



UNENLIGHTENED

By Jacob Graysol

Billy passes as one of the diehards who venture out in the winter nights to gaze at Edison Tower, aiming his battery-less phone, feigning clicks, having shortly before left the museum through the same door he'd busted to get in.

That was the plan.

But his backpack should be bulging with two fireproof, waterproof boxes, and he shouldn't have a gash in his right glove. *Better not have left blood.*

He gets in the car and preempts my tirade with an outburst of his own. "You screwed up, Lee! There wasn't a cam lock on that cabinet, it had an electronic deadbolt! I nearly sliced my hand forcing it open!"

He waves in my periphery as I focus on the road.

"And there were no records inside," he says.

"No whats?"

"Edison's first recordings. Just some old parts and boxes of knickknacks."

"You grew up in Edison and never went to the Thomas Edison Museum? His lab was there!" I turn right.

"Yeah, yeah. The light bulb, the phonograph."

"You idiot! Early recordings were on cylinders. Those knickknacks would've fetched enough Bitcoin to buy a couple of Cadillacs."

"What did you call me?"

"An idiot!" I shake my head. "We could circle back if—"

"I'm no dimwit."

"Do you think that new lock was alarmed separately from the phone line I had you cut?"

"At least I know the difference between ignorance and stupidity."

"Then focus, ignoramus!" I slow down before Dellwood Road. "Should we backtrack or not?"

“Quit the insults. If I’d planned this job, I would’ve given clear instructions.”

I slam the steering wheel and continue straight. “You think staring at a fortune and leaving it behind isn’t your fault at all? A smart person would’ve asked questions if he didn’t understand something. A curious person would’ve visited the only museum in his home town. Ignorance is usually caused by stupidity—”

“Don’t call me—”

“—which is clearly the case now.”

I fume, and both of us stay silent until I start pulling into my garage. Billy says, “You’re sure no one will remember my car’s been parked at the Fix-It?”

“There are always different cars there overnight.”

“And this will be our last job together?”

“That’s for sure, Einstein.”

“Then I’m coming in for the evidence burn.”

I huff. “Fine.”

I close the garage door and we get out of the car. Billy puts the backpack on the ground, takes off the black coat, hat, and gloves I’d bought and piles them together on the hood, then retrieves his coat from a hook.

“Make sure your own gloves are on before you come in.”

“I’m *not* stupid!”

That time I hadn’t meant it.

I say, “Stay here a minute. I’ll double-check that the shades are drawn and start the fire.”

I’d left the wood and wax starters stacked to burn, and get back to Billy quickly. He’s wadded the robbery outfit and backpack in his arms and holds the tools in his hands. I lead him in, then nod to the bathroom. “Steel in the tub. I use straight vinegar for any residue that’s stuck.” He’s gentle with the crowbar but clunks the hammer and screwdrivers. “Careful!” *Careful, moron!*

We continue to the hearth. He kneels with the pile and hands me the clothes. I toss the hat and gloves into the flames, then cut the coat into strips with shears. “The backpack’s completely empty?”

“Otherwise, what? I’m a dope?” Billy unzips it, puts both hands in, then pulls out four brown-wax cylinders pressed together with the fingers of his left hand.

“You said—”

I raise the shears as Billy brings up a silenced pistol with his right hand. He smirks. “I’m thinking one Cadillac is all I need, and a boat. Or would that be stupid?”

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