

Jack

The rain was falling hard against the glass windows of the cafe now and I began to wonder if it would come in through the window I left open in my kitchen. I shook my head at the absurdity of such a thought at a time like this and crossed over to the windows. What did it matter if the rain came in? What did it matter if the floor was ruined? Chances were, I would never see my home again.

Even though I planned well, no plan was fool proof. There was the distinct possibility I would be caught; caught and punished. I rolled the thought of jail around in my head, tasting it, feeling its weight. This was not the first time. I tried to let the thought of it change my mind, alter my course before I acted. At each stage I tested my resolution. It held and my plan moved forward. I still burned with rage, consumed by the need for vengeance.

‘This won’t do,’ I thought. The fire was dangerous. It would make me reckless if I let it. I needed a cool head. I took the risk. The deed was done. I needed to be calm and cool for what was to come. I placed my hand to the glass and felt the coolness of the rain as it ran down the other side, chilling the glass before splashing to the ground. There was ice in the rain, I could hear it tink against the glass. There was ice in my veins. The coolness entered my mind and body as well. The white heat of my hatred cooled. His last breath was expelled. Vengeance was mine.

Jack was dead.

It was extremely simple. A few months earlier I purchased a plant known as Lily of the Valley from a local greenhouse. It was my grandmother's favorite and I bought it with the intent of planting it on her grave as a memorial. The man behind the counter warned me to keep it away from small children and pets as every part of the plant, including the water in which flowers cut from the plant were kept, was poisonous. I promised I would. I paid cash. From earlier

investigation I knew he only kept his surveillance tapes for thirty days and sold a lot of plants. I just needed to bide my time.

I pulled my hand from the glass. I didn't give the advice too much consideration, since I had neither pets nor children. And Jack deserved what was coming to him. I saw his current set up. I couldn't help the people he would hurt during the time it took me to prepare but I knew he would be in place for another six months. It seemed almost poetic justice. The man who killed my grandmother, killed in turn by a plant bought in memorial for her. It was too delicious a thought to ignore.

The thought brought a smile to my face as I walked out of the shop with my plant. Jack passed by and smiled back politely in the way of strangers passing, not recognizing me. And why would he? I wasn't his victim. I was inconsequential to his dealings. A red haze clouded my vision and I turned away before Jack could see the change of my expression. If I was going to kill him, I needed to remain a stranger, an innocent, harmless, non-worrisome stranger. He couldn't see it coming or I might fail. I would risk imprisonment, but failure was unacceptable.

At a bookstore I browsed the garden section and confirmed the greenhouse manager's assessment. The plant was dangerous. Ingesting it caused almost immediate heart failure. I made no purchases that day but browsed the garden section for a while. No one appeared to notice me.

On my way home, I ducked into a junk store and picked up a bent knife with a dull blade, a warped wooden cutting board and a small cook pot to use in brewing my poison. This armed, I returned to my apartment.

In my small kitchen I donned the rubber gloves I used for cleaning. I extracted the plant from its pot, shaking off the excess dirt. I lay it on my cutting board and used my dull knife to hack

it into pieces small enough to fit into my cook pot. I poured water on top of the bits and set the pot on the burner, letting the low heat simmer everything, the poisons leaching into the water.

While the poison steeped, I emptied out a small glass bottle, thoroughly rinsed it and soaked off any identifying labels. I filled the cleaned bottle with the poison and cleaned up from my task.

The first week, the remains of the plant found their way into my apartment building's dumpster. The following week, I disposed of the cooking pot. The gloves, cutting board, and knife were tossed out the following weeks as I bided my time. Soon enough, no trace but the tightly sealed bottle remained. As I removed every trace of the poison from my kitchen, I monitored Jack's life from a distance. I created a mental map of his movements without drawing his attention. I was one of the crowd. I secured a gym membership in the building nearby and stuck ruthlessly to my schedule, knowing that the key card would record me clocking in on a regular schedule. It was my justification for being in the area. I passed by Jack routinely on my walk to the gym, but never paid him any attention. Sometimes I stopped in to one of the shops for a bottle of water or another for a post workout snack. Sometimes I even stopped for lunch at one of the cafes or just walked home stopping nowhere. I followed my routine, but not slavishly so that any variation on the big day would hopefully go unnoticed.

Then the day came. After my workout, I decided to stop for lunch in a café, Jack favored each Tuesday. I wore a heavy sweater with sleeves that covered my hands, and more importantly the open bottle in my hand. I hung back as he made his way through the line as though reading the posted menu and deciding my options. When he received his tray of food and moved towards a table, I moved towards the bathroom. My path crossed his. His gaze drifted to the attractive server clearing the tables, his gaze flicking to the gap in her shirt as she bent over to clear one of the tables. Taking advantage of his distraction I dosed the food on his plate and prayed he would consume

enough. While the café had video cameras at each of the entrance and over the cash registers they had none in the dining room and only human eyes would record my movements. I saw no one notice my actions and I continued into the restroom.

Once inside I washed my hands, rinsed out the bottle and wiped off my prints. I wrapped the glass bottle in a paper towel and set the bundle on the counter top. I put my hands over it, and pressed my weight into the glass until it shattered. I dropped the bundle into my purse, washed my hands again and returned to the dining room.

My heart pounded as I waited in line but my voice remained steady when I placed my own order. I took my plate to my table for one by the window and looked out of the window as the rain began to fall, seeing the reflection more than the street. In the reflection I saw Jack finish his lunch, scraping the plate clean. As he stood, a passing member of staff, the same one who he was ogling earlier took his plate. She dumped it into a bussing bin already filled with other plates and took the bin into the kitchen.

In the reflection, I saw the poison take effect and turned back with the rest of the patrons as Jack began to stagger, dropping to his knees across the room. Paramedics were called and I watched with the other patrons as people tried to save Jack's worthless life. They failed.

As he was trundled away, I heard the word heart attack drifting from someone's lips and hoped it would prove the end diagnosis. I sat at my table as those closest to his collapse were asked for statements, their contact information taken. I pulled my hand from the cold surface of the window and waited for someone to look at me and announce that I put something in his food. No one did. A general question was asked to see if anyone saw anything different, but no one came forward. I was not questioned, my contact info not written down.

The officials left and the café buzzed with the shocked excitement of the tragedy. Soon enough, people began to leave and I felt it would be safe for me to do so as well. I filtered out with the rest of the crowd. I moved back to my apartment building, keeping a slightly sad, almost contemplative look on my face to blend with the shock of seeing a stranger die.

The trash can outside my apartment building was full and I knew the hour was approaching when it would be bundled up and taken to the dumpster by staff. I slid the paper towel containing the broken bottle in the trash can and went up to my apartment. Once safely behind my locked door, I allowed myself to sag with relief, the smile I hid from the outside world sliding to my lips. I changed clothes and put everything I wore to the café into the laundry. I added it to the washing machine and added the soap. As the machine began to chug away, I saw movement and looked out of my window. One of the office staff was taking the bagged trash from the lobby to the dumpster. I glanced at the clock as the same staff member moved to the other outside garbage cans. In about an hour the garbage service would be by and the dumpster emptied, the contents taken for disposal. I didn't know if anyone would seek to investigate to see if Jack's heart attack was natural or not, but I made my bargain with myself. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

"Jack is dead," I said as I exhaled. I felt a heavy weight inside me dissolve into nothing. I felt free and at ease for the first time since my grandmother's death. While I hoped I covered my tracks well enough, if they came for me I knew the price of my vengeance was worth it.