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BUTTER WON'T MELT

by Aryn Free Kelly

Petey's boots crunch in the Boston snow as he passes a 'Closed'-neon light that reflects into the snow as he turns the corner of the two-story-brick museum. He peers through the flurries that obscure the window to the paintings that hover on the wall of the first floor. He approaches the only door on this side of the building. Petey's stomach grumbles.

"Let me in," Petey says, slamming his fist against the frozen door.

"I'm coming," Ricky says.

The cold blows Petey inside. "Pay up."

"I don't have it, Petey. Maybe you can take something to square us?"

"You have got to be kidding me, Ricky-boy. I'm hungry. I want my Ma's pancakes for breakfast, not jailhouse muck. I'll have the law on me faster than butter melts on Ma's pancakes."

"No. No. Honest. I know a way. Then, I'll be done. I'm out for good. I won't try those cards no-more."

"How are they never gonna catch me?"

"I'll help you. You tie me up. I won't ever tell because you'd make me swim if I ever did."

"I take any one picture? What if I can't sell it? I'm stuck with a lousy picture."

"Like this one. Take this one." A somber, middle-aged gentleman sits at a table and stares out from the painting.

"I don't like that one. The boss wouldn't like that one either. Who wants an old picture of a bloke in a top hat? What about the other guard? Where's he at?" Petey asks.

"Second Floor."

Petey sighs and shakes his head. "Ricky, you owe a-buck-fifty large. Do you even know how many paintings equal that?"

"Take more. Take seven for luck."

Petey shakes his head. "You don't get it. Still trying your luck at numbers. Fool. You say two black and whites showed up because of a disturbance. You turn off the cameras now. I'll take what I want until I think you are square."

Ricky hits a switch to turn off the cameras.

"Call the other guard here for some reason."

"Hey, Jeff. Police just showed up. I need your help. Over," Ricky says over the handheld walkie-talkie.

"On my way from Rembrandt display. Over." The walkie-talkie clicks off. Petey moves behind a wall. He picks up an ancient, heavy Chinese beaker that fits into his bear-like grip. Jeff's footsteps echo through the building as he walks into the room. Petey raises his hand with the beaker.

"What about police?" Jeff asks.

"They..." Ricky says. Petey clubs Jeff in the head with the ancient artifact. He slips the treasure into his oversized-left pocket as Jeff drops to the marble floor.

"What did you do that for?" Ricky asks.

"Too many players for the game, Ricky-boy. I don't like loose ends."

"What do you want?"

"I want the money, Ricky-boy, but I'll settle for that Rembrandt section. Show me."

Ricky trips into the wall as he stumbles over Jeff's body.

"What if he wakes up?"

"He won't wake up any time soon. While I'm busy, you tie him up, and cover his eyes."

"They are just this way."

"Which one is Rembrandt?"

"Those," Ricky replies.

"Go package-tape that guy." He removes a box cutter from his right pocket.

Ricky returns to his co-worker's side. He pulls packing-tape out of a drawer in the quasi-kitchen. He tapes Jeff's feet, hands, and mouth. With trembling hands, he takes a lunch menu off the table and tapes it over Jeff's eyes.

"What did you do?" Ricky asks as he joins Petey.

"I had to get the painting out. I didn't want to poke a hole in the painting with my knife. So, I drop it first."

"You cut the painting out of the frame though. Do you know nothing about art? The borders are how you identify the original for insurance."

"Alright, pipsqueak. How do you suggest I carry these paintings down the street? In the frame? I roll them was the

idea, but they don't roll so good. What else is here? What about that guy with the melting clocks? You got any melting clocks?"

"Dali? We don't have melting clocks. We have Degas."

"I think I heard of him. Lead the way. Woah. Stop. What's this number here? Why does it have a chair in front of it? None of the others do."

"It's The Concert. It's so you can sit and enjoy the concert taking place in the painting."

"I like the checkerboard. It reminds me of Ma's kitchen." Without warning the goliath man moves at incredible speed. The painting drops to the floor, glass shatters, and the box cutter slices through the canvas. "Where are the others?" Petey asks.

"This way." Ricky leads Petey into an adjoining room. "Here." He gasps as five more gorgeous paintings fall to the floor.

Petey turns his box cutter around and uses the metal end to smash the glass over the oil painting. "My Ma would like that one." The Manet drops.

"I think we are more than square, Pete."

"I like the eagle."

"That's a Napoleon eagle."

"Oh, now I really like the eagle," Petey says. He slides the eagle into a massive interior pocket within his coat. "Now we are square. I take thirteen, your lucky number. Back to the breakroom. I'll tie you up. Where will you live if you talk?"

"I'll be an ice cube in the lake."

"Your debt is paid. I'm gonna go get me some pancakes, Ricky-boy." Petey binds Ricky the same way as Jeff, complete with take-out menu, except Ricky can still speak.

Petey opens the door, wrestles the treasures under his right arm protected under a blanket, and silence falls on the little break room as the door jangles shut. Wind howls around the building. Sleep overtakes Ricky as panic subsides. He awakens to a whisper in his ear as sun illuminates the room.

"You made sure he took what I said?"

"Yes," Ricky says.

"The fakes are gone?"

"Yes."

"Welcome into the fold."