

## -SYLVIA-

Her hair is vibrantly red and feels so full as I pull one of the strands into the center, and then fold over the other from the other side. This is favor payment. It's not bad; all I have to do is braid her hair.

She sat me down and we watched like 8 episodes of sailor moon. Brucie still gives a lot of affection to me. He wanted to be petted and have his ears scratched. Honestly this is the most girlish fun I've had in a while, and I have almost completely forgotten about the job.

Basically, when it was done I came to room 523, and from across the hall, Winnie jumped out and gagged me.

"Gotcha!" she said to me. I did think I was busted for a second. Except for her hands. They were just as narrow and lady-like and just as cold.

"Did I scare you?" she asked.

"Yeah. Sheesh."

"Come on, let me show you my room."

She slid her card into her room door and turned to me.

"It's a master key for every room in the place, but this room here is mine."

The room she had was in a corner of the hotel, which means it has double the room of any of the others. It's on the top floor of this wing, making it a nice tall ceiling. Great choice.

It's very frilly and pink in here. I've been made to feel more girly than ever since getting here. The two outward-facing windows have white satin drapes. There's a down sofa in the main portion of the room. It's also white with pink trim to match the cotton candy look of the room. There's a nice big TV and she has loads of fashion magazines spread out on the table. In another section of this large room is her bed that is surrounded by big wooden cabinets for her clothes. There is another TV in front of the bed. It's just as big as the one in the living room area, where we had been watching loads of import Japanese Animation DVDs.

I get done braiding her hair and lay back on the bed. It's 4:30 AM. I could really go for a nap right now. That's out of the question. I have to leave in an hour.

Why do you meet really special people for only a brief time?

"What do you want to do?"

Brucie jumps up on the bed and wants his head scratched all over again. The look on his face as he's panting, I could swear he's smiling. Good dog. She had me braid her hair, that ate up a good fifteen minutes. I'm all out of the ability to watch anime any more, at least in Japanese with subtitles. It was a real TV party tonight.

"I dunno." I say "I'm good I guess."

"Did you find what you were looking for?"

"Yes, thank you. I knew about the penthouse more or less, but you gave me a great way up without getting noticed."

"Well, you're welcome."

"Why'd you help me, anyway?"

"Brucie!" She calls out, and the big rottie jumps up on the bed, crawls over me and nuzzles her face into Winnie's belly.

"Brucie was real nice to you. I can't figure out why, but it compelled me to give you a chance."

I smile and lay back on the bed.

"Well, there is a reason he didn't attack me."

"Do tell."

"First of all, you should know your dog is a pedigree that had a show dog bitch for a mother. Now, did you leave town for about a week two months ago?"

"Yeah. Marvin took me on a trip to Key West."

"Key West? How was it?"

"Pretty good, except I had to pose as his niece."

Yuck. Too much information.

"How did you know that I left town?" she asks

I fold my arms "Confession time, Winnie, You boarded your dog at a kennel where I work."

"Get out!"

"Not only that, but I made \$800 off of him."

She looks at me quizzically. I've already said too much.

"How did you end up doing that?"

"Do you promise not to get angry?"

"No, I don't promise, but I still want to hear."

"Well, there was a breeder in Ohio and he wanted to stud his female. So, while you were away, I invited him up to the kennel and had Brucie go to work on her."

"You pimped out my little Brucie?"

"Basically." I reply She laughed and smooshes the dog's big face.

"So that's why you like her so much. You bad boy. She got you laid."

"Are you angry?"

She laughs "Hell no."

I laugh too. I catch myself looking at her hair and thinking it's the longest ponytail I've ever done. Maybe the longest I've ever seen.

"Tell me about yourself, Winnie."

She sighs deeply. "Life's been pretty hard for me, Sylvia. My parents are dead. I didn't have any other relatives. I was alone. Rather than go into foster care I skipped town at a very, very young age. From there I did what I had to do and found work with migrants. Kept going place to place. About a year ago I was in a town called Montgomery and had enough money for a train ticket to either here or Denver. I chose here."

