

MICHELLE GREENDYKE



Hit Me

by

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Mort sat silently at the breakfast bar, scanning the stairs over his coffee, not yet fuming. Doesn't she have class this morning? His daughter's car was blocking in the van, and he couldn't be late to work. "Thea?" he called up the stairs. "Honey, Daddy needs to get going soon."

"I know, I know," she came flying down the stairs, full of smiles. She grabbed her backpack and gave him a peck on the cheek.

"When did you get in last night?" he asked.

"Oh, Daddy, don't worry, I'm ready for school now." She grabbed her keys from the table and came up behind him, giving him a surprise hug that almost made him spill his coffee. "I had such a great night! I'll tell you all about it later. Love you!" She turned and left.

As soon as her car pulled out of the driveway, Mort sipped his last and left for work himself.

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Brian took a bottle of beer from the fridge and paced his small kitchen nervously. He took a swig, and the doorbell rang. Even though he was expecting it, he still jumped and spilled all over his shirt. Feeling like an asshole all over again, he headed to the door.

"I've been expecting you," he said from inside.

Mort stood on the other side of the door with his

clipboard in hand. "Brian Montgomery? Got a delivery for you."

"I refuse delivery. Thanks."

"Gonna need a signature here either way," said Mort, tapping his clipboard on the door. So, it's going to be one of THOSE days, he thought. Good thing I only have two deliveries today.

"Come on, man. Just . . . just walk away, ok? No one ever needs to know."

Mort knocked again, getting less patient. "C'mon, yourself, fella, I got other deliveries to make." He looked around. It was a scrubby little bit of land, but tucked fairly away for a residential suburban lot. He didn't appear to be noticed by, let alone bothering, any neighbors. "Mr. Montgomery, I just need your signature of refusal, be reasonable." He knocked more loudly.

Brian was confused - did he really need a signature? Why couldn't he just leave? "You're not needed here anymore, man, do you get it? Your services are no longer required."

Mort really had never met a person so seriously opposed to getting flowers. Flowers were the best; everyone was happy to get flowers or a succulent arrangement. Had he not done his homework? Did Brian have serious allergies no one let him know about? "I'm just trying to do my job here. Can you help me out?"

Brian cracked the door, latch still chained, and said, "I'm Mr. Grey, get it? I hired you. But I don't want what you're bringing now!"

Mort pushed through the door and into the room, breaking the little joke of a chain with ease, dropping the flowers as he came in, and shutting them in.

"Please, listen, yes, I am Brian Montgomery, but I am also Mr. Grey! And I don't need you anymore. Please, just, go, there's been a change in circumstance. Keep the money!"

Mort laughed. "Of course, I'm keeping the money. You wanna sign?"

Brian took the wagging pen and clipboard as Mort pointed to the blank sheet. His voice shook. "Look I know you're here to kill me, ok? I know that." He handed Mort the clipboard.

Mort tossed the clipboard on the counter. "Kid, why are you trying to tell me you're Mr. Grey?"

Brian exhaled shakily and nodded toward the refrigerator. "Beer?"

Mort waited for him to pull out the offering, looked at it in distaste, and said, "No thanks, on the job. So, kid -"

Brian took a long gulp and gave what he sincerely hoped was an acceptable answer. "How else would

I know you're armed, your name is Mort, and you recently received ten thousand dollars cash in a small red gym bag at the corner of 14th and P?"

Mort chuckled. "Yeah, I guess no one's that good. Listen, Mr. Grey, you just realize you sent the package to your own house or what?"

"Call me Brian. I mean, please call me Brian. But no, I just found out I don't want what you're bringing."

"So, you meant me to be here?"

Brian nodded.

"Ain't that a kick in the head? Now why'd you go and do that?"

Brian shrugged. "You ever hear that saying, most men live lives of quiet desperation?"

Mort nodded, recognizing the distillation of the quote into a "saying" of the simplest English.

"That was me," said Brian, "I was just, you know, done. Done. Same dismal fucking existence, day in, day out, every day is exactly the same as the miserable fucking day that came before it. Dead-end job, dead end aspects, no real friends to speak of. Just no hope.

"You had ten grand to give me. That's not nothing."

“Got it from my dad. No, I was finished. Just too much of a coward to do the thing myself.” He took another long swig from his shitty beer and grinned.

“So whaddaya, want a refund?”

“No. I just want to live.”

“Let me guess-”

“Met a girl. Met THE girl.” Brian downed the rest of his beer in a gulp and belched, then laughed. “Life’s funny like that, I guess.”

“You called a guy like me, and love was right around the corner? Must be some girl.”

“Oh, I had- no chance; I fell immediately. You have no idea. Her smile just lights me up. I don’t want to do anything but make her smile for the rest of my life. I’m going to marry that girl.”

“You could have put me in a spot, kid, why didn’t you try to reach me before this? I mean, what if I’d just taken you out through the window?”

“Just met her last night. Completely turned my life on its ear after one conversation. After an hour, I knew.”

Mort chuckled. “You think you know, but at this stage, what you’re looking at is mostly, whaddayacallit, physio logical. The endorphins and whatnot. In a

year, you're still gonna be you. Not for nothing, what I mean is, I get all sorts of calls from husbands who got into it the same as you're about to. It doesn't take a lot more than the magic being gone."

"That's not me, man," Brian insisted. "I don't know how I can convince you. I mean look at this girl! Here," he tapped his phone and shoved the picture in his face. "THAT's Thea. That girl is my new reason to live! You sure you don't want a beer?"

"I don't suppose you got any whiskey?"

"Yes!" Brian, the relief palpable in his voice, walked into the kitchen, grabbed a bottle from the cupboard and set it down. He took a glass from the shelf and held it up to the light. Rejecting it for a cleaner glass, Brian poured the shot for Mort and went to hand it to him.

Mort was still staring at the phone. "I know," Brian said, "I can't believe it myself." He handed Mort the glass. "To love!"

Mort chuckled, holding up his glass. "To Thea!" he said. He drank the whiskey - it was as good as the beer. "Quite a story, man. I should probably be getting on with my day." He reached out to shake Brian's hand.

Brian shook his hand vigorously, obviously relieved. "Love, man. It conquers all."

Mort shook his head as he got up from the couch

and headed toward the door, then paused, pivoted, and shot Brian in the head. "Maybe not ALL, kid," he said as he checked for a pulse.

Mort was just finishing the cleaning up when his phone rang. "Hey Thea honey! What's up?" he asked, closing the door behind him.



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