

Purple Lady, Lavender Afternoon

by Daniel Harris

The yellow taxi pulled up to 5555 Palm Avenue. A tall, slender woman dressed in a mauve Chanel suit exited the cab and walked into the building. Her heels made staccato clacks as she hurried across the terrazzo lobby floor to the elevator.

When she entered the elevator, there was a deliveryman standing in the elevator holding a flower vase filled with pale purple tulips. The woman gave the man a tight smile and pushed the button for the penthouse.

—What floor? asked the woman.

The man did not reply.

—Pretty tulips, said the woman.

The man said nothing.

—The flowers almost match my suit, said the woman, putting the sleeve of her jacket next to the flowers.

—Do not touch the flowers, ordered the man.

The woman backed away. She stood in front of a glass-covered compartment containing a fire extinguisher with the notice: IN CASE OF FIRE, BREAK GLASS.

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The superintendent of 5555 Palm Avenue stood in front of the building watching a Blue Heron perched on a frangipani tree limb stalking a lizard hidden in one of the lavender frangipani flowers. Bird, lizard, and man formed a frozen tableau of imminent mortality.

The super heard a woman scream. The super turned and entered the lobby. He noticed that the elevator was at the penthouse. The super pushed the elevator call button.

When the elevator reached the ground floor. The super found the woman in the mauve suit lying on her back on the floor of the elevator, her hands to her face and an ice pick stuck in her heart.

Pale purple tulip petals covered her body. The tulip stems, clean as a bone, protruded from underneath the hem of her skirt.

—Holy shit, said the super.

The deliveryman discharged the fire extinguisher at the super's face. The blast froze his face in the half-smile of his last alveolar “t.” The super put his hands to his face and began to shout when the deliveryman brought the half-discharged fire extinguisher deftly down on the back of the super's head so that the super fell forward landing atop the dead woman. The deliveryman finished the job with another blow to the super's head with the bottom of the fire extinguisher. He dropped the fire extinguisher on the floor of the elevator, pushed the penthouse button, and exited the elevator. He sauntered across the lobby and out the front door.

Outside the Heron was still poised to deliver the *coup de grace* to the lizard that remained motionless in the lavender flowers of the frangipani tree.

