

The Way He Found Her

(based on a true story – I can't make this shit up)

He's wearing an ascot – no shit – an ascot and a three piece wool suit. Immaculate. Beautiful suit – well cut. And don't let's start on the shoes. Ninety years old and he's wearing shoes that probably cost a couple grand at some shop on Fifth Avenue. People are crazy.

“Is this how you found her?” I ask.

“Yes, officer, I haven't touched a thing.”

She's lying on top of the covers on her back, silk pants suit, support hose cover her feet. She doesn't have shoes on. Her hands are crossed over each other on her stomach the way you'd lay out a corpse for a viewing. Somewhere in the apartment opera is playing on a stereo.

“When did you first notice her missing?”

“I never said she was missing.”

“Okay, let me restate the question. When did you realize she was dead?”

“This morning. I thought I'd been hearing a beeping coming from the room for some time but I didn't come in to investigate until this morning. It was her alarm clock.”

“And how long had you been hearing the beeping?”

“Several weeks.”

“Weeks?”

“It's a large apartment. The air conditioning was on. I don't hear very well anymore.” He shook his head. “Getting old is not pleasant.”

Dying isn't very pleasant either, bub, I'm thinking, but I keep it to myself.

"May I sit down," the old guy says. "At my age I can't stand on my feet but for a few minutes.

I tell Flores to escort the guy into the living room.

"She's been there two weeks, maybe three," the forensics guy says as he takes out his camera and begins to photograph the body. "No sign of foul play..."

"Major sign of foul odor," I say. "How could he not smell...that?"

"Sense of smell goes along with the hearing and sight," he says as he snaps off photos. "Probably won't ever be able to tell what happened. She's too far gone for an autopsy. She probably set the alarm, laid down for a nap, and had an MI."

"Died in her sleep."

"Happens all the time."

The apartment is huge, even for this address. Last redecorated probably in the 1990s. Expansive view of the park, two wings off a central entry with a separate service entrance.

"The daughter showed up," Flores informs me, sticking his head in the doorway. "She's in the kitchen."

"Jesus," she says standing in front of the open refrigerator. "Look at this. A half jar of caviar, two eggs, a slice of Guda and half a quart of orange juice. They have a net worth greater than most developing countries and this is all the food they have in the house."

She's probably in her mid-sixties, pencil thin and pale as a Kabuki, and as immaculately manicured as her parents. Her helmet of hair is so shellacked it wouldn't budge in a windstorm. Wool Chanel suit, Chanel handbag, probably wearing Chanel panties too. She's got a diamond as big as the tip of my thumb on her right hand, no wedding band on her left.

"Both your parents live here?" I ask.

"Fifty years," she says looking at the ceiling as though she's calculating the years. "They've been estranged since just before my first marriage fell apart. Reconciled just before my second marriage. That didn't last long. My marriage had a longer shelf life, and my second husband and I were together only eight weeks." She recalls all this with a sour and puckered expression of someone who's bitten into an exquisite yet incredibly bitter raspberry.

"He used the main entrance and the west wing, she used the service entrance and the east wing. I wouldn't be surprised if they haven't talked in a quarter century."

"But they cohabitated?"

"Christ," she exclaims, walking into the expansive and coldly neutral living room. "Just look at this place. Would you want to give this up in a divorce? They probably stayed together just so I couldn't get my hands on it."

I'm thinking *she's gotta be kidding*.

"You think I'm kidding?" she asks. "I'm not! That's what anger does to you. It ruins everything – friendships, children, families. Everything. They loved each other once-upon-a-time. But he was preoccupied with drinking martinis and chasing skirts and she reciprocated by spending his money and denying him sex. The next thing they know

they were alone, old, and friendless with children who couldn't care less about them. Selfish."

"I can hear you," the old man says in a bitter singsong tone, sitting on a couch and staring into space.

"Now *that* he hears," she says. "You couldn't have checked in on her every once in a while? Just to make sure she was okay?"

"I checked. She was dead. You could have come by from time-to-time, too. It's a two way street you know..."

"I'm not having this argument," she says distracted by her reflection in the enormous window and the great orange eye of the sun setting over the city. "Can I see her?" she asks.

"The smell is pretty overpowering..."

"I can smell it from here. That's not what I asked."

"Sure you can see her."

The forensics guy stops his work as she enters, a bony hand over her mouth. Her face goes even paler. She hesitates, and then takes a halting step toward the bed.

"Mommy?" she whispers, touching the sleeve of her mother's suit jacket, horrified by the blue-green-black skin of the putrefying figure before her. "Mommy?"