

Richard NO!!!

A Short Story

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Conflict's always first in line when money is involved. I guess murder is quite second. Yet, who's to judge an action sparked by gaslit desperation? Delusional angst clashing with an inescapable hunger for more. Thirsty? Parched. Longing to make ends meet lacks a sense of self care. Gasoline prices peck at the cotton crumbles buried under my pocket change. I prefer to walk anyway. I'm what you could call a freelancer.. I work for myself, and this private investigation firm. It's my responsibility to manage everyone else's shit.. that's the only way the job gets done right? Boss lady sneaked me an extra exclusive case with a commission I couldn't refuse. Sly like a handful of crumbled Jacksons from a relative. It felt almost guilty to decline. 100 mill in dirty money .. you know the deal. 6 stacks of that cheddar *misplaced* during a recent delivery to a supplier.. But nothing's ever that innocent in this business.

During my routine mail delivery to my brother, I was sent out to see what I could learn, hear who I could know. Somehow, though whispers and a few black eyes, I ended up at my brother's for both. Lingering concerns stained my left brain with purple ink as an innocent "why" tugged at my chest. Psh, if it was him, he'd at least save me a chunk of that cheddar right? At least tell me to keep my mouth shut? Shit, I wouldn't blame him though. Three jobs is enough stress to make a person put their morals to the side for a come up.

Thunder crackles and rumbles a low growl. My suede soaked fedora acting as a personal awning. Droplets dripping down the brim, just missing my toe tips. Five loud knocks on the pine door snuggled into its peeling frame. 321 South, Chicago Ave. No answer so I knocked again, hard enough to bruise knuckle hairs. The lamp light glows through the second floor window and silhouettes fade in and out of focus. As I'm about to clinch my fingers to knock again, I hear Richard exclaim, "IT'S OPEN". It was an aggressive declaration. A tone loaded with intrusive thoughts. I reached in for a handshake, but he was too caught up with the chick on his lap. Figures. She's been around for a minute unlike the others.

" Aye Rich, sorry for the mess. That rain's hitting like bullets today", I joked. An empty nod and a slight grin was his reply. Such an uneasy response leaving my gut in knots. I lit a cig to relax the tension. A gesture mistakenly masking my intuition.

" Have a hit!" I passed that chilling toxin eagerly. Still questioning his mood. I let my eyes wander to the tiger stripes the blinds made.

" Last week, when I ran into you at that lounge, how long did you stay? I didn't spot you for the rest of the night." I pressed a bit.

" I got a call, so I had to leave." cold, blunt he grunted. It seemed off. His eyes inspecting intentions. Flashing Back, I vividly reminisced about my oddly comfortable brother in a speakeasy i never knew existed. Shifting to the woman propped on his thighs I asked,

"And how about you Miss Lady? Were you with him?"

"What do you think, Miss *detective*?" She let out a light squeaky chuckle. Squinted eyes I glared at her up and down. I let my chest collapse as I exhaled. Releasing my frustration with these two and their jokes. Maybe there was something more to this story than I thought. Time is money, and here I was wasting it. There was more to do, more to question, more to look into. I took my last hit of that cigarette, gave it to my brother and wished him well.

"Sorry to bother ya Rich. I just hadn't talked to you since then. Here's the mail they dropped off for you last week." I gathered my cool drenched blazer still leaving water trails from the storm and placed damp envelopes on the filing cabinet, when the gleam of a pistol caught my eye.

" I'll see you next Tuesday Rich" I said trying to regulate the hurry in my voice heading toward the door. And the last thing I remember was a loud click and cries of " Richard NO!!!" as I hit the floor.