



# the Monkey's Raincoat (1987)

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## ***The Monkey's Raincoat***

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## Chapter 1

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cole, this has nothing to do with you. Please excuse me." Ellen Lang stood up out of the director's chair across from my desk. I'd had it and its mate fitted in a nice pastel burgundy a year ago. The leather was broken in and soft and did not crack when she stood. "We shouldn't have come here, Janet," she said. "I feel awkward." Janet Simon said, "For Christ's sake, Ellen, sit down."

Ellen sat.

Janet Simon said, "Talk to him, Ellen. Eric says He's very good at this sort of thing. He can help."

Speak, Ellen. Arf. I rearranged two of the Jiminy Cricket figurines on my desk and wondered who the hell Eric was.

Ellen Lang adjusted her glasses, clutched her hands, and faded back into the director's chair. She looked small, even though she wasn't. Some people are like that. Janet Simon looked like a dancer who'd spent a lot of time at it. Lean and strong. Good bones. She wore tight beige cotton pants and a loose cotton shirt striped with shades of blue and pink and red. No panty line. I hoped she didn't think I was d+!class+! in my white Levi's and Hawaiian shirt. Maybe the shoulder holster made up for it.

Ellen Lang smiled at me, trying to feign comfort in an uncomfortable situation. She said, "Well, perhaps if you told me about yourself."

Janet Simon sighed, giving it the weight of the world. "Mr. Cole is a private detective. He detects for money. You give him some money and he'll find Mort. Then you can get Perry back and kiss off Mort and get your life together." She said it like she was talking to someone with brain damage. Great legs, though.

"Thanks, Mom," I said.

Janet Simon gave me a look, then turned away and stared at the Pinocchio clock. It's on the wall beside the door that leads to my partner's office, just above the little sign that says The Elvis Cole Detective Agency. As the second hand sweeps around, Pinocchio's eyes move from side to side. Janet Simon had been glancing at it since they walked in. Probably thought it was peculiar.

Ellen fidgeted. "I was just curious, that's all. I'm sorry."

"You don't have to be sorry, Mrs. Lang," I said. "I'm thirty-five years old and I've been licensed as a private investigator for seven years. The state of California requires three thousand hours of experience before they'll give you the license. I spent that time with a man named George Feider. Mr. Feider was an investigator here in Los Angeles for almost forty years. Before that I was a security guard, and before that I spent some time in the Army. I'm five feet eleven and one-half inches tall, I weigh one hundred seventy-six pounds, and I'm licensed to carry a firearm. How's that?"

She blinked.

"Yeah, it impresses me, too," I said. "I don't take custody work. I might find your husband and your son but after that it's up to you. I don't steal children unless there's reason to believe the child is in danger."

Ellen Lang looked as if I'd kicked her. "Oh, no. No, no. Mort's a good man, Mr. Cole, please don't think he isn't." Janet Simon said something like shumphf. "You have to understand. He's been under enormous strain. He left ICM last year to start his own talent agency and things just haven't gone the way they should. He's had to worry about the house payments and the cars and schools. It's been terrible for him."

Janet Simon said, "Mort's an asshole." She was standing by the sliding glass doors that lead out to the little balcony. On a clear day I could go out there and see all the way down Santa Monica Boulevard to the water. The view had been the selling point. Janet Simon fit nicely with the view.

"I just want Perry home, that's all." Ellen Lang's eyes went from Janet Simon to me, sort of like the Pinocchio clock. "Mort will settle for McDonald's. He'll let Perry stay up all hours-

I cleared my throat. "Mrs. Lang, I don't bill by the day. I charge a flat fee exclusive of expenses and I get it in advance. You're looking at about two grand here. Why don't you wait? Mort might call." McDonald's. Christ.

"Yes," Ellen Lang said. She looked relieved. "I'm sure you're right."

"Bullshit," Janet Simon said. She turned away from the balcony to sit in the other director's chair. "That's not right and she knows it. Mort's been threatening to leave for almost a year. Mort treats her like a sop. He runs around." Ellen Lang made a little gurgling noise. "He's even hit her twice that I know of. Now he's taken their son and disappeared. She wants her son back. That's all she wants. It's very important to her."

Ellen Lang's eyes widened but didn't seem to be looking at anything. "Ms. Simon," I said evenly, "as much as I'd like to lick chocolate syrup off your body, I want you to shut up."

Ellen Lang said, "Oh, my." Janet Simon stood up and then Ellen Lang stood up. Janet Simon put a hand on Ellen Lang's shoulder and shoved her back down. "Who do you think you're talking to?" she said.

"A woman who's very concerned with her friend's problem. But a woman who, right now, is acting like a royal pain in the ass. If the sexual nature of my comment surprised you it's only because I needed to be shocking to get your attention."

She chewed at the inside of her cheek, trying to decide about me, then nodded and took her seat.

"Also," I said, "I find you devastatingly attractive and it's been on my mind."

