

The Adventures of Vulpecula
Episode Two
Hair

1.

"Tell me, Vulpecula, do you have any wild ideas or hunches about, well, whoever could possibly be responsible for this?" Officer Pends, literally a sheep of the law, asked with curiosity in his voice that he couldn't disguise.

There was the distinctive smell of chocolate beneath the officer's breath, which only fueled the stereotypes regarding police-officers and their unhealthy infatuation with donuts. Thankfully, stereotypes weren't always negative, and a love for donuts was practical for anybody with a working brain. Speaking of donuts, Vulpecula recalled passing a stand earlier that looked to have been selling pastries. Alas, 'twas not the time for forbidden delicacies, but the time for work, which was something that Vulpecula enjoyed even more than sweets.

"What were you saying?" Vulpecula eventually inquired while pulling at some of the white fur on his chin. For better or worse, there were always a lot of fox-things bumbling about in his mind, and surprisingly, this included more than simply an unwavering desire to eat floor-roaming critters or birds.

That would be an example of a stereotype with negative connotations.

Vulpecula didn't have any problem whatsoever when it came to birds, in-fact, his dear friend Apus just so happened to be an owl that often helped him out on his cases.

"I was just asking whether or not you think you'll be able to figure out who stole it?"

Vulpecula commenced biting the nail of his thumb for a moment; he did not look forward to having to ask Officer Pends to repeat his question a third time. It wasn't Vulpecula's fault; he was a victim of his own imagination, for better or worse, things of such little importance generally failed at keeping his interest for very long. "I'm sorry, I swear that this time I'll listen, run that by me one more time," he said with an innocence that thankfully kept the officer from ignoring him out of sheer (Get it?) spite. (Forget it.)

"Do you have anything?"

Vulpecula looked at him earnestly for a second, and then frowned. "No, that's not what you said," he retorted before beginning to walk forward toward where the sword once resided. There was a glass-case that once contained the Sword of Tertius. The sword got its name from Charles Tertius, a famous figure in Maharris history.

"Did you ever get a hold of Apus or Lacerta?" Vulpecula only waited for a moment or two for an answer prior to letting his eyes scan the area of the crime-scene.

The Malane Palace is amongst the artsiest places in all Maharris, and the go-to place for the country's history. If you are a tourist visiting Italina, you are usually there because you want to experience one or a mixture of three things.

There's the illustrious and beautiful Sanchi Tower that looks down at the rest of the city, which is arguably one of the most coveted landmarks in all Maharris. Then, there's the delicious rice, spaghetti, and aquatic foods, but other-wise, tourists came to Italina because they wanted to see the Malane Palace. Vulpecula, however, as he has grown accustom to being, was the exception to that rule, because he was a tourist exploring the city, but wasn't there to experience any of those things. Although, that's not exactly true because he was there on official business.

He was a consultant for some of the most bizarre criminal investigations across the globe, and in so, Vulpecula supposed that he was wrong, and was in-fact another example to that theory. He looked over to see the police-officer, who looked a tad haggard and, ahem, sheepish. If only he knew of the

self-discovery Vulpecula experienced merely seconds ago. All Vulpecula knew for sure was that Officer Pends never answered his question, and so, Vulpecula decided to put his mind at ease, "No worries, I am sure that they'll find a way of getting a hold of me."

Vulpecula could see that his words didn't do very much to settle the police-officer's nerves, and he had no interest in making further attempts. He could only imagine the extreme amount of stress that must have come with the job. Then again, Vulpecula didn't find his job to be particularly easy either and so; the officer shouldn't have been pawning his negative energy off on him. "Please leave while I am working," Vulpecula blurted out at once.

"What?" The officer asked, as if he expected his constant annoyances to go unnoticed.

"You are being a distraction."

The officer's face sagged into an even greater frown, which reminded V of what it looked like when a grape was left under the sun for too long. However, to his credit, Officer Pends left without argument.

"Hey, wait," Vulpecula called out urgently. "I am assuming that the rules of no flash photography don't apply during the routine in my investigation?"

Ah, there wasn't even as much as a smile, what a party-pooper. Vulpecula couldn't say he wasn't at least a bit disappointed they couldn't end up as friends.

He could have used the company.

There wasn't anything in the world that he found to be more tedious than museums. If it wasn't a caffeine addiction that killed V, it would be disinterest and boredom. (or somebody choking him, ... V's vendettas were already becoming notorious in his long career.)

He had a very severe case of attention defi....

Vulpecula walked over to where a medallion laid comfortably inside of a glass case, below it was an excerpt explaining its historical relevance.

Vulpecula did not read it.

