roz to his companion.

"Is she human, Egon?" he whispered.

"According to these readings, yes." He turned and found himself looking up at Bull who had sidled

forward to help if necessary. Running the bizarre device along Bull's broad torso, he added. "But I'm not so certain about this one."

Bull Shannon beamed. "Why, thank you ..."

The discussion continued as Roz hustled them towards the bench. Catherine peered at the charge sheet then at the mismatched duo.

Harry Stone's gavel smacked down, effectively cutting off the shorter man's protests.

"Gentlemen! Let's put the toys away and get down to cases. Ms Prosecutor?"

"Yes, Your Honor." Catherine stepped forward. "These men were apprehended while trespassing in a disused subway tunnel. According to the police reports, they were allegedly investigating...." she quickly checked her notes. "... reports of some supernatural disturbances located in the vicinity of the subway tunnels."

"But they *are* there!" interjected the shorter man. "They originated somewhere under Central ..."

"Sir." Christine glared at her client who fell silent. "My clients were merely indulging their scientific curiosity. Dr. Stantz owns a shop for books on parapsychology, while Dr. Spengler teaches ..."

"Behavioral psychology, not geology." Catherine smiled coolly at her opponent's annoyed reaction, then continued smoothly. "These men have identified themselves as paranormal investigators and eliminators, otherwise known as ..."

"The Ghostbusters!" Bull could barely contain his excitement; any moment Catherine expected him to bounce. "Wow - this is great!"

Roz tugged her huge partner back to his post while he protested weakly. "But Roz, they've seen all sorts of neat stuff! Like the time the giant marshmallow man ..."

"You got marshmallows for brains if you believe that crazy stuff."

Stantz protested. "But it really happened; you can ask the mayor's office. He'll vouch ..."

"The mayor's office requested a court injunction that forbids these so-called psychic investigators from operating within the tri-state area." Catherine ignored the hurt look from Bull.

"That's because they didn't want to pay us. We save the city from what could have been the biggest holocaust since Sodom and Gomorrah, and not only do they refuse to honor the bill, they slap us with injunctions that effectively put us out of business," Spengler drily commented.

Stantz nodded, glaring at Judge Stone as if he were the emblem of disbelieving authority figures.

"This cavalier attitude epitomizes the reason why the state demands that these men should be prosecuted for violating the court's injunction."

While Christine protested that her clients had been needlessly persecuted by police surveillance, Catherine noticed a black man studying the law's stolid guardians before he began to move towards them.

As he reached the swinging doors, Roz clapped her hand on his shoulder; he turned. "You *know* these clowns?" she asked.

A wry grin answered her. "I work for 'em. Maybe I should speak up as a character witness or something."

"They're characters, all right."

"Yeah, but they know what they're talking about. There's some weird shit going down in this city. Like it says, *'There's more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in thy philosophy, Horatio.'*" The grin grew wider at her blank look. "Hamlet - Shakespeare."

"Yeah? Well, try this; *'You're known by the company you keep.'*" Roz Russell."

"Really? My name's Winston Zeddemore, in case you're interested."

An evil grin answered him, then she jerked her head to indicate he could join his wildly gesticulating partners.

"See ya after session, Zeddemore. You can check out the thing that's haunting my apartment."

"Strange sounds at night?"

"So they tell me."

"I look forward to checking it out. 'Scuse me." He paused inside the door and cleared his throat.

"Uh ... sir ... may I approach the bench?"

Catherine studied the newcomer; although he wore a jumpsuit similar to the other two men, he radiated an aura of common sense. She waited while the duo appraised him of the problem, but as the explanations became more and more elaborate, she decided enough was enough.

"Your Honor, if we could proceed ..."

"Right, Ms. Chandler. Well, we've heard the charges ..."

"I shoulda gone with you guys instead of staying with the car ..."

"Gentlemen!" The trio peered at him, startled out of their discussion. "I've heard the charges ..."

Stantz, Venkman, Spengler, Winston

"Completely erroneous."

"Quiet, Egon. Let the ma ...the judge ... say his piece.

Harry barely acknowledged the exchange as he turned to the public defender. "Okay, Ms. Sullivan, give it your best shot."

Behind him, Mac muttered. "This had better be good."

Taking a deep breath, Christine launched into her appeal. "Sir, these charges are based on an alleged trespass and vandalism of disused public property. My clients maintain they have caused no structural damage to the property in question; they were ..."

"The term is spelunking," prompted Egon. Winston and Ray glanced towards the judge who smiled.

"I've explored a few caves in my time. Anything else?"

Ray glanced towards his colleagues. "Uh, Your Honor, you wouldn't believe what we found down there! Tunnels that date back to the turn of the century. The graffiti ... we ought to charge admission to see some of those paintings! And the linguists and historians would have a field day!"

"And what were you doing there?" Catherine asked, her tone sharper than she'd expected.

"We were just checking things out to make sure it's safe," Winston said smoothly. "The Gho ... the company is prepared to meet anything, above or below the ground."

"Including ghoulies, ghosties, long leggity beasties and other things that go bump in the night?"

"You said it, Your Honor, not me." Winston and Harry exchanged glances that spoke of complete understanding, so Catherine took her cue.

"Nevertheless, sir, the injunction states ..."

