

-SYLVIA-

I'm making the call from Loopy's place.

"Hello?" He asks in a weak whisper.

"Yes? You there?" All I hear is the sound of weak breathing. "Are you alright?"

"What the fuck do you want?"

"First just tell me that you're OK."

"Look, it's just a hangover. I'll get better. Just shut the hell up for a second."

I hear him sounding violently ill. Gagging, gulping, barfing.

"I'm sorry." I say, "Should I call back?"

He hangs up.

-DAVE-

The sun is bright and total. It glares in on me in my bedroom, and I feel absolutely energized to face my day. It's Monday and there is much to do before the day is done. My guess was that I would get a call from Arthur today, anxious to make the sale and make me 80 grand richer. Before that, though, I was going to earn my keep. I'm out of the house at 9:30.

My first stop is the waffle-house. I get blueberry pancakes and some black ladies' hand bag.

Moving down Gloria street, near the business district, I bump into a man with a shirt and tie. He says he's terribly sorry, and hurries off, without his wallet. I head to a nearby electrics store, and buy a new MP3 player with his visa.

I have to steal to survive, yes, but deep down I enjoy stealing.

I head back toward my neighborhood, and sell the old woman's pain killers to some guy near the methadone clinic. He pops three of them before I can even turn around. I got \$50 for them too.

Upon arrival at my place, I unload all the stuff I've picked up on the table in my den. Then I plug my new player into my PC. Around this time it's lunch, so I head over to the kitchen. It's not a kitchen, really just a section of the den that I renovated. There's a sink installed from the piping in the wall, mini-fridge, propane burners, microwave. It's all mounted on a makeshift tabletop. I really should buy a freezer. I haven't had ice cream in ages it seems.

I make a sandwich and quick fries. Simple as slicing potatoes heating a bit of oil, salting, and maybe some Parmesan. In this case, yes indeed. 1.2.3. I make my fries quickly because I prefer a bit of al dente.

I'm out the door. Wallets are taken. Watches are pilfered. I go into a music store and bail with the alarm beeping behind me as I hurry down the sidewalk, and into an alley.

My stuff now.

A nearby pawnshop buys the CDs, still in their plastic wrapping. I go to a different shop to unload my jewelery, and empty wallets. The cash is mine. It's about \$240. I'm fucking on fire today.

I've got Soundgarden running through my player. At 4:30, I'm about ready to head home and the phone rings. I pick up.

"Ken?" He asks.

"Arthur, hey buddy."

“About this money, Ken, I'm not sure if I can trust you with it.”

“Can't trust me?”

“You seem very underhanded. Who's to say you won't come back to take more of my hard earned money?”

“Let me state for the record, Arthur, just to dispel your fears, I'm going to.”

“Thanks. That's just why I'm not going to give you even a fucking thin copper coin.”

“I see. So I'm going to have to talk to the police, then?”

“No. I am.”

I scoff with an audible chuckle. “What? You think you can walk away from an 80-grand embezzlement scheme just by coming clean? The fuzz will staple you down to sub-basement.”

I dunno what that means, I said it too fast.

“I won't be confessing about me, I'll be hitting hard on a friend of ours.”

“A friend?”

“Your friend in the warehouse. He gets up in the morning, he steals. He steals everything. He sells swag to pawnshops. He lives in a place where his back yard is a wasteland of syringes, broken crack pipes and sewage treatment fumes.”

Fuck me. No way.

“He hustles every week and goes across town to church on Sunday.”

“You son of a bitch.”

“Listen well, Ken.”

I don't know how he found me.

“You say even one word to anyone about me and Loopy goes down.”

Wait. Loopy? Holy shit.

He's hung up before I can scream “Put Sylvia on the phone!”

-ARTHUR-

She's leaning on her elbows as I hang up the phone. She's wearing a Code Anchor t-shirt and deep-blue jeans. She's still got her school bag, and some of her papers are strewn out on my desk. She's too young, too short. She can't be serious, possible or relevant, and yet, there she is.

"There you go, Arthur, I helped you."

"Why is your homework on my desk?"

"Just going to ask a favor of you. Are you any good at math?"

"Very good."

"Could you--"

"Go away, Sylvia."

She comes around to my side of the desk, and tosses some more papers in front of me. I think she's making a mess intentionally. She's pulled out her camera.