There was no challenge in history; it was a subject that had been studied repeatedly by historians. There was seldom something to discover for yourself, but you could certainly go where man has gone thousands of times before. (History: The Eternal Frontier)

All the other subjects carried the same basic principle, but at least they were a challenge. Vulpecula was a private investigator and was a good enough detective, but the reasoning behind studying things which have already been thoroughly studied was lost on him. The only thing worth studying to him was the latest past, and that's what they paid him for.

Italina's finest brought Vulpecula and his friends here because somebody broke into the Malane Palace at approximately two in the morning and stole a sword once belonging to Charles Tertius, not to lollygag and look at dumb necklaces.

The cameras successfully filmed the happening as it occurred but because the incompetence of the security guards, the culprit was able to make the escape. The immediate deductive analysis is that it was a ruse conspired between the two security guards and an unnamed third-party, perhaps even a co-worker. This theory could be backed when you consider the amount of knowledge that the thief seemed to have. The thief easily dodged all the lasers while repelling down where the sword lay dormant.

There was no part of Vulpecula that wanted the case to be solved so easily though.

The idea of conspiring co-workers wasn't worth the vivacious Acerian adventurer, and quite frankly, it wasn't very original. Thankfully, Italina's head-honchos were friendly enough to send him a clip of the thievery as it took place, as well as give him access to all the faculty information. The camera fully captured video of somebody repelling down to the sword, however, didn't capture

footage on the perpetrator's entry into the building. The wiry frame, feminine stature, and the way that the culprit's hair was hugged by the ski-mask did all but imply the culprit was female.

There are only six security guards employed for the Malane Palace and not one of them is female. One other thing that may or may not be worth noting is that the thievery also fell on the "Night of the Dead," a Maharris holiday that is commonly celebrated by dressing up as a deceased figure in history. This, like most holidays, had lost its meaning, and had become merely an excuse for birds to defecate on vehicles as a "prank," chickens to egg houses, and for the heavy consumption of alcohol. After looking at both profiles for the fine, upstanding gentleman on-duty, V decided that it was reasonable to assume their negligence.

He didn't have the evidence to fully support that, but he had learned not to go against his intuition.

The only question is how the perpetrator could have known about the museum's short-comings.

Once again, there was an immediate answer, and it's that the lady was in cahoots with one of the guards and was thereby enabled means to get the "scoop" on security. The thorough (albeit brief) research that was done on each of the two security guards on-duty revealed that only one of them was married. He was married to a waitress at Ollie's which is open at all-hours of the day, and she just so happened to work on that night. In other-words, the dame had an alibi. As far as other family-members go, the athleticism and acrobatics applied by the thief suggested a female of youth, and as far as siblings went, the only one that had a sister was also a turtle, and there was no sign whatsoever of the female having a shell or bulky exterior.

These are the elements that are known about the case, and in that, with the attributes of the thief, there isn't too much to go on except that the perpetrator was a young, smaller-framed, and well-educated female. She'd need to be well-educated to pull off such a heist, even when considering the museum's short-comings.

There were so many questions, and with such little answers, Vulpecula realized these questions were the only thing getting him out of the bed in the morning. There was nothing that he envied more than the eternal sunshine of a thoughtless mind because for the life of him, he couldn't stop his eccentricities.

He didn't even know the species of the thief because there was no sign of a tail or other characteristics on her body. The mannerisms demonstrated cat-like abilities, but that was intuition more than fact. V had to credit this as being a commendable tool, and one that he used often during his cases. Somebody once said that hunches mustn't be allotted if they aren't fueled by logic. If an individual doesn't have the facts, then they'll find themselves distorting the initial truths in such a way that pieces together their theory. He took few inspirations from others, but those were examples of things that fitted into his self-imposed guidelines.

The way of solving a case isn't through theorizing but through comprehension of occurrences and finding a mistake in what would perhaps other-wise appear to be a utopia of antics. Vulpecula inspected the case which had once confined the sword, it once rested inside of a black case with red-fabric lining the bottom. There was also an impression in the fabric showing where the sword had been. The black-case laid upon a chrome-podium that stood at approximately five-feet, and much like the medallion that V had looked at earlier, there was a small excerpt explaining the sword's history.

This time, Vulpecula admittedly skimmed through the paragraph, not because he needed to polish his knowledge over the famous sword, but because he deemed it as worthy to the case.

Next, Vulpecula looked upon the glass-lid over the case, looking for any signs of smudging. He knew he wasn't going to find anything because the video showed that the thief wore gloves, but it was a habit. Also, it was a long-shot, but if he found a lot of finger-prints from another individual, maybe a

security guard, (excessive prints not seen on the other cases) that could imply there was interest in the item. "Not to be," belched the cruel hand of reality as it almost always did.

Wiped clean, but Vulpecula doubted it was done to erase evidence, more likely as something routine for the employees to do. Well, barnacles, thought V to himself, and not out-loud, because such harsh language wasn't to be spoken aloud!

