

Deviled Egg

"It's the sound a record makes when it needs a needle—like the pause for air between a baby's cries. That's the stuff silence is made of, baby; that's the stuff music just can't play," Tommy told me, leaning like the tower of Pisa. "But just cause something can't play don't mean it's not a part of the game. Dissonance, for instance, is the sexiest flavor of flavors—so flat it's sharp, if you can dig it."

"I can dig it," I exclaimed, taking a lustful puff—holding the smoke in to feel warm inside. "But the boat don't float without the notes."

"Maybe, baby. But the blues ain't about keeping your head above water."

"I'm not your baby, baby. And this business ain't about going down with the ship," I explained, handing him his resignation—a torn contract and an empty envelope where his bills would have been. Tommy's face broke, but his heart kept beating; I could see now he knew what the blues were.

The plan was to buy Tommy back before his next album—make him make something mighty fine before he became a find. But that's the business of the blues—break a fella to give him a break—happy artists are as useless as sad clowns.

"But I..." he started to cry, as I stood up and straightened my skirt.

"Nothing personal, Tommy—you know I'm just the messenger," I stated, dabbing my cigarette in an ashtray and striking a pose for the crowd. Dames like me didn't come around slum bars often; dames like me didn't stay either. "Billy says 'hi.'"

"Don't you mean 'goodbye?'"

"As a matter of fact, I do," I finished, turning heads with my hips as I walked out the door. Now that Billy's errands were done, Billy and me could have some fun. But I couldn't help turning back one more time to see Tommy's sweet face—heartbroken and alone. There was something about that kid that didn't sit right with me—I liked him.

The street gave me a fist full of wind and half a mind to head back inside. The air smelt of something out of a factory, and the trees mocked my nostrils. Suddenly, the world wasn't as sure of itself as I was—and the spinning had to be everything else. I held my stomach as I wobbled to an alleyway, feeling like a deviled egg. My pretty little

lips parted to a damn river of my breakfast coming out—and it wasn't till I could taste every last bite that I stopped feeling so terrible. It occurred to me that I was late—dragging on a long time seeing Billy, and, just now, coming on time to see Billy junior. The stupid son of a bitch had got me pregnant.

2 months later...

"Fifty calls for him today and not one's gone through," secretary Sally squawked, as I strutted past her desk—too busy to say 'hello' and too indignant to mean it. "Is there some reason everything has to go through you?"

"I do what he says, and so do you. Which means, you know the reason same as I do."

"Doesn't change the fact that nothing's getting done when you're not around."

"Well it's a good thing I'm around then, isn't it?" I stated, stopping my walk to put my foot down on Sally—she never did trust me, and I never did like that she was smart enough not to. But I couldn't get rid of her—she'd have to hear it from Billy's mouth and that wasn't part of the plan by a long shot.

"It's good for you, bad for business."

"The 'business' is none of your business. You take the calls, you give em to me and I give em to Billy. You got a problem with that, then you've got a problem."

"I haven't seen Billy in some time... maybe he should leave his office sometime."

"Maybe you should do your job and let me do mine," I replied, flicking my wrist to extend my hand—snatching the messages out of her grasp. "Or, maybe, you should spend more time watching your mouth and less time watching where Billy goes."

"Yes, ma'am," she growled, smiling like someone stabbed a fishhook in her cheek—just the kind of respect I respected.

"Don't bother us for the rest of the day," I ordered, cracking open the door to Billy's office as Sally sat back down at her desk. "And stop dressing for the corner—If you're gonna give jobs after work, start bringing two outfits with yah," I finished,

slamming the door to let her know her place. I smiled leaning against the knob, listening to her thrash angrily about at her desk. Bitch didn't know anything for certain, but she was sniffing too close for comfort—particularly given the smell.

Billy sat where I'd left him, propped up in his big chair facing the closed blinds of his penthouse view—the kind of wealth a gal like me had come to expect. But, when Billy found out I was expecting, he didn't take too kind to the idea of feeding another mouth. I still had the bruises from when his henchmen abducted me—still hurt to pee—still hurt to breathe. But he'd been dumb enough that he didn't say nothing to no one about it, otherwise Sally'd be calling me into the station and throwing away the key. But good ol' Billy, never suspected a dame like me had it in her—never suspected that for scrambling our baby I'd scramble his brains.

“How's the view Billy?” I asked, turning him round in his chair to see his blood had dried into the upholstery. He had the same horrified expression from when I'd clocked him on the head and stuck him with the knife—27 times the miserable time that son of a bitch had put me through. His baby was gone, just like he'd planned it—too bad for Billy, it had been my baby too.

Continued in The Collection: Volume One