"Yes, Ms. Prosecutor, it does. However, there was no actual disturbance, supernatural or otherwise. Therefore, this court ..."

"I'm Dr. Peter Venkman," announced a voice from the back of the courtroom. "Now what seems to be the problem here?"

As Bull and Roz moved to intercept him, the newcomer ducked under Bull's outstretched arms, chucked Roz daringly under the chin, as he made a kissing motion at her, and hopped over the railing.

A dark-haired woman trailed him, but her protests were cut short by Roz's flat statement. "No, you don't, sister. We're full up. Bull ... take him."

Catherine glanced up at the newcomers, barely acknowledging the man who was making his way up to the bench; however, her gaze came to rest on the elegantly dressed woman who accompanied him.

'Now what on earth would a woman like that see in someone like him?' she wondered. Everything about the woman said education, breeding, sophistication - in short, a complete opposite to her loud, obnoxious companion. The woman stood behind the railing, doing a good job of hiding her anxiety about the proceedings, and Catherine marveled at her composure.

Glancing nervously around the courtroom, her eyes met Catherine's for just a moment before she returned her attention to the proceedings in front of the bench. The more Catherine watched the woman, the stronger the feeling she'd seen her somewhere before. Then it came to her and she knew why the woman had looked so familiar. While she couldn't remember her name, Catherine was positive the woman played in the symphony - cello, if she wasn't mistaken.

That revelation made her even more curious as to why she was with this man. *'Talk about opposites attracting. Then again, considering her own life, maybe she shouldn't look too closely at these two.'* However, those thoughts would have to wait as the commotion in the front of the courtroom demanded her attention once more.

The huge bailiff lumbered forward to intercept the psychologist, but Harry waved him back.

"You had something to add, Dr. Venkman?"

Grinning, Venkman ignored the others' gestures for him to retreat and leaned on the bench. "We're all reasonable adults here, Your Honor. You see, the police have got a coupla funny ideas about us, the mayor, too, for that matter. They tried to pin a couple of exploding buildings on us - but you can't believe everything you hear, especially what you've heard about us ..."

"That so?" Stone drawled, daring him to say more.

Winston joggled Peter's elbow. "Yo, Pete. Enough already. The man was about to pronounce sentence."

"And I'm sure he wanted to know all the facts." He turned to Harry. "Lemme tell you, I'm an authority on these things, not some half-blind cops. You may've seen my show."

"Yeah, I've seen it. And let me tell you something, Dr. Venkman; never try to con a conman. You'll get taken real fast."

The two men glared at one another for several minutes. Finally, Catherine cleared her throat to get their attention.

"Sir, if we could get back to the case?"

"You're right, Ms. Chandler. As I was about to say ..."

"Hey, what about our rights? You haven't heard our side of the story ..."

The other Ghostbusters buried Venkman's protests in a swift stranglehold.

Egon separated himself from the pile and said calmly, "As you were saying, Your Honor?"

Judge Stone ignored the sputtering on the floor as he stated. "Seeing that no harm was done to said substructures, charges are dropped."

Venkman struggled to his feet. "I want to make a statement!"

"Venkman ..." Harry held up his gavel. "I'm not finished yet - and don't think I won't jail you for contempt."

Peter opened his mouth to protest once more, but the dark-haired woman caught his eyes and he shut it again. Catherine wondered whether he was stopped by her presence, or by the fact that two of his partners had their arms looped around his throat and were ready to throttle him. They held him so tightly that she could almost hear his joints creak when they shifted to get a better grip.

He shot an appealing glance at Catherine, but she stared back coldly, as if he were the number one perpetrator of the crime on trial. Sighing, Peter looked at Christine who shushed him before turning her attention to the judge. Finally, he got the message and kept quiet.

"All right, we'll start from the beginning." Harry waited for another protest but, for once, there was silence. "Dr. Spengler, Dr. Stantz, I'm releasing you on your own recognizance. As for you, Dr. Venkman, that's \$55 and one week's community service for contempt of court."

"Wait a minute!"

" 'Or', you can spend time in holding while we check into things. Your choice." Harry paused a second; Venkman glared at him, but the judge showed no sign of changing his mind.

When no protest came, he brought the gavel down. "That's a wrap, folks! See you Monday."

As the courtroom prepared to resume their normal (*or in the Ghostbusters' case, paranormal*) lives, Catherine judged that it was time to make a strategic retreat. The case had been rather too close for comfort, and Spengler had never really stopped scanning the courtroom.... not that there was anything supernatural in her life, but things were complex enough without added complications.

Bidding goodbye to her coworkers, she almost stumbled over the quarreling foursome in the hallway; Venkman still wanted revenge for his sentencing, and the others were busily trying to dissuade him.

"Come on, Egon, just a little one." He grinned mischievously as if picturing the scene. "Then we can come in and blast it."

"Peter, you don't really mean that...." The feminine voice of reason was quickly seconded, so she left them to it.

Nothing but shadows waited for her in the parking lot. Automatically checking her car, Catherine slid into the front seat and started the engine. The car seemed to know the way, and the city itself was unusually peaceful. Perhaps the nightside of life had a more positive edge than she'd known.

And if its nasty, demonic side ever tried to haunt her? Well, she knew who to call.... if they stayed out of jail long enough!

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