

Literary Heist

Taking Back the Arts

November Seventeenth

□ MARCH 20, 2021 □ DONALD MCMANN □ 0

Bio

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Evie was missing something. Late the previous week her team – yes, *her* team, chosen by her, directed by her, inspired by her – had presented the communication campaign to the client, Fourco Petroleum. This very afternoon Fourco’s CEO, Edward D. Timmons, had called to say that the firm had accepted it. There were details to work out, contracts to write, but it would be at least three years of work. Billings in the hundreds of thousands. Evie should be ecstatic. She *was* ecstatic. But something nagged.

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“Evie! Come on. We’re going to Players for a little celebration of your triumph.” It was Mr. Big. Perhaps because his name was Biggalow, Sam Biggalow, everyone at the agency referred to him as Mr. Big. But not to his face. Or at least never more than once to his face. He was five-two. In shoes.

Shoes with quite thick soles and substantial heels. But he was also vice-president of business development. Different kind of big. Seriously big.

“I’ll make an appearance. Gotta get home at a decent hour tonight. Perry’s been making jokes about being an ‘office widower,’ and lately those jokes don’t seem to be amusing him much. Or me.”

It was already past six when Evie got to the bar. A couple of phone calls that wouldn’t wait. Some email to deal with.

“A glass of Chablis?” It was her assistant, Natalie. “You deserve a whole case.”

“Just one. Glass, I mean. Driving.”

“Taxi?” Natalie shouted over Players’ throbbing music.

“No. Gotta get home. Can’t leave Perry alone all evening again.”

“But this is your big night.” Evie just smiled. Natalie handed her the glass and moved on, headed purposefully toward the new assistant art director. Evie had a swallow or two of the too-warm white and set the glass down on the bar.

He came up behind her and put his arm around her waist. Mr. Big. There was no squeezing. No fondling. Just an arm, gentle, firm, persuasive.

“You done good,” he said, putting on the bad grammar.

“I done as good as I could.”

“Come sit with me.”

They moved through the crowd to a deuce on the far side of the room. He led, bobbing slightly to the driving beat of the music. Hips swaying just a little. She might have chuckled. Just a little. Should she? They sat. Drinks arrived – scotch for both. The special stuff – scotch old enough to vote. They talked about the contract, the business, the creative process, life. It was easy between them.

And then there was a moment when they fell silent.

“Nothing to say?” she asked.

“Too much to say.”

“Oh, wow,” she said, picking up her phone from the table, “it’s already past ten. I’d better get going. I’m not a carefree single like you are.”

“You’re right about the single part.”

They looked at one another. Neither moved nor spoke. Then she stood. He stood. The hug lasted just a little too long. Unplanned. Perhaps. The scent of product in his hair. The feel of his hands on her back. Awkward byes and see-you-tomorrows. Then she was on her way out into the chilly November night. A skiff of powdery snow swirled across the sidewalk. She hurried without knowing why. Maybe just the cold.

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Evie eased her car into the drive. She pressed the controller for the garage-door opener while, behind the car, a giant plume of frozen exhaust billowed. Perry’s car was in for the night. The house was dark and as soon as she entered from the garage, she flipped on the lights. So bright. In the glare she pulled off her coat and boots and headed toward the kitchen.

“Hello,” she called. “Had some great news today. You’re going to be a very proud husband.” Silence. “Perry? Are you home?” Silence.

The kitchen was clean. Not a used dish or pan in sight. Yet there was the lingering scent of food. Steak, perhaps. Onion? Mushrooms? Paprika? She eased the refrigerator door open and saw a plate of food covered in plastic wrap. Noodles. A meat dish—stroganoff possibly. Not usual mid-week fare. She closed the fridge. She glanced at the stove, and seeing the clock, it finally sank in to her just how late it was and how hungry she was.

“Perry. Honey. Where are you?”

It was then she saw the note on the kitchen table. It was standing, leaning against a mostly empty bottle of red. French. Not one she knew. Nice label. Seemed to be a Bordeaux. And there was a small

arrangement of yellow and white chrysanthemums that she didn't recall being there at breakfast.

Evie, the note read, I have a big day tomorrow. Finally decided to eat and get to bed. There are some leftovers in the fridge. I'm sleeping in the guest room tonight. See you in the morning. Oh. And happy anniversary. Perry. (Remember me?)

She stood outside the closed door to the guest room.

"Perry?" she called softly. "Perry, are you awake?" She paused and looking down where the bottom of the door didn't quite meet the floor, she saw the flickering, bluish light of the TV. "Perry," a little louder this time, "I'm so sorry." Still nothing but as she watched it, the light of the television was extinguished. "Perry, won't you get up and have a glass of wine with me? I have something to tell you. Something big. And I'll let you watch me eat your wonderful leftovers." This latter gambit was her best coquette imitation. It had worked before. Not this time. She turned to go back to the kitchen. Stopped. Stepped back to the door. Pounded on it. "Perry! Fucking Saint Perry. I just made a hundred and fifty today. And you made dinner. Let's have some perspective here. Let's have some fucking, goddamned perspective."

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