

Windfall

by Laurie Stone

7:30 A.M. Apartment on West End Avenue

peel off five, hundred-dollar bills from a stack. Eel is smoking beside an open window, wearing a striped shirt and black pants. The bills look like love letters. On the bed are bundles of hundreds secured with rubber bands. Outside a tree sways, and a bird greets the day. Eel says, "Easy there, pony."

2 P.M. Central Park

Two middle-aged men walk behind us with the dumpy swagger of killers. Eel says, "Let me think," and I remember Amalfi when we zigzagged up a mountain and left our suitcases at a hotel. A squirrel holds a nut. Ahead is a cop, the last person we want to see. The men stop at a cart, and one tosses a bottle cap on the ground, and I think about the way small gestures reveal us.

Noon. Café Des Artistes

I'm wearing a scarf in my hair I fiddle with. Eel plucks a garlicky bit from a shell and dips a crust of bread in melted butter. Five years ago I fell over him on Broadway. One of my legs is shorter than the other, and I tend to stumble. He smiled. Was it was my red hair or the purple dress I had on? It turned out Eel's brain corrects for imbalance, and he can only feel danger for a moment or two.

6:45 A.M. Apartment on West End Avenue

I dump the contents of the bag on my bed. I say, "I'm quitting my job." I set diamonds on 47th Street, and I am tired of looking at things I can't afford. Eel says he likes giving massages. He points to the bed and says, "It's drug money, some kind of mob money." I say, "Maybe someone tossed it from a car." He says, "Or lost it in a drunk." His pulls his hand over his mouth. "They will come looking."

6:15 A.M. Riverside Drive

I trip on a brown leather bag that is worn and burnished like the skin of a homeless person. Eel says, "Don't open it." I laugh. Grass pokes up through the paving stones, a green the color of hope. Rose and purple light reflects on the river. I unzip the bag and feel a rush unlike anything I have ever felt. No one is around. Cameras might be recording us, but I don't care. I zip up the bag. Eel says, "Give it here," and slings it over his shoulder with a crazy smile, and I remember the time we were on a train in England and two girls were blasting music on a radio. They wouldn't turn it off, even after Eel asked them to politely. Suddenly he got up and grabbed the radio away, and the three of them scuffled on the floor amid gum and spit. Eel's glasses were knocked off, and he pulled a clump of hair from the head of one of the girls. They looked 15 under their pancake and eyeliner. Eel was shaking. I didn't know who he was.

2:01 PM Central Park

I wonder if we will have time to reach my apartment, buy a diamond, get on a plane, and sell the diamond in Amsterdam. One of the men takes a call, and I picture Eel and me chained in an abandoned garage. I smell gasoline. Our voices echo off the concrete walls. Maybe they are ordinary guys just out for a walk after lunch. Is money the reason we haven't changed our lives sooner? The squirrel drops his nut. The men advance. A shadow crosses Eel's eyes. I am losing my footing as Eel touches my neck. He puts his lips to my ear and says, "Here's the plan."