She throws the ponytail over her shoulder and looks at it.

"You did a great job." She gets up and takes a ribbon off her dresser. Quickly she ties it in a bow at the base of the braids.

"You probably know what he and I do. It might not look like a life you'd want, or that you'd want for anyone. But I'll give it this, at least for this little while I've gotten to be a girl, and not a victim or a survivor."

I smirk in an awkward kind of way. She's so saying this more for her than for me.

"I've got no opinion, Winnie. Do what you have to."

She takes me by the hand and walks me over to one of her dressers.

“I kept some old clothes. Something might fit you.”

In my head something rings out that this is not the time.

“This is a bad idea. I'm not wearing a bra.”

She hands me a pile of lavender and frills.

“Oh so what? Look at you. You're not flopping over or busting out any time soon. Put this on.”

“I told you I have to leave the building by 5:30.”

“I know, and that's why you have to put it on now.”

So with a pout and a shrug I go to her bathroom and change out of my infiltration garb and string up this old-fashion lavender dress. I even have to tighten the shoulder straps on it to get it to fit my smaller frame. Through the door Winnie talks to me.

“So what's your story, Sylvia? Why are you breaking into houses late at night?”

“Technically I've been here since this afternoon. So that's the first reason. I have a natural ability for it. I like the challenge.”

“Right. But why here?”

I like this girl so far, but I'm not willing to spill all my secrets for her.

“I'm doing it for a guy I like.”

There is a pause, as I yank at more frills out of the hem.

“Do you love him?”

“Yes.”

I open the door and she smiles broadly at me.

“Perfect.”

“Are you always up this late, Winnie?”

“Yep. It's just my way. I love to stay up late and that way I don't have to put up with any of his

other girls. I'll wait in my room until ten, and if he shows up, he does. If not, I wander the Hotel; inside and out."

"Do you not like his other girls."

"They're all in their 20's and I'm not. I can't relate, so I stay to myself."

I nod sadly, and look out the window. No sign of light yet, but I don't have much more time.

"Tell me about the guy you love."

Arthur. My big, juicy watermelon slice of manliness.

"He's everything; Strong, smart, fun, gorgeous, emotional."

"How did you meet?"

I really do feel an honesty streak coming out of me tonight.

"I won't lie to you. I spied on him."

"Ooh-la-la."

"What about you? How did you end up with a guy like the old man?"

She lays back in bed.

"It's not a long story, but it's not one I like to tell. I'm leaving in the spring, anyway so it won't matter."

I smirk.

"Are you just saying that?"

"No. No. Portland, Oregon by April 15<sup>th</sup>. I haven't been to the west coast in about two years."

"You're just going to pick up and leave?"

"Sylvia. I've been doing this since I was 12 years old. Find a safe place to bed down for the winter. Do what you have to do to be a good guest, then make your move out when the weather is right."

"Is Winnie your real name?"

"Yes. Yes it is. I'm not ashamed of it."

“Isn't it sad to not have a place to call home?”

“Maybe, but I never ever wanted to stay in one place for a long time. Winds and rivers never stand still, so why should I?”

She smiles at me and I return it, and there is a certain look in her eye.

“You're cute.”

“Thanks, Winnie.” I check my watch. It's ten to five. I have to move now.

“It's time for me to go.”

“So soon?”

“I have to leave before daylight. You know that.”

“Before you go can you promise me something?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Keep the dress.”

I look down, and it only just hits me that I'm still wearing it. Fuck, I have to change.

“I can't take it. It's yours!”

“Not only does it not fit me but I'm tired of dragging it everywhere.”

“I'm sorry, I can't accept it.”

It's not that it's an ugly dress either.

“I kept it to remember good times, but those times have a long list of bad memories between then and now. I can't look back at it anymore.”

“No. I can't.”

“Take it, or I'll call security.”

This stops me short. She'll do it too.

“Look, I don't have anything to get it out with. I just can't.”

She reaches under her bed and pulls out a road-beaten green knapsack with some faded

hippie patches on it. She tosses that to me.

“Go get changed.”

