

FOR THE LOVE OF SMOKE AND MIRRORS

SHARINA BLACK

It's April. The sky is scary, threatening bi-polar weather. I'm sitting in Kathy's car, doing Kathy things while Kathy pretends to be someone else. She's got this way of talking about absolutely nothing and making you feel like it's the only thing on this planet you should care about. I'm pretty sure she knows how fucked up her eyeliner is but she wants me to know she doesn't care.

"So Kenneth seriously needs to rethink his angle, ya know? Really make it pop."

I don't know who Kenneth is or what he's angling but I sure hope it pops before Kathy's eyeliner-induced cyst does. I check my own make-up in the sun visor, pass the dutch and cough, showing Kathy how great her hyped up weed is. It's alright, and I want her to know that.

"So are you still doing that singing thing tonight? That's tonight, right? 'Cause I told everybody it is," Kathy asks in her forced falsetto. When she speaks I wonder if it hurts.

"Everybody would be?"

"Dawn, Cage, Meriam, everybody."

My throat hurts listening to her. I imagine hers rubbed raw and red from jamming out annoying names. I threw up a whole piece of cake once immediately after swallowing. It was excruciating. I imagine that's what Kathy feels when she talks.

"They're all so stoked about it. We're buying a keg afterwards and posting it online."

"Please don't do that," I tell her and choke, passing the dutch back. There's something about the internet that creeps me out. It's this entire dimension inside of our own dimension readily available for

access. Like being able to go to Heaven for a few minutes and come back with fucking post cards. It just shouldn't be possible.

"I shouldn't have told you, dude. I don't like your friends and I don't want them near my songs. You know that."

Kathy looks at me like a zit. I'm an inconvenience to our friendship.

She asks if I'm ready and I say yeah. I put out the joint and slide a lavender colored beanie over my face. It's got small eye holes and a slit at the nostrils for breathability. Kathy's is conventionally pink, for feminism or something. I open the passenger door with a 9mm Glock clinging to my left then my right hand. Our shifty footsteps move us quickly to a pea-green sidewalk apartment door and I rap knuckles on the wood. Solid wood, good call.

A red-headed lady with a bad dye job answers the door. She looks kin to an offensively proportioned doll. It's sad to ponder the amount of money spent on Botox from a doctor most likely operating high on his own supply, so I choose not to.

Kathy bellows, "This is a robbery, bitches," and it's so condescending I forget she's Kathy for a second. The lady, Liza I think she said on the phone, shrieks and claps with giggles.

"Oh you're just in time," Liza says. Liza has an accent that's not really considered an accent in America, but it's clearly acquired by upper class influence and I don't like it. She thinks we're strippers for her bachelorette party. We're not strippers.

Kathy and I look at each other. I know she's smiling because I am and that's always the signal. There's a group of ladies sitting around a really nice coffee table framed in wrought iron and adorned with dildos and mojitos, as expected. I put my Glock in the air and shoot the ceiling. It's done me no wrong so it retaliates with chips and dust.

"I don't think you heard me," Kathy says, "This is an actual robbery ladies! Faces down, asses up, hands in the motherfucking air." Liza loses her smile. Giggles drop dead and she stands there just looking at me like a deaf mute. I shoot again at the ceiling that takes no shit and Liza and her buddies get on the ground.

"Hands up, hags." For some reason Kathy's yell doesn't sound like it hurts.

Kathy grabs the purses, the decorative crystal shit and the dildos. She puts it all in the black duffel bag we brought and heads for

the bathroom's medicine cabinet.

"Goddamit, Liza, you don't fuck around!" Kathy yells back.

"There's som-m-me more in the bedroom, on the n-nightstand," Liza stammers. Her fear and hospitality bring out a southern drawl. One lady starts crying and my boots find their way next to her face. She cringes her neck up at me and makes a weird, pleading expression that doesn't suit her. I raise the gun to her face. My boot makes more of its own decisions and slowly, pointedly, flexes itself out onto her splayed fingers. It grinds itself, searching for carpet and she screams. Kathy juts out of the bedroom with curiosity. A swift kick to the face and the lady stops screaming. I miss the noise.

Kathy comes out of the bedroom. "It has been swell, but we've got other affairs to tend to. Catch ya later, Liza," Kathy says, weighing the duffel bag by hand and smiling through her homemade ski mask.

"Ladies," I say and bow dramatically, more like a ring master than a Broadway lead. Kathy jumps up and grabs a banner reading "THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM!" on our way out. Fucking brutal. The banner, not Kathy. We get in the car and take the masks off, giggling at each other and cackling at the banner. I start the car while Kathy grabs me by the ponytail and kisses me with damp lips and nose-tip. Our lipsticks are different faded shades that cling to each other. She lights a cigarette with a white bedazzled lighter and sets the shit on fire. She sets the fucking banner on fire and flags it out the window like a kite while we do eighty to a bar on the other side of town.