

**\$250 OBO**

*A short-story script for October's good health.*

*By Teeth!*

*JACKIE sits in a cafe, at a table in a cafe, at a table in a cafe in the North End. She wears an elaborate outfit, necklaces a-dangling and hands jittery. She has something on her mind. Upstage from where she sits is a large wooden chest or box. It may look important, but it is not lit as though it is.*

*Across from Jackie, unseen to the audience, is an off-duty police officer. He is dressed plainly, does not speak, and will not exist for the purposes of staging this piece. But he is there, and it is to him that JACKIE addresses the following:*

JACKIE:

Thanks for agreeing to meet me here. I know this is...

I need to talk to someone about it, I think. I need to feel like I told someone, someone who could do something about it. Because, believe me, I've tried to do something about it myself. I don't have the time, the resources, shit I barely have the money. And I would have invited you to my home, but it's a mess. That's the price you pay when you don't have a physical storefront, hey? You have to keep it all in your house.

Yeah. Thanks for agreeing to meet me here. And, and this is all off the record, okay? I don't need you taking notes or recording me, that's not... that's not what I want. I just want someone to listen. You can take the credit for this if it leads you to her. I just want her to be found. "Her" being Jade Hardy, yeah, the missing girl from the north end. She's the owner of Hardy's Hand-Me-Downs, that antiques shop on the way to Bedford?

Jade Hardy. I'm... no need to sugarcoat it, I guess, I'm sure you did your research, I'm a competitor of hers. I use present tense very consciously because I'm sure... no, I don't know where she is. But I know for a fact she's not dead.

To understand me, to put it into context, I need to tell you about how I met her, and how we spent those first three years of our career together. We were both hired by the same man, a collector named Raph Fiander. Antique collector, yeah, sorry. I'm an antiquarian, too, but I wasn't back then. Back then I was just a teenager with a drivers license and an interest in old shit. I've always been interested in old shit, I don't know, I like the thought that someone in the future will search for pieces of my daily life. How long until the first generation of iPhones start popping up in our stores?

We like to say that anything less than sixty years is too new to consider, which is why I always joke that Jade and I barely knew each other. What's ten years to an antiquarian? Nothing. But it's not nothing, that's just a joke. It's basically a third of my lifetime.

Jade and I were hired by Raph Fiander to act as his extensions, I guess. He was getting old, and no longer was in a place to leave the house. We would be his caretakers - as well as his buyers. Raph didn't care about our experience in the field, just cared that we had cars and the willingness to find "the things other people forget about." In exchange for room and board, we were his representatives. He'd send us out every day of the week with credit cards and no other instructions, trusting us to find him pieces he'd enjoy. And that was all fine enough, but he did have his... quirks.

The thing he missed most about the business was the auctions. He liked the suffocating smell of smoke, the shuffling of well-polished shoes and the polite coughs as the auctioneer described the items for sale. And so, he explained as he led us down to the basement, he'd made an auction house for personal use in his old age. It was expected that on Sundays, we would prepare the basement for him with the things we'd found throughout the week. There were three large glass cases on every wall except the one with the entrance. Ashtrays littered the place. It grossed me out at first, but I did grow fond of it over time. And, when we'd finished placing our items on display, we'd ring a small brass bell and Raph would come down and start bidding. These items were already his, but he wanted the thrill of the chase. Between Jade and I, one of us would be the auctioneer and the other a rival bidder. We were to always let him win.

And time passed, and soon we'd been working together for two and a half years. We were still friends back then, Jade and I, but that all changed when Raph lost control of his vision. His house was a hoarder's paradise, organization was loose, and when he went blind he stopped leaving his bedroom. Auctions still took place and we had to be extra careful about our descriptions because he wanted to know what he was buying. But yeah, he went blind, and Jade started stealing from him. He had so much, you know? He never should have noticed.

I tried to just stay out of it, pretend like I didn't notice things going missing. Then one day Jade's car broke down and she asked me to drive her to a sale. I said sure, why not, but it wasn't until we were on the road I realized she was the one selling. On the side of the road, I parked the car and got out to check the trunk. It wasn't a bag like I'd thought, but a large wooden box. Jade stayed on the passenger side, didn't get out, didn't even look as I caught her trying to make me into an accomplice.

Raph Fiander was our boss. He provided everything we needed, in exchange for a little participation in his daydreams. All he wanted was to feel like he could still leave his house - still leave his room. And Jade didn't care. That's always been the thing with her, even when things were good, she never cared about the human element.

Maybe that's harsh. I got harsher, though. Screamed and cried, asked her how could she, how dare she make me help her, and she just sat still.

"Jackie," she told me, "I need to get rid of it and I need your help."

There was something in her eyes that made me believe her. I shouldn't have, but I did. And yeah, I helped. Sold the damn thing to some reclusive artist down on the South Shore who wanted to store his materials in it. I. Helped. Jade. I helped her, and you know how she repaid me? She fucking killed Raph.

No, I can't prove it. But he didn't die in any way that was natural. He was crumpled. Crushed like a clunker car in a junkyard. I moved out of that house the morning after we found his body, kept freaking out that I'd be connected to it somehow. Jade, on the other hand, took all his shit and opened up a physical location. No guilt, no remorse, no shame.

And - and every fucking time that I get a tip, go to an auction in search of something really worth something, something I could use to finance my own store, anything more than an instagram account,

Jade Hardy has been there. It's been seven years of being outbid by the woman who I spent the earliest years of my career with. Am I bitter? Sure. But not enough to disappear her.

You have the context, now, so here's the part I need to tell you:

Three weeks ago, Jade Hardy showed up to my door and talked to me for the first time in seven years. She was shaking, crying, and she... she had that box. I didn't invite her in, but that didn't stop her. She dragged it inside, messed up the floor with scuff marks, brought it into my living room and set it down.

She said, "I need to get rid of it and I need your help."

She said, "Raph isn't dead."

And she said, "If you can't sell it, I'll be back in a month. But I promise you you don't want that."

Well, that was a month ago. She went missing the very next day. I want her to be found, I do. As the days have slipped away, I've just kept making the price online lower and lower. I'm offering delivery, I...

I'm scared. I haven't looked in the box, but I can't get the image of Raph all crumpled up in his sheets out of my head. Do you - do you think you could take it into evidence or something? Do you think that would work?

Please, you have to help me.

*A sudden blackout with lights on JACKIE and the box. From within the box, the sound of laughter can be heard.*

JACKIE:

Jade?

*The laughter gets louder and louder as the light on JACKIE gets dimmer and dimmer. At the crescendo, JACKIE screams!! AAAA!!*

*And that's how it'll end, if things go according to plan.*

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