

The Threefold Law

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originally published on www.fanfiction.net 03-05-12



"You might've warned us," Stoker complained.

Stanley stretched, leaned all the way back in his desk chair and laced his fingers behind his neck. He was doing a particularly poor job of trying to hide his grin.

"Look, you heard the man. He made the decision after the party you guys threw. Can I help it if that trick all of you played was so convincing that he bought it?" He grinned broadly. "It was pure coincidence that I was attending that Fire Prevention Conference in Santa Barbara the very next shift."

Stoker's acknowledging nod lacked even a vestige of conviction. "And you're saying that you didn't warn us that Captain Hookrader was going to cover your shift because you didn't know about it?"

Stanley's eyes slid away and his shoulders inched upward in a shrug. "Life lessons, Mike, are best learned through direct experience." He tilted his head to his right, in the direction of the raised voices still audible from the day room. "Sounds like they're still pointing fingers."

Stoker shifted his weight against the edge of the Captain's desk and straightened the Engine's logbook.

"No, now they're arguing about..." He stopped, frowned, and thought about how to say it. "They know what a hoist is, obviously – we use them often enough - but they're still arguing about petard."

Stanley raised both eyebrows and turned with deliberate slowness to look at the unabridged dictionary on the shelf behind him.

"Well, if they come in here to borrow the dictionary, Cap, they'd have to admit that they don't know what the word means, even if they're pretty clear on your overall meaning."

Stanley tipped his head downward but the fist he used to cover his mouth did a poor job of hiding his merriment.

"Think of it this way, Mike. You guys get Hook half a dozen shifts a year; C-shift has him every shift. Those are the guys who'll really be paying the piper for that stunt you all pulled, including that speech Kelly gave. If anyone should be put out..."

A sudden raised voice from the day room traveled and echoed throughout the bay. "It is NOT Karma, Gage! You don't know *anything* about Karma, man!"

Stanley snorted and even Stoker briefly smiled.

"So..." He bit his lip. "You think the rest of the department..."

"Oh yeah," Stanley interjected with a nod. "Pretty much everyone in the Battalion knows, including the Chief. Probably the entire division."

Stoker sagged a little. "Great."

"Maybe even HQ," Stanley added, biting down on his lower lip.

"So the only one who doesn't know..."

Stanley nodded. "Yep. And if you guys know what's good for you..." he said with an piercing look.

Stoker sighed and gave a reluctant nod of agreement. The only thing worse than another three years of Hookrader, for which they had no one but themselves to blame, would be three years with a vengeful Hookrader who learned he'd been tricked by the men of Station 51.

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