

-SYLVIA-

It glints of metal like a new nickel. Dave flips it over, and points to the bottom of the handle.

“This is a 45 caliber handgun. It's a colt model 1911, one of the earliest and most influential clip-loading pistols in history. In a few years this gun design will be a hundred years old.”

He pops out the clip and shows it to me.

“This is a stack of 8 bullets.”

“I don't want a gun, Loopy.”

The clip is flat and flat gray. On it are tiny holes where I can see the glinting brass of the cartridges.

“It's just for your safety, Sylvia. It is a dangerous neighborhood around here.”

“Well, another gun should make it a lot safer.” He takes the gun by the barrel and pushes the handle toward me.

“Squeeze the handle, but don't touch the trigger.”

My fingers barely make it around this big, awkward hunk of metal, but I can manage.

“There's a metal hinge there, at the base of your thumb. That is one of the gun's safeties. You have to squeeze the handle tight enough to push that in.”

I do, and he nods, before pulling the gun back. “Good.” He says

He pulls back the slide and the barrel sticks out like a tongue. He hands the gun and the clip over to me, points to the hammer, under the back of the slide.

“This is a single action. What that means is, you pull the trigger, the hammer falls. If the hammer isn't set, the gun won't fire. What you need to know is that whenever this metal slide comes back, it resets the hammer, and reloads the gun. It comes back every time the gun is fired. OK? The gun resets itself until it's empty. When that happens, it looks like this.”

He points to the clip, then to a switch on the gun.

“Put the magazine in, and hit this lever.”

I do as he says and the clip goes all the way in, and locks. I hit the switch and the slide of the gun chomps forward like the jaws of a metal dog. Loopy points to another switch right next to the one I hit.

“OK. The gun is loaded, hammer cocked. There is a round in the chamber but the safety, here, is on.” I point the gun at his head.

“HEY! HEY! HEY!” He shoves it. “This is not a fucking game, Sylvia.”

I try to put it in his hands.

“Take it, I don't want it.”

“Shut up. Now look.”

He levels my hand with his.

“Look right down the sights. Put that bead between the fork.”

It feels like I'm ready to shoot. I'd just shoot the wall.

“I think this is all you'll ever have to do. Just point it at someone, and they'll probably back down. Otherwise, click off that safety and just think of it as a camera. Just point and shoot.”

Oh, my God. This is not a camera. This is not a picture I'm taking. I'm a photographer. I'm not killing anybody.

“When it goes off, it will kick. It will kick hard, like being hit with a baseball bat.”

“Loopy, take this damn thing. It's too goddamn heavy anyway.”

“Okay, princess.” He sighs.

He takes the gun and puts it on the table then gets up from the couch to sit at his computer.

“Take the gun wherever you go. School, take it to work, have it on the train.”

“No school, Dave. I'm quitting my job and I'm dropping out.”

-DAVE-

"Sylvia, I'm not going to let you do that." I swivel in my chair to look at her directly.

"I don't care about the job, but you've got to stay in school."

"Who are you to even tell me, man?"

"I'm the guy taking you in."

"I don't need this, and I don't need you. I could leave right now."

"Yeah? Then what? Do you think that spoiled bitch Arthur is going to take you in? Are any of your friends going to help you out? You know what you are, Sylvia? An orphan. You're like me."

"Just shut up, OK? My mom died today!"

"I know, and I'm sorry. I feel like shit over it, but there's nothing I can do. Just don't let this stop you from going to college."

"College?"

"Yeah. You were planning to go to college right?"

"No. Couldn't afford it."

"Did you take the SATs?"

"Yes."

"How'd you do?"

"I think it was like 1200."

"Did you apply to schools?"

"No."

"Sylvia, what the fuck have you been doing?"

"I've been trying to take care of my mother!"

I run my hand down my face. The scruff of my chin feels like coarse sandpaper.

"Sylvia" I say, "look over there."

I point to the warehouse floor at all the stolen stuff from the rich man's collection. It's all in our warehouse now. The furniture and tapestries and goblets. It's a treasure trove. I've boxed some of them already. They'll be ready to ship.

"That's everything that Arthur had us steal. It's worth millions of dollars."

"Yeah?"

"When you went and stole that key, I took it and stole all this, and I'm selling it all of, so we all get a cut."

"So what?"

"Money is not an issue here, Sylvia. The issue is that you need to do something with your life. You need to go to college."

She sulks but doesn't cry.

"Arthur burned down the warehouse. No one will ever come looking for all this stuff."

"What?" She says perplexed.

"He burned it all down and everyone who knows about this stuff thinks that it has all been destroyed."

"Arthur doesn't do shit like that."

"I saw it with my own eyes, and he told me himself. That's his big overarching plan. We get to keep a share of this stuff in order to shut us up."

"He wouldn't burn anything down."

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“He has. What do we do with our fortune? I've decided for sure on one thing. You are going to college. Get over here, and let's start applying for schools.”

-ARTHUR-

Already the messages are out. The fire was not arson. It was an electrical fire. The DeLobb insurance company will be liable for coverage. The stocks are selling fast. The price keeps falling. By the end of next week the stock will be well below 15. The company is frantic. It's the Friday after thanksgiving and not one person is out of the office. Many of them are clearly trying to do their work with heavy hangovers from a turkey day of drinking. The company will be at work through the weekend. It's Chernobyl. It's the Titanic. It's the Hindenburg, all in one.

Dad is scrambling all over the place. He's trying to find some way for us to have enough assets to cover the fire. The phone rings off the hook. I tell most of the callers that Mr. DeLobb is unavailable for comment.