So that is that. I rush to the bathroom, and use the facilities before gearing up in my spy outfit again. I pack the dress quickly and carefully into the bag and step out. She has a real sad look in her eye when she sees me. It gets worse as we walk to the door.

“Well, Winnie, Thanks for all the help. It's been fun”

“Yeah. This is the most fun I've had in a long while.”

“You can stop by the kennel before you head out if you want to see me. Then maybe we can go back to my place.”

“Sure, if you will invite me.”

“I will. Goodbye.”

I pull her in and give her a quick hug. Which she holds on to tight.

“Why do we meet really special people for just a short little time?”

“I was wondering the same thing.”

I wave goodbye, and open the door. It's still dark. I'm moving much faster now, even with the knapsack on me. I get to the stairwell, and listen. It doesn't sound like there is anyone down there. No shoes, no whistling, not even breathing. All the same, I make my way down cautiously, and slink under the few cameras. Lights are on past floor three, and I book it to the bottom, and back into the boiler room as quick as I can. I glance out the door to the outside world and see down the way the myrtle where I hid the rope. The sun is beginning to break. The sky is getting lighter, and time is shorter now than ever. I'm in the cold night air, and I am running. I make it to the top of the fence and throw my rope down, and jump the nine feet or so onto the ground. Walking the perimeter for a bit I find my camouflage over clothes and throw them on quickly. I'm taking off uphill, away from the hotel when I stop. I'm out of the zone for the first time since I left.

Did I really just do that? Did I really fucking just do that?

I look back and I listen. It's cold outside but I feel hot over my whole body. My thoughts are racing but it's just so quiet. I sit down on the hill, looking back at the hotel as it welcomes the colors of a lightening dawn, into breaking brilliant sunlight.

It's done.

## -DAVE-

The polished silvery metal of the gun is cold and heavy. It's a knock-off colt 1911 pistol, chambered for .45 caliber ammunition. Bad motherfucker.

Why did I keep it?

Why didn't I sell it like I do to everything else?

I touch the slide of the gun, leaving a greasy fingerprint that I shine with the sleeve of my shirt.

This is not my gun. I stole it on Halloween. It can't be traced back to me.

I press the clip release and out slides the tall metal column of lead soldiers. Then I pull back on the slide to take the round out of the hole. The slide locks and I bring up the bullet. I look at it.

This tiny little tube of copper and lead can punch through a mans skull from across a football field.

I put the bullet back into the top of the clip and slide the clip back into the pistol. With a flick of the release the slide springs back into position, and the round is back in the chamber once more.

I pull the hammer back it clicks once at half-cock, then again at full and locks. Safety off, and I put my thumb on the hammer. I pull the trigger, and the hammer is loose, but I ease it back down onto the firing pin.

It's so easy. It has to be done. Just pull the trigger.

I reach for my bible.

1 Corinthians 6: 9-10

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor practicing homosexuals, etc. etc. etc. shall inherit the kingdom of god.

I do it again. Clip out of gun, bullet out of chamber, bullet back into clip. Clip back in gun, bullet back in chamber, hammer ready-just pull the trigger.

It's all over. Shoot him in the face.

My cell phone rings. It's him.

“Ken I'm coming to the back now.”

“Yeah.” I reply “I'm just about to get the door for you.”

I walk across the warehouse floor with the gun tucked into to back of my pants, and I hit the button to open the gate. Outside is a white van. Arthur waves at me as he pulls in. when the van gets all the way inside I shut the gate and wait for him to turn off the engine. I have my hand on the grip.

Arthur hops out and shuts the door. Looking at me with a smile. That's when I point it at him. Right between his eyes.

## -ARTHUR-

Shit.

So Dave is going to kill me? How romantic. The gun trembles in his uneasy grip, but he has it trained pretty well on the bridge of my nose. I get an exhilarating rush of adrenaline, but I don't feel scared.

"Why are you with a gun, Dave?"

"You can't just get away with it, Arthur, you can't just fuck people in the ass and get away with it."

