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Nose
for a
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The picture dominated the room. It was not a part of the room. It was stark and modern, and completely out of place, which is why it was the first thing I saw.

The room had a comfortable feel to it, in spite of its precision neatness. The gray and rust pillows on the dark blue overstuffed sofa were perfectly aligned with the corners. A Waterford crystal lamp stood on the exact center of the dark oak top on each of two end tables. Two printed velvet wingback chairs rested at a forty-five-degree angle with another dark oak table between them. A quilted reproduction of Van Gogh's "The Harvest" watched from the wall above the sofa. Ninety degrees away, on the adjacent wall, an intricately carved marble mantelpiece framed a brick fireplace.

The picture sat on a brass easel in front of the fireplace. Aesthetics aside, it seemed a rather awkward place for it. Not that I was in any position to question it, or rather, I didn't think I was in any position to. I had yet to meet Mrs. Sperling.

She'd hired me the day before as her chauffeur, over the phone. Her attorney had handled all the

paperwork: my DMV sheet, insurance, driver's license. It seemed pretty strange. After all, it was a live-in position. I'd asked her if she wanted to meet me first, and she laughed and said it would be pointless, but maybe I'd like to meet her. So, there I was, in her living room, wondering why she had that huge picture on the easel.

I'd been shown through the entry hall into the room by a young man in his early twenties, if that old. He was tall but didn't look it, with light brown hair and dressed in a trendy baggy gray sweater and faded black jeans.

He returned, and carefully adjusted the huge lace doily on the back of the sofa.

"Mrs. S. will be down in a minute," he said in his soft tenor voice.

"Fine," I replied. I had arrived a couple minutes early.

On his way to the wingback chairs, he passed the picture, glanced at it, and sighed.

"I know," I said. "It really doesn't belong in here."

He looked around. "Oo. It doesn't." He shook his head and shrugged. "That's not why it's here anyway."

He sighed again and moved a pink Wedgwood vase a microscopic bit towards the center of the table between the two wingbacks. He noticed my puzzled look.

"A sixteenth of an inch can mean the difference between an intact vase and me paying for one," he explained. "Mrs. S. totally has to be that tough.

It's like she'd never get through the house if everything wasn't exactly where she knew it was gonna be."

"Oh." I still didn't understand, but I decided Mrs. Sperling would enlighten me.

"By the way, my name's Glen." He smiled.

"I'm Donna."

"I know. You told me when you came in."

"Oh. That's right."

I heard a quick clicking sound from the hallway and turned towards it. A yellow Labrador retriever trotted into the room. Mrs. Sperling had asked me if I liked dogs, which I do.

"Eleanor," Glen addressed the dog. "You're supposed to be upstairs."

The Lab cocked her head at me.

"It's alright, Glen," called Mrs. Sperling's voice, pleasant and well-bred, even at a higher volume.

Eleanor approached me. I held out my hand for her to sniff. She seemed to approve. I scratched her throat.

"She wanted to meet Donna," Mrs. Sperling continued as she entered the room.

She was of average height. Her elegantly tailored pale blue suit covered a somewhat padded figure. She had dark blonde hair with wisps of gray running through it, cut into what they used to call a wedge. There was something very graceful about the way she moved, which covered up how fast she did it.

She smiled knowingly at Glen. "Are you also interested in joining us?"

"For sure," Glen replied. His attitude towards his boss was respectful but relaxed and friendly. "I mean, a new roommate and all."

"Very well. By the way, the hall lamp..."

"Oh!" he groaned. "I'm really trying!"

"There was no damage done this time, fortunately. And don't worry about it. You're much further along than your predecessor was when she left, and she'd worked here five years." She turned and addressed the air next to Glen. "So, you're Donna Brechter."

"Yes."

She shifted to face me. There was something not quite right about her eyes.

"I'm Delilah Sperling," she said and stepped forward to shake my hand.

I closed in and took hers. "It's nice to meet you, Mrs. Sperling."

"The pleasure is mutual. Should I have Glen show you around, or do you have any questions?"

"Not really." I looked around a little nervously.

Mrs. Sperling chuckled. "You're wondering who I am and if I'm on the right side of the law."

"No!" I blushed. "Well, a little. It just seemed weird that you were satisfied with a phone interview, that you didn't want to see me first."

"I said it would be pointless." Mrs. Sperling seemed to be enjoying some joke that I had missed. Even Glen was in on it. "But if you think it's that important, why don't you describe yourself."

"How?"

"Physically, your appearance."

That stumped me. After all, I was standing right in front of her. Then it dawned on me. Her eyes weren't quite right. The left one was clouded over and unfocused. The right eye looked inward and twitched steadily.

"Sure." I took a deep breath. "I'm five-eight, one hundred and twenty pounds. I've got brown hair, blue eyes. My hair's real long, down to my waist. I've got very long arms and legs. Frankly, if I could only use one word to describe myself, that would be it: long."

Mrs. Sperling chuckled. "Indeed. I believe you said you are a dancer?"

"Only when it doesn't interfere with my work here," I said quickly.

"I doubt it will. But why chauffeuring?"

"I heard the money was good, and I like to drive. I don't mind odd hours, either."

"Excellent." She smiled. "Not that I expect there'll be many of them. I lead a quieter life than most of my peers."

Glen snickered.

"I do lead a quieter life," Mrs. Sperling insisted.

"You just don't party," said Glen.

Mrs. Sperling sighed and turned back to me. "The picture on the easel. Would you try to describe it for me?"

I looked at it carefully. "Well, it's a print, a real good one. Um. It's a picture of a woman with her hair pinned up and wearing a beaded necklace and nothing else. The picture stops at her waist. Um. Do you mind if I ask how much you can see,