

Promise on Barnes Hill

A single car waited on top of Barnes Hill. Down below, the port was quiet. The cranes had stopped moving for the night, and the final flood light had pitched the maze of containers into darkness ten minutes ago. On this side of the Witellman, with the city lights to their back, the port was nothing more than bulky shadows lost against the horizon.

"I ought to kill you, you know," said Lily conversationally. Matthew looked over at her in the passenger seat. She hadn't taken her eyes off the cranes and sea containers since they got here. She was cold - more so than usual - and didn't seem one bit sensitive to the dull ache that pulsed across his torso. She was ice cold, alright.

He'd picked his lieutenant well.

"Be done with you, done with your family shit," she continued. "Find a real outfit, someone that'd have their ducks already lined up. Maybe that Jeannie Roche is looking for some new muscle. She'd probably even let me plant one across Stephan's face on the way out."

"You aren't half kidding," said Matthew, keeping his tone straight. He knew she was just trying to jazz him up. Roche had nothing to do with the jump last night, but even so, it was her smuggling goons he had to blame for his tendered ribs tonight.

"I don't kid, Scarpaglio."

"You don't have the sense of humour for it."

"Seriously, Matt. What are we going to do?"

"About what?"

Lily made a gesture that seemed to Matthew to encompass everything but herself. "This place. These people. He's killing you."

"Settle down, Lily, it was just one lucky jump."

"Your daddy isn't just one lucky jump. He's got your number, he's just waiting for Rosa to turn the other way. And if I'm not there the next time, like last night..."

"Geez, if I didn't know better, I'd think you were concerned for me."

She frowned at that. "Don't start getting touchy-feely on me, kid. You

know score; no girly work.”

Matthew nodded. “That’s what we said.”

“Well, then. I’m glad we’re still agreed.”

Matthew grinned to himself in the dark. She was his ice-cold firecracker alright. He’d seen what she’d done to poor Lockett Inches outside the Lady’s Luxury those two months ago. The roughnecking she gave him wasn’t the work of the dainty tail that typically worked at Karla’s joint. She’d taken his knee out from behind him, planted his head into the hefty front door, and finished with a crack against his skull-top with the gaudy heavy metal of the door knocker - and all for the ten bucks he owed her! Inches hadn’t stood a chance, and Matthew offered her a new job right there on the spot.

She’d been quick to lay out the boundaries to him in those first days. She wanted out of the girly game, which meant that she wasn’t his bought-for moll. She was an operator, and would be treated like one. Perhaps she hadn’t killed anyone yet, but it wasn’t for lack of *coglioni* that she didn’t yet have her first notch.

Of course it had caused some problems. Stephan had his knickers knotted up tighter than a Forchester docker’s wife at the idea of being bumped as his second for a woman. It made a lot of the boys around Simon’s nervous. Stephan was the right material, they all said, although the whole cowboy shtick was going to need toning down. He got on well with the boys, and could hold his own in a shakedown.

The thing was, Stephan didn’t have Lillian’s drive; that hungry look for something more than another shitty pay day.

Plus, Matthew was certain she could take Stephan in an unfair fight. She’d have made sure it wasn’t fair to start with.

“I have a plan,” said Matthew, slowly, tasting the words for the first time.

“We’ve all got plans.”

“No, I mean a real plan. A job.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. The Central.”

She paused at that. The Grand City Central Bank and Securities building

was the Holy Grail of Grand City's schemers. It held \$80million in bonds alone; safety deposit boxes with wills and estates of the city's wealthiest; even Joseph Manessi was rumoured to keep a box there. The security system was believed to be impenetrable, the workers incorrigible. It was the city's only virgin bank, and had remained so for the seven years it had operated.

Like all virgins, the rumours of the bank's fidelity were exaggerated and widely known.

"You're crazy," she said. "It's solid. Can't be done."

"I've got an in," he replied.

"The front door?"

"The architect."

"Who just so happens to want you to rob his bank?"

"Sure. He's a greedy son of a bitch, just like me."

Lillian paused again, Matthew assumed to think through all the possible scenarios. Eventually, she asked. "What do you get out of this?"

"You mean besides hitting the tightest bank in Grand City?"

"We can get money elsewhere. This is dangerous. We'd need more hands, a full crew."

"Stephan is already in," he said before he could retract it. He waited for the explosive burst, the offence at approaching Stephan before her, but Lily was still wrapped up in her mental simulation of the caper.

Instead, "Who else?"

"Killing as well."

"Donny's driver?"

"An obvious choice for our getaway."

"And he's agreed?" She sounded hesitant, a little strained. Perhaps she did not trust the driver, which was fair; the man worked almost in his entirety for Donny. Did he really have the sand to go behind his boss' back to work for his son?

"He's in, he knows the score. I promised him a cushy retirement."

"Can we get Waylan on this?"

"Maybe. Rosa thinks we should. He has friends to pay back, and this could help him along nicely."

"We'll need him."

"Keep in mind I want to rob the place, not reduce it to rubble."

"We'll need him," she repeated. A quick tap of fingers on the dashboard. "So what do you get out of it?" she asked again, trying to catch him off guard.

Now that he was speaking it out loud, he felt triumphant. This plan was his way in. This was how he deposed Donny, and fulfilled every promise that his mother whispered to him. Restore the Scarpaglio name to its former glory. Reinstatement of the family with the Commission in New York. Finally get this city, everything - from its rat hovels to its crystal ballrooms - under his control.

It wasn't even the money. If he pulled this off, he could sway every player to his banner, from the petty sharks to the veteran made men. It wasn't money that bought allies; it was respect.

He opened his door, and stepped out of the car. "Everything."

"That's a lot to promise, Scarpaglio."

"Whatever it takes. I pull this job off, and there isn't a soul in this city that could stop us."

Lillian exited the coupe from the other side, and sat next to him on the bonnet. By now the stars had come out, no longer hiding from the glare of the port lights. The Witellman cast its silvery sheen, and from up here on Barnes Hill, it seemed all the fortune in the world was just right there for the taking.

"Whatever it takes," she agreed.