Even still, there was a strong smell that kept entering his nostrils. An aroma smelling very reminiscent of perfume, could it have somehow belonged to the woman of the hour or was it simply the residue of a past tourist?

Click.

There was the distinctive sound of a door-latching from afar in the museum, but V heard it, and unsurprisingly enough, he found it to be inexplicably disruptive to his thought-process. He anticipated hearing the loud and unsettling sound of the police-officer's voice. He knew it was him as he recognized the pitter-patter from his furry feet with every step. Officer Pends carried himself like a lurch and dragged his feet as if they were especially heavy for him. Truth be told, they probably were, it was uncharacteristic for a sheep to be put in such a physical job, and the uniform and boots that came with it couldn't have been lenient to his small-stature. V felt for him, for he too, as a fox, was forced to endure his inefficient strength for a considerable number of tasks, but, then again, he was a private investigator, and didn't often need much more than his brain.

"Yes?"

He tried to come off polite as to hide his admitted irritation. There was nothing he hated more profoundly than sounds while he was trying to think but didn't want him to take it personally. Other foot-steps soon followed, clearly not belonging to the uncharacteristically loud sheep. Vulpecula easily identified them as belonging to Apus and Lacerta. "Good evening," Vulpecula called out.

"My friends! May I ask what kept you?"

He turned around curiously, and sure-enough, his hypothesis stood ground and could now be deemed as fact, it was them!

"It's raining cats and dogs out there," Lacerta answered at once which immediately drew a firm stare from Vulpecula. "Not literally," Lacerta assured.

And so, Vulpecula went back to looking at the empty-case, doing hand gestures welcoming them to come and make their own inspection.

"I haven't discovered any specific pieces of evidence. If we can't find anything to go on, we'll need to interview each of the employees to get a better read on them."

Apus and Lacerta both walked over to where Vulpecula had been conducting his inspections, ducking beneath the red-velvet rope that kept civilians from getting too close.

"Do you really think that any of the guards are actually capable of a heist of this magnitude?" Lacerta asked.

Apus, Lacerta, and Vulpecula had all three divided the work-load of conducting information regarding the employees. Vulpecula had admittedly done less than his fair-share, hence why Lacerta and Apus were just arriving. Perhaps humorously, Lacerta had been the only one imploring the hunt and peck technique to his laptop. "Looks can be deceiving, if you decide a book on its cover, there are so many library books that are going to be ignored on the shelves, but that doesn't mean they're bad books. In all honesty, if the individual only took advantage of flaws and happenstance in the system, it wouldn't have required very much, which is reason enough to believe that the guards are a possible candidate."

Vulpecula scratched at his nose. The scent of perfume felt aggravating and uncanny, but he couldn't seem to pinpoint its origins.

"However," Vulpecula began again. "I assume that this is not the case, but still, that doesn't mean there isn't a possible lead. Maybe they were asked a lot of questions by one of the visitors, in-fact, doesn't the Malane Palace conduct tours over the museum?"

Vulpecula's mind was racing with thoughts faster than a deer from a lion, but like the lion, until he caught his prey, he had nothing to sink his teeth into. (The heinousness of lions is also an unfair stereotype, but they are very proud animals, and gotta eat.)

There were so many routine questions of making something out of nothing. Really, it was a process of throwing things at the wall and hoping that one of them sticks. "I will ask Pends about the employees, maybe you're right and there are interns or volunteers," Apus answered.

There was always an uncanny metallic sound to Apus' voice that made him sound raspy and robotic. Vulpecula didn't know whether he liked or disliked that about him, but he was used to it. He was very intelligent, which Vulpecula knew was an asset, and was very computer-savvy. Apus just didn't much care for people, or the socialization that went along with it. That was the exact opposite of Lacerta, who was more of the loud-mouth and arrogant variety. He wasn't really the greatest fit for the mysterious incorporated style that they paid abidance to, but every once in a while, he provided a way to earn his keep.

More importantly, they were Vulpecula's dearest friends; their company was one of the only things that kept his sanity intact.

"That's a pretty aroma," Apus whispered beneath his breath, not particularly saying it to either of them, but Vulpecula heard it. Apus smelled it too, and at that realization, his eyes became transfixed on the multiple hairs to the left of where he was standing. They didn't need to be drenched in perfume for V to smell them, but Apus being able to smell them proved that they were. They were inside of the "No Trespassing" portion of the museum and too abundant to be coincidental.

"This doesn't belong to the guards," Vulpecula said before dropping to one knee and picking up the strands of hair with his paws. Eventually, after breathing in the aroma of the scent, he had them placed into a zip-lock baggie for safe-keepings. "Seven strands, lavender, about fifteen inches in length, it's inside the red-rope barricading the sword." His eyes went up to Apus and Lacerta. "This hair most likely belongs to our girl."