

It is a dark and stormy night. Aren't they all? They are when anything interesting is happening. And tonight, judging by the rain, would be most interesting. The rain cascades down onto the street. I stand out under the street light. I try to look as though the rain doesn't bother me. It did for a while but I am numb by this point. The glare hurts my eyes but I need to be seen. I want a cigarette. To feel the smoke in my lungs. The tension flowing out of my body. The wave of calm. As if to spite me the rain comes down harder. I hate this rain.

All of this; the rain, the filthy street corner; was all to do with a bitch called Lucy. Why is this street corner still filthy? It's rained for three days. I guess some places don't wash clean.

I need a cigarette.

I should have bought a drink to keep my mind off the habit. I'll get one later.

A light comes on. The third floor of the building across the street. The light I was waiting for. The curtains are pulled back and there stands Lucy. She looked down at me. I smile and walked out of the light, in to the dark, rained filled, street. Now to find that drink I promised myself. And a smoke. That'll be first.

The bar is empty and unremarkable.

"I'll take a whisky". The barman already has the bottle in hand. Looking at the shelves there isn't much else. I light up a cigarette.

"Hey, you can't smoke that filthy shit in here." Barks the barman as soon as I light up.

"Why not?". I mean why not?

"It's against the law. If you want to smoke, do it outside with the rest of the trash."

"It's raining." Is all I say and sit down. Cigarette still in my mouth.

"Out the back there is cover. Use it or fuck off."

"Fine." I grab my whisky and walk out back. The barman isn't lying. There was cover here. He just didn't tell me I had to walk through the rain to get to it. By the time I am there my cigarette is soaked. I give it a look before flicking it away. If I'm going to be out here I may as well have two. I should have brought more whisky. I light up my first of two cigarettes and think about Lucy.

I think about her in her warm little apartment. I wondered if she would come for a drink. I hope she does.

Lucy stood in my apartment surveying the decrepit existence that I was enjoying. My place is a filthy dive but it's my place. I like it here.

"Can I offer you a seat?"

She pulled out a chair from the table at which I sat. She sat down and then reached up and pushed the light that hung from the ceiling. It swung back and forth in the room pushing the shadows about.

"This place is a dive." She said. The light was still swinging back and forth. Why had she done that?

"I kinda like it here."

"I can help you make it a little bit more..." she searched for the word... "comfortable and a little bit less..." she paused again. "vile."

"You make it more comfortable by getting the fuck out." I was sick of her already. I didn't even know what she was doing here. I hate losing my temper but she was pushing the right buttons.

Lucy threw a wad of cash on the table.

"A little something to line your pillow at night. All you need to do is..."

Was this pausing for effect or because she really couldn't think of the words? She finished her sentence.

"...kill someone for me."

I picked up the wad of cash and thumbed through it. The notes were all tattered but they were all real.

"Who? By when? And any special messages?"

As Lucy had promised the door was unlocked. I eased it open and it moved silently. The girl had oiled the hinges. Once the door was closed I paused and listened for sounds.

Silence.

After letting my eyes adjust I surveyed the room. It was a nice place with high ceilings and wooden floors but at the same time stark. It was like the removal company had come in the day before and had taken all the large furnishings. Smaller items were stacked in piles on the floor.

Before heading to the bedroom where Sophia slept, I went to the lounge window and peeked outside. No movement. I had checked at the street and it looked the same. A set-up was never fun to get out of.

I moved silently into the house trying to remember the floor plan. The lounge was connected to the dining room which adjoined the kitchen. Both the lounge and dining ran parallel to the hallway.

On the kitchen bench was a large duffel bag. It was open, I peered inside and there was a single piece of paper that contained the details for a bank account. There was nothing else. I put the piece of paper in my pocket and stepped out of the kitchen and into the hall. The hall was a sight to behold. All the furniture had been stacked and interlaced down the hall. It was going to be a nightmare to get past this mess.

I picked up a chair and move it out of the way. It groaned as I set it down.

"I know why you are here." came a call from the room at the end of the hall.

"Sophia?" I asked. I may as well find out who I am talking to.

"I have a better deal for you." She didn't directly answer my question. "It is more than what Lucy offered you. In the kitchen is a bag and inside bank account details."

I broke my silence. "I found that on the way to your hedgehog hallway. What's to stop me from killing you now and taking your offering as a bonus?"

"You have to get here first, I have a mobile and the money won't be transferred until I say. I can do that now but not until you agree, not to kill me."

What a mess. I have a bad feeling about this and get the urge to walk away. I am not sure how to do that though, either. Lucy and Sophia both know now who I am.

"Alright" I agreed. I couldn't care who paid me the most. I never agreed not to double cross anyone.

"I have a problem now." said Sophia. "I need Lucy killed for obvious reasons and I don't have an alibi."

"If you want me to kill Lucy as well as not killing you then that will be extra". This could turn into a good days pay.

Lucy came out of the bedroom. She was unarmed. Wearing an olive collared shirt and jeans, her hair was pushed back into a pony tail. "Agreed. I'll pay the standard rate for Lucy." She said and pulled out her phone and pressed buttons for a few minutes. After a short while she stopped and said "We need to burn this place."

"Why? Apart from the current decorations, it's a nice place."

"I can't come back to this home. Once Lucy is gone, this place which we share, I won't want to live in." With that she continued pressing buttons for another minute.

