

Dinner for Two

Jonathan Barr

“Who hired you?” Rick asked, with a sudden look of seriousness.

So now he knows; they usually do. I remain silent and allow my emotionless expression to do the talking. I glare at him. My gaze never strays. Under the table, I can only feel where the gun points. This part gets easier every time, my hands don't even sweat anymore.

“Did Donovan put you up to this? I bet he did, that bastard.” Rick shakes his head, looking scared now.

Out of pity, I usually explain myself before disposing of each client. Besides, it's fun to watch them squirm, like fish out of water.

“Whatever he's paying you, I'll double it.”

“It doesn't work that way,” he looks relieved to hear me finally speak, “I'm a woman who never breaks a contract.”

“You know, he's the one who deserves to die; he's been stealing from the company. He's a womanizing murderer. He pushed his secretary from the sixteenth floor, for Christ's sake! He pushed her...he could have just paid her off...I mean...” he trails off into a whimper.

This signals the beginning of a cycle. First, he'll try to reason with me and explain why he doesn't deserve to die. Next, he'll ask for sympathy, but it always ends in pathetic begging. But killing bad people does not concern me. Occupational killing pays the rent. I do feel sorry for him, though. What a waste of a chiseled body, at least I've had my fun. Amazing how discreet an isolated conversation can be in a crowded restaurant.

Rick signals for the waiter. “A bottle of your best champagne please.” I continue to conceal my weapon beneath the white linen tablecloth.

“Yes sir,” answers the waiter, disappearing quickly.

“I might as well enjoy a last drink. That is...if you're still planning to kill me.”

I smile. “At this point it's inevitable.”

“How can you do this? Do you have even an ounce of humanity? I have a wife, and kids.”

“Well, you slept with me quickly enough.”

“You seduced me! I was convinced you felt passionately for me. You set this whole thing up just to kill me.” He looks down at his hands again and rubs them together nervously. “How do you expect to get away with

this? It's a crowded restaurant filled with witnesses. They saw us getting a room together too, the clerk, the bellhop."

"That's the whole point; everyone is supposed to see me shoot you and run out of here with your briefcase."

"It's just full of papers."

"No one else knows that."

"So they..." The waiter interrupts him, arriving with the champagne in a silver bucket of ice and two glasses. He points the bottle away from the table and uses his thumbs through a cloth napkin to remove the cork.

"Just leave it on the ice. I'll pour." Rick turns to me, "Is that all right?"

I nod and keep my eyes fixed on his movements. He stands and fills each of our glasses half full. Rick sets his own glass in front of him and extends the other towards me.

"Oops!" He exclaims with a hint of obvious sarcasm. The glass lands on its side and the champagne races off the edge of the table and onto my dress. I sit completely still. Rick quickly grabs his handkerchief out of his jacket and begins to reach across the table.

"Hold it right there!" I say without moving. "Sit back down, I'll clean it." I glance down quickly, just to move the wet napkin from my lap to the table. When I look back at Rick, he has already started to refill my glass. I dab at the spill with my napkin.

"I'm sorry," he says with sincerity.

"Shut up. That's going to stain."

"Call it...leaving my mark."

"How about that, he still has a sense of humor."

"How about a toast?" He raises his glass, "To...uh...to life after death."

His comment brings a smirk to my face. I decide to humor him. I raise my glass and take a sip. "To life."

"So, where were you? Oh yeah, so they want people to see you with the briefcase?"

"Yeah, they'll think it contains the money, that it was you and your mistress who looted the company, but our relationship soured. The cops will assume I took your half and disappeared."

"But people have seen your face."

I have to laugh. "You're so naive, do you think I look remotely like this? I'm not even blonde."

"God..." He shakes his head and covers his face with his hands again. I just finish my glass of champagne. It's good, and as long as he pays, I'm drinking.

“This was supposed to be so easy, you know. Donovan and I, we’ve been taking company money for ourselves. He does the payrolls and attributes the losses to accounting errors. Over the years, a little money adds up to big money. Eight hundred thousand! Can you believe that? Eight hundred grand. We were going to split it at our retirements this year. He hid it in a Swiss account, until his secretary discovered it. God, first that, now this. That greedy bastard, he’s going to keep it all and blame me.”

“You should have tried to beat him to it.”

“How do you rationalize killing a person you just met today? Is it the money? How can you be so heartless?” Tears are welling up in his eyes. This is it, his final attempt at sympathy before the big farewell. He looks down on the table as he whimpers into his hands. “What gives you the right to play god? How can you decide who lives or dies?”

His words echo in my head. Suddenly, the whole room seems surreal, rocking back and forth, spinning even.

“You, you think you’re so important.” He chokes back tears, nearly outright sobbing. “What makes you so special?”

A drop of condensation falls from the ice bucket onto the table, the sound echoes in my head. Voices from the other tables grow disorienting and loud. I can hardly hear Rick’s whining. My hands and body begin to shake. Oh my god! What was in that drink? The gun slips from my hand and hits the plush white carpet with a muffled thud. Everything moves in slow motion. How did he...? I never took my eyes off him, except...when he spilled the drink!

“What did you do to me?” I can barely choke out the words while gasping for breath. I collapse backwards onto the floor, drawing attention from the other diners. My eyes wide open, the chandelier spins above me. Rick looks down at me with an evil grin.

“Who’s naive now, bitch?” He was never really crying, just stalling.

“No! Help me!” I try to raise my arm, but I can’t move. He turns his back to me and walks away. The last thing I see is a crowd of worried faces around me as I take my final labored breaths.