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About 800 words

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The Concert

By Joseph Laguerre

Serina carefully examines the pieces one by one. The brand-new oak table in front of her has the glassine, bubble wrap, artist tape, and a pair of scissors. As soon as she finishes inspection, she prepares the paintings for transport.

Richard walks over with his glass of Moscato and pulls up the black leather office chair next to her workstation. Serina coughs at the waft of Calvin Klein's Contradiction. Serina puts her long blonde hair into a ponytail before she grabs Rembrandt's "Christ In the Storm on The Sea of Galilee".

"Isn't this part usually done, before you call me," Richard asks.

"Don't you know better than to play on a school night? Since when do you Calvin Klein on the job? Plus, it's not my fault Charles called you prematurely. Do you know how long it takes to validate fine art?"

Serina places the painting face down on the glassine. She cuts the edges and folds the excess onto the back of the Rembrandt, starting with the longest sides first, placing the artist tape to seal it in place.

"Nope, just a transporter. So how much longer?"

"What are you five?"

"I just think I could be at Tony C's, watching the Celtics."

"Well why don't you just—"

"Now, now, you know I'm not just here for the paintings, relax," Richard interrupts.

Serina places the painting face down on the bubble wrap, wraps two layers before cutting a line across. She takes the artist tape sealing the sides and edges again.

Serina places the Rembrandt inside the box. Richard stands up and walks toward the window overlooking downtown Boston. He finishes his Moscato and places the glass down on Serina's desk.

"I was supposed to be painting these, you know. I wasn't supposed to help steal them. I was an art student. My art was supposed to be in the places these get stolen from," Serina says.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah and then some rich guy from Nantucket swept you off your feet, you quit art, and he left you a shell of yourself in the divorce. At the end of day, you didn't have to be here. You could've gone back to school. Whose fault is that? Not your ex-husbands," Richard responds.

Richard motions for the Rembrandt that Serina placed in the box. Serina hands it to him.

"Thank you, my dear. Hey, maybe when this is done, we can go to The Envoy. Nothing like a great view, and apple martinis," Richard says.

"Sure."

Richard leaves with the Rembrandt, closes the door behind him. Serina places "The Concert" by Vermeer onto her workstation. Serina gasps and tears up when the phone rings.

"Is the Vermeer ready?" Charles asks.

"Uh...no I just pulled it." Serina responds as she wipes a single drop from her eye.

"I'm sending Richard back for it. Make sure it's ready to go. These Bulgarians have an affinity for art and guns. I don't want to see what happens when you piss them off. He'll be there soon."

"I understand."

Serina hangs up the phone, picks up the Vermeer and places it on the table. She runs her fingers on it. Stares at it like she's seen a ghost. She looks in her purse, pulls out her wallet and inside a zipper pocket was a picture. The picture was of her and her mother in front of "The Concert" at the Gardner Museum in Boston. She flips the picture on the back exposing the writing on the back, "March 17, 1990 At the museum with Rina".

She walks over to her desk by the window.

"I'm so sorry, Mom."

Serina walks over to the portrait of Albert Einstein that her mom gifted her for Christmas 5 years ago. Behind it is the electronic wall safe. She places her thumbprint on the console and inputs the combination. She grabs the black Adidas duffle bag and looks inside. She grabs her passport and looks over the \$100,000 she keeps there for emergencies. She grabs the flip phone inside and calls Richard.

"Ugh, voicemail. Hey Richard, it's Rina. Listen, I'm sure by now you've spoken to Charles. Whatever you do, don't come back for the Veneer. This place is going to be crawling with BPD. Listen you're right, we all make choices in life. I can't be a prisoner of mine. Neither can you. Thanks for everything, maybe when everything dies down, we can grab that drink. Until then, I'll be doing something I should've done a long time ago."

Serina takes the sim card out, and then cracks the phone and tosses it. She takes one last look at the office she called home for the last 9 years as she closes the door.