"Done. You can access the half the funds tomorrow. The rest I will transfer after this is over."

Sophia headed for the kitchen and ignited the gas stove. She then took a box of matches and some lighter fluid and set fire to the pile of furniture in the hallway. It took a while to get started but once it had the entire hallway was aflame in minutes. The wooden floor aided its advance.

I fired a couple of rounds into the bedroom door. I then used the house phone to call up the police and reported gunshots and that I saw flames coming from the apartment.

We walked out of the house. I keep Sophia in front of me the whole time. I direct her to my beat up little Toyota. Sophia gets in without regard for the rubbish all over the floor and backseat. I had expected her to be reviled by the state of it all. Perhaps Sophia was not always rich.

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I let Sophia into my home. She walked around it lifting up old newspapers and magazines, surveying the state of it all. Cosy was all she said. I wasn't sure if she meant the size or because my apartment is next to the building's heating unit. It made my apartment warmer. It helped during these rainy days.

Sophia sat herself down on the couch. "We need a plan" she said to me. "A way to lure Lucy into a trap without her knowing."

"How will she know? Or does Lucy know already that you will try to kill her?"

"She may, but this may be easier... There is a bar not too far from where Lucy's new playgirl lives. If we can get her to go there..."

A new playgirl. Rejection is hard but these two play harder than most.

“Take these matches” Sophia said to me and flicked a box of matches to me. “Put them on the table. When Lucy sees them she will understand.”

“How is Lucy going to see them in my apartment?”

“Lucy is a cop. She is probably framing you right now for my murder. It won’t be long before she’s here with the rest of her team.”

I couldn’t believe it. A cop. I got up and paced around. My house. What do I need to take?

“Get what you need and we’ll wait across the street so you can see for yourself... “ and she paused... ”just in case you don’t believe me”.

I went into the bedroom and picked up my stack of family photos. Once that was done I was ready to leave. I didn't have much. That was both comforting and depressing at the same time. I know I can just walk away. I'm not tied down to a life, a room, a job. I realise that I've spent a lot of money on whisky and smokes.

I dropped the matches on the table under the light. I followed Sophia out of my house, locking the door as I left. I managed to get a chair to rest under the doorknob on the inside. I chuckled to myself as I did. It would cause someone some grief.

The police tried to smash the door down. The lock gave but the chair didn’t. The first officer was winded. I chuckled to myself. Sophia said they would be here and they were. I looked across at her. She was pretty, not beautiful. In this light you could mistake her for beautiful though. She didn't look at me. She just kept watching the scene that was unfolding in the building across the street. My building. My floor. My apartment.

They went through each room. Lights on. I had already taken the curtains down so we could watch what was going on. Lucy stood next to my kitchen table flicking the match book in her fingers while the officers smashed the place apart. They didn't find anything else.

I could do with a smoke right now. I reach for them but Sophia's hand is already there. It's soft but she is firm, halting my progress.

"It's a vile habit." She said. "They may see the glowing embers."

She was right. I made a mental note that I would have a cigarette as soon as this was done.

I am on my tenth cigarette when Lucy walks out of the bar, gun in hand, pointed at me. I have a bottle of whisky next to me that is almost empty. Apart from this little episode it has been a good night. I probably should have been ready for her.

"You may want to finish that bottle. You won't be getting any more." And without even waiting for me to start drinking Lucy shot me in the leg. The pain races through my body. My eyes start to water, this is intense. I have never been shot before.

"Drop the gun, Lucy." Sophia calls from the shadows. Lucy spins, gun in hand, Sophia doesn't take the risk. Her shotgun already pointed into Lucy's midsection she fires. Lucy goes down. I am the ground by this point, whisky in one hand, gun in the other.

Sophia walks up to where Lucy is curled up on the ground rocking back and forth holding her stomach. Lucy doesn't make a sound. I'm not sure she could. Sophia kicks her gun over to me. I don't pick it up. I have mine and my free hand has whisky. I drink what is left. It doesn't help with the pain. I don't think I can walk. I don't try. Sophia walks over to me keeping one eye on Lucy. She takes the whisky bottle from the table has a long gulp.

Sophia sits down on the ground next to me. We share a drink of whisky. Lucy lay on the ground moaning softly. Tears are streaming down her face. It smears her makeup. She bites her lower lip and holds it. Her mouth has frothed from trying to deal with the pain.

Sophia places her glass on the ground. She aims the shotgun and fires. Lucy is dead. It was brutal. Sophia empties the remaining shells on the ground and places the gun beside me. I pour myself another drink.

"We probably should get me to a hospital". I tell Sophia.

"We will. I just need to say my goodbye." She picks up Lucy's gun and walks over to her body. She kneels down next to the corpse and runs her hand along Lucy's body and through her hair. Lucy's hair is a mess of blood and has matted together.

Sophia reaches into Lucy's pockets and pulls out a packet of smokes. She checks inside and then tosses the packet to me.

"It's a vile habit but I think you need one more now, than the ten you had earlier." She says.

She is right. I do need one. It hasn't stopped raining but my head is undercover. I light up a cigarette and smoke it as slowly as I can. The pain in my leg is intense but this makes it just a little easier.

"Let's go now." I say. My smoke is finished. My leg isn't getting any better.

"Yes let's go." Responds Sophia.

I start to get up when Sophia points Lucy's gun at me and fires. This pain is worse now. The leg is nothing. It is fine.

Sophia fires again.