She leaned forward and said, "Eric told us you had a partner. Maybe we should speak with him."

Eric again. The Mystery Man. "Fine by me."

Janet Simon looked at the door beneath the Pinocchio clock. If she looked close enough she'd see the little ridge in the jamb from the time someone had forced the lock. Three coats of paint, and you could still see the crack. She didn't notice. "Is that his office?" she said.

"Unh-hunh."

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Aren't you going to introduce us?"

"Nope."

Janet Simon stood up, steamed over to the door, and went through. I smiled at Ellen Lang. Ellen Lang looked nervous but smiled back. After a while Janet Simon rejoined us.

"That's no office," she said. "There's no desk, no furniture, nothing. What kind of office is that?"

"Italian moderne?"

She cocked her head a little to the side. "Eric said you'd be like this."

Eric. "How do you know Eric?" I smiled. Mr. Sly. I have quite a charming smile. Like Peter Pan. Innocent, but with a touch of the rake.

"We worked together when I was in the legal department at Universal."

That brought it back. Eric Filer. Three years ago.

"He said you found some film negatives for him. He said it wasn't easy. He recommends you highly."

"M'man Eric."

"He also said you were like this."

"Were you ever a dancer?" I said.

If she wanted to smile, she fought it. She took out a pack of Salem Lights, lit up in the office but stood in the balcony door, blowing smoke out over West Hollywood. I liked the way her neck looked when she lifted her chin to send out a plume of smoke. Some woman. I bet her mouth tasted like an ashtray.

"Listen, Mrs. Lang," I said, turning back to Ellen, "I don't know if Mort is going to call or not, or what you want, or what Mort wants. A couple hundred women have sat where you're sitting, and usually their husbands call. But not always. You're going to have to decide which way you want to jump."

Ellen Lang nodded. Pinocchio's eyes shifted back and forth a few times. Janet Simon smoked. After a while Ellen Lang took two photographs out of her purse and put them carefully on the desk. "On Friday Mort always picks up Perry from school. Perry goes to Oakhurst and the girls go to Westridge. That's Cindy and Carrie. Fridays, Perry gets out two hours earlier. Only this past Friday they never came home. I tried all weekend to find Mort. I phoned Oakhurst Monday but Perry wasn't there, and I phoned again this morning and he still wasn't there. They've been gone for four days."

I looked at the pictures. Mort was four or five years older than me, balding on top with a round face, thin lifeless hair, and skinny arms. He was wearing a tee shirt that said U. S. S. Bluegill, Maui, Hawaii. He had the sort of eyes that had just been looking somewhere else. On the back of the picture someone had written Morton Lang, age 39, 5' 10", 145 lbs, brown hair and brown eyes, no visible scars or tattoos, mole on right forearm. The writing was even and firm, all of the letters identical in size.

"I wrote that," Ellen said. God bless television.

The other picture was a wallet-size school photo of a little boy who looked like a smaller, less-worn version of Mort.

Perry Lang, age 9, 4' 8", 64 pounds, brown hair and brown eyes, no visible scars or tattoos or moles.

I put the pictures on the desk, then opened my right top desk drawer and took out a Bic pen and a blank yellow legal pad. I had to move my gun to get the pad. The gun was a Dan Wesson .38 Special with the 4-inch barrel, a gift from George Feider the day I got my license. It was a good gun. I closed the drawer, put the pad beside the pictures and the Bic on the pad.

"Okay," I said. "Did Mort leave a note?"

"No."

"Why would Mort take your son but not your two girls?"

"I don't know."

"Was Perry Mort's favorite?"

"That would be Carrie, our youngest daughter. I asked her if Mort said anything about this to her, thinking he might have, but she said no."

I nodded and wrote Carrie on the pad.

"Your husband make any large withdrawals recently?"

Ellen Lang said, "I'm not very good with figures. Mort handles all our business affairs." She said it apologetically.

"How about work? Someone there who might know what was on your husband's mind?"

Ellen Lang looked at the floor. "Well, he's not part of an office anymore, like I said. He worked out of the house, and he didn't really talk'a" She trailed off and turned red, her lips a tight purple knot.

I tapped the Bic against the pad, which wasn't exactly brimming with information.

I looked at Janet Simon. She had a tight, sexy grin on her face. Or maybe it was a sneer. "I wouldn't think of interfering," she said.

"Maybe if I said please."

Janet Simon took a final pull on her cigarette, tossed it out over the railing, and came back inside. "Tell him about the girlfriend, Ellen."

Ellen Lang's voice was so soft I could barely hear her. "He has a girlfriend. She lives at the Piedmont Arms off Barrington in Brentwood."

"Her name is Kimberly Marsh," Janet Simon said. "She's one of his clients. 412 Gorham, just above San Vicente. Apartment 4, on the ground, in the back. An actress." She took two rolodex cards from her purse and flipped them down on the desk next to the photographs. The top one had