"When did I ever do that to you? I never fucked anybody in the ass that wasn't asking for it."

He's coming closer, the gun is getting steadier. He puts it right on my forehead. The cold metal of the gun is like a Hindu dot.

"I'm not asking."

"How is this going to work, Ken? Blow my brains out all over a Rental car?"

He looks around nervously. Then bears back into me, looking for the resolve. Honestly, I don't think he has the guts. He closes his eyes.

"Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy--"

"Oh! Shut the fuck up!" I scream.

"Thy kingdom com--"

"Shut up you moron. I'm here to give you a job. Your half of the Job. Sylvia got the key, you idiot! It's right here."

I pull out the keyring from my pocket. He stops babbling and looks at it.

"You remember like a week ago, Dave? You saved my life. Why the change of heart?"

"Because you're a fag, asshole!"

"For the record; I'm bi, do you want to shoot all gay people in the head?"

"No. Just the ones that want to screw around with me."

"Oh, that want to screw around with you, huh? Why don't you think back, Ken. Think back to that night, all the things you didn't have any problem with when you were stuck in the moment. Now give me a fucking good reason why you'd rather kill me than have me make you filthy rich for the rest of your life."

"You're evil! An abomination!"

"If you pull that trigger you will never get a single dime of this job. Put the gun down so I can tell you how to steal millions of dollars in poorly-guarded antiques. He's a crazy old man who keeps a museum in a warehouse. I can tell you where it is, and I can show you what to get. It's all yours. This key is worth a fortune."

I do something he was probably waiting for me to do a while ago. I put my hands up, slowly. It looks like I'm scared and surrendering.

"I'm going to kill you, Arthur."

When I drop the key, that's where he looks. I swoop my hands together under the gun, and push up fast, as I throw my head back and down. The gun goes off with a fucking loud BANG and sends a bullet high into the wall of the warehouse. Quickly I wrestle the gun around. Hit the release of the clip and push back the slide. The clip is out and I have a cartridge in my hand. No more bullets. I knee Ken in the tummy as hard as I can. He loses his breath, and goes down, while I take the gun from him. On his hands and knees I tamp down his jaw twice. He keels back against the Van, and puts his hands up defensively, just before I kick him in the ribs, and he winces over. I put the bullet back in the gun, and point it at him. He sees me and clenches inward on the ground. I get his forehead in my grip and sit him up against the van.

"Go to Hell, Dave. We both know you aren't killing shit."

He puts his hands up like he is trying to get the gun, and I just slam his head back into the van's siding. His hands go up to his newly throbbing headache. My gun goes against his chest. This really isn't me. I need to relax.

"Dave. You're one of the most block headed boys I've ever met. One track mind. But it's cute to see you freak out whenever somebody messes with you. That's not what I'm trying to do. I just see you, you know what I mean?"

"No."

"You surprise me all the time. You try so hard to be tough and determined, but underneath it

all your just a clichéd romantic softy. Despite that, What you are is someone tough in a struggle, and the amazing thing is you've got vision.”

“What are you trying to say.”

“Maybe, I love you, I don't know.”

Oh, dammit. Arthur, you idiot. Sure. Cupid packs a .45.

I pick the key off the floor and put it in his hand. Then pick up the Gun's clip and stand up, sliding it in.

“Fuck you, faggot!”

“There is a list of items to collect in the cabin. Study it. Tomorrow at seven I'm coming over, and we'll do a quick run through. Be here. Then late that night I'm sending you off to get the material. Understand? I'll tell you where to go and how to get there. Now nod. Acknowledge me.”

He nods.

“I'll see myself out.”

I walk to the door, and make my way to the subway station. I liked his place. It was very clean and orderly unlike everything else in the area. You would never suspect from the outside that anyone was living in it. That's why it's so clever. He's a perfect thief. Nobody knows where he is, and he keeps to himself. Doing exactly what he has to do.

I board the late train and head into town where I'll get a taxi home. I'm alone in the rattling car. I take out the Gun that he'd had. There's still a greasy mark there where his thumb was. I just look at it. His gun.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to

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

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