One of our departments is on the line all the time with the police and firefighters. They want to know the second there is proof of arson. Not just arson, but specifically arson with the intent to defraud on insurance. They want a link between the fire and Marvin Curosa. I know though, once it's called arson by the police we'll find a way to write it off.

Here is where the real fire is going on. Dad comes down the hallway. Curosa hasn't been able to get out of bed since he heard about the news. Finally he got the strength to go down and see first-hand. Dad wants to go down there personally. Worse, he wants me with him.

I know I should be happy. Everything according to plan. I'm kind of depressed today. Life really is pointless. Time wastes away, and nothing we do lasts. The universe doesn't care about us. The mind is just an illusion that comes to an abrupt, pitiful end under an indifferent sky. I can't get off of that fact. The Prozac isn't doing it for me today. So here I am, fucking mad. No real reason, nothing rational, anyway. Just fucking mad. I tell dad that I will go with him. Just that I had to make one phone call first. I call Ken.

"Hi, Dave?"

"Yeah, Arthur."

"I need to know if all of the liquidation goods are out the door and set."

"What? From the pile? There are a few things. A painting that I can't sell and there are some books that didn't move."

"And why haven't you sold them?"

"Just because there is no market for these old volumes. Shame too. They're first editions of some classics."

"If they are first editions that means there IS a market for them, and you haven't been able to find it yet."

"Yeah, tell me what I don't know. I'm trying again at another site. I think I can still make a killing."

"I'm sure, Ken, just save the talk and fucking do it."

"There is going to be a major shipping operation going on here for the next few. I'm going to need more freight boxes and crates and pallets."

"Well what the hell am I paying you for, asshole? Get on in."

"Un-bind your panties man, I was just thinking out loud. I'll get the boxes."

"Good. Also get the Goddamn buyers, OK? I mean do you want me to hold your hand on this?"

"What is wrong with you, man? I'm going to get this together, and we've already made big money. This whole thing is an accomplishment. It's a wild success. You want to feel successful right?"

"I dunno, Dave, sure. Success. Maybe I'll move to New York city, and get a big office. You know, I bet you everybody that worked in those big offices on the 100th floor of the World Trade Center felt very successful. You know, for what it's worth."

He doesn't retort, just breathes loudly on the other end of the line for a second.

"You ARE moody. Goodbye."

Dick.

I check the list of insured items and there are some classics and museum pieces.

Anna Karenina in Russian, Eighth Century Koran, Principia Mathematica, Blah-blah-blah. I'm sure he left some of them to burn, but I don't know which ones. Idiots. We're all idiots. I hate everyone.

I stuff the list into my briefcase, and dad comes back to retrieve me. In his red Mercedes Benz we cruise off to the city. On the ride both dad and I are silent. I rifle through paperwork just to look busy.

Police and firefighters had quartered off most of the blaze. It's all blackened and twisted. It's roof torn open up to the sky like the cast off shell of some great and hideous insect. It reeks of smoke and chemicals. It feels damp and cold from the ground to the air. It burned for twelve hours.

Dad talks to a cop. I keep rummaging papers on the Benz hood. We get waved over to the Curosa warehouse. Ground zero. It's more like a train-wreck. Holy mother of God. That chemical blast toppled the whole thing on this side, and where the fire started is a mound of smoldering cinder blocks and shit.

Dad turns and whistles to me, and waves me to come over. He's jogging. I'm in no rush. It's the front gate, where Marvin Curosa's chattered Limousine is pulling up. When he steps out he is on uneasy legs.

"It's not too bad, is it, Chuck?"

"Marv, I think it's better if you just come see."

Curosa can't wipe the stupid look off his face. He can't believe it. It's kind of a weak and childish look though. He's walking next to me as we move to the damage. As soon as the mound that was his block comes into sight he trips over me, and I have to hold him up.

"Oh, my God! Your friend just fainted on me."

"Marvin! Marvin!" He tries to slap the old codger awake.

"Look, I'm going to lay him down, OK?"

Dad lays his jacket on the ground and I set Curosa on it. My hands go up.

"I'm done with this."

"Arthur! Call 911!"

I don't because there are police and firefighters still here, and they make the call for an ambulance. None of my damn business.

Dad stays by his side, while I wait by the car. Everything should be Okay, I guess. Less than five minutes and the ambulance arrives. We stick around for the two guy paramedics, and one girl with a cute little-boy haircut to put him on a gurney and haul him away.

On the ride back to work we are just as quiet as we were on the ride up. We're on the highway cruising back in a silence only slightly less awkward than any conversation we could be having. Still, I feel like asking.

"What was his problem?"

"Marv has been anemic for some time now. It looks like the stress gave him a severe arrhythmia."

"Poor fucking old fart." I try to say this with as little audibility as possible. Enough to warrant clarification.

Dad, calmly, takes an exit ramp going into town.

"Where are we going? Work is across town."

"I know. I just need some time to think."

He parks the car outside an electronics store.

"Get out." He tells me.

"What? Why?"

"You know why, Arthur. You fucking know! Okay. So can it. We both know I've put up with a lot of shit. We both have. We've done what we had to do, and I have done everything I could. I know you have some issues, and we have been working together on that. But as for just now, and for today, I'm not putting up with it."

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"What? Hey? Just bring me back to the office and-"

"Get out, Arthur."

The pain from my inside cheeks is the first thing to let me know I'm biting them. I wasn't even trying.

"Fine." I say, getting out into the cold and slamming the door. I'm about to look at him through the window when he pulls away and leaves me on the sidewalk.

Fuck the world.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to

Author@14rivers.com

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

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