"Pretty please, Arthur! I helped you out and all I want is for you to believe you're like the most ga-ga gorgeous guy I ever saw in my whole life."

I itch the bridge of my nose with my middle and pointer finger. I still haven't come all the way down, and I still feel sick.

Eyes closed.

"What I really want is a photo shoot. Just a quick one."

I can't believe I went so manic this weekend. Episodes like that and I am beyond all control. Looking back I was like a runaway train.

"I don't know if you remember, Sylvia, but the other day you broke into my house."

She smiles, and leans her hips into the desk, and slides closer to me. My God. I lean forward and away to cradle my aching head.

"I can't forget about that Arthur. That's why I agreed to help you, and I finish what I start."

"Thank you, you did me a favor, so I won't turn you in."

She backs off quickly and frames her camera on me.

"Don't move!"

She snaps a picture of me, with my head propped up on my wrist. I'm not smiling.

"See? Look. It's that easy. Click-click-click. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. If you gave me just one afternoon I could take so many of these shots. Like an album full. I could even get you your own on-line portfolio. I could borrow the tripod, and the overhead flash from the AV room. Then get you into the school studio- You need to be on camera, Arthur."

Holy shit. Make her shut up.

"Fuck off Sylvia. Goddamn it."

I'm reaching for the phone.

"Give me just ten minutes."

I hit 521 for security.

"This is Arthur, I need Mr. Drake at my desk right away."

"Here's the thing Arthur, I know you got me a deal, but I was really only doing this job so I could have some shooting time with you. I don't care about being charged with braking and entering, and I don't care about turning in Loopy either. I hate him."

"Whoever this Loopy character is, he's not who I'm after. I need Ken, and you didn't bring him to me."

"True. True. But, if he's a friend of Loopy's, I guarantee he's just another gutter-rat."

I pick up the papers, on the desk and she shoos me off.

"Don't worry I'll get them. It's fine."

"I should probably tell you Sylvia, Security is on its way here to escort you out."

"But Arthur--"

"No buts, why don't you just leave now, and save me the trouble?"

Her face goes sour, and she gathers her paperwork. "Fine then, I will."

I recline back in my seat, and ignore her, playing a chess game on the computer. She's shuffling through papers sitting at a chair in the lobby. Clearly buying time. The guards come in, and I wave them off.

"No worries, fellas." I say with a smile, as thin as a wedding veil. They turn in stride, back down to the hall corridor, looking almost disappointed.

"Ten million dollars?" I hear her say.

"Ten million dollars?" Again.

She's at my desk before I can care to glance at her.

"Arthur, What the hell is D-day?" She holds up my red Doomsday folder With the atomic-bomb dollar sign I drew on it. I'd gotten it out just before I'd called Ken, in case I needed to check the numbers. It got mixed in with her homework. I jump out of my chair, and smack her across the top of her head. She hops back with folder still in hand. I'm already coming around the desk.

"Give me back that folder, Sylvia, I shit you not, I would kill for what's in there." My voice is dead serious.

She flips it open. "I'm a fast reader, you know. It says you're even richer than I thought."

I consider chasing her around my desk, but rather I go to the corridor and wave back the security guards.

"Get back here, you dipshits, I need your help!"

I'm running my fingers furiously through my hair when she jumps on my back.

"So, you're rich, you're hot, and you live in the coolest mansion in the whole world. Arthur, I love you." And she kisses my cheek. With her arms wrapped around me I easily retrieve my property. After surrendering it, her hand drops to my chest, with a wide-fingered stroke she coos and giggles.

In one violent motion I toss my arms up, and throw her off my back. Behind me she lands in a heap.

"Take that out."

Sylvia is escorted to the door, which is only about seven feet from where she landed, by these two oversized guards, one tubby portly, the other unenviably tall and thin. Once she's outside, the fat one keeps her there while the thin one gets her bag.

Through the glass of the lobby she slings her backpack over her shoulder, and looks directly at me, playfully even.

"We'll meet again my love." She shouts muffled behind a wall of commercial glass.

"Goodbye, Sylvia." I whisper making sure there would be no way for her to hear.

With a smile she sets off on her way.

Placing the folder in the drawer and slamming it shut feels with the satisfaction of penning the final word of a novel.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to
Author@14rivers.com

More Chapters will be made available. <http://14rivers.com/threeweasels.htm>

You may distribute, but not alter this document.