

Unfinished Business

by strannikov

Once the bar had closed and the last of the night crew had checked out, Vern had one last decision to make: leave a note behind or not?

It would be the final touch to a plan concocted just twelve hours earlier, which in its immediacy seemed nothing less than perfectly ingenious and spontaneously foolproof. And so: he would indeed ransack each and every cash register, rifle the safe, leave a signed confession that he intended to hand all the proceeds over to private charities, the homeless, and needy passers-by—and then fake his own suicide in such a way that his poor body could never be recovered.

The only thing dogging him now was the masterful matter of whether to leave a suicide note as such, too. Suicide note or not? The question raged across his mind, a real boulder-heaving contest, turning over again and again in his head as he emptied each cash drawer. Since it took barely five minutes to collect the \$14,265.48 in receipts, to be bedeviled by such a question for even five minutes seemed hateful and cruel punishment, generous torment indeed, occupying his mind for those endless minutes, all that mental turmoil over a crime that he was planning in fact not to commit.

The receipts all fell into the black leather valise he'd retrieved from storage that afternoon, except for the forty-eight cents, which wound up in the right front pocket of his jeans. Another detail began to linger: just how was he going to fake his death without leaving a trace? Awww, worry about that on the way to the airport!

Vern found a yellow legal pad in Quiggley's office, on his desk in front of the motionless safe, the now wide-open and all but

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empty motionless safe. The paper was too long, he didn't have time now for a long explanation, plus he didn't like the color of the paper, a suicide note on yellow paper looks too sick. Or maybe that qualifies it expressly for a suicide note. Again! Everything, every question dividing clear in two! Pffft!

Instantly, the brilliant idea of leaving a terse note on a bar napkin arrived. But still, all he had to write with was a regular magic marker, and its green ink bled generously through the napkin so fast, he couldn't even finish one word before it was already illegible.

Maybe a note's not a good idea. Well, that way now, all he had to worry about was how to do himself in without leaving a trace. He chose not to treat that question for the moment, he had to make an unplanned trip to the bathroom. All these implacable questions!

Hmmm. Returning to Quiggley's office, Vern sat again with the odious yellow pad and sketched out with the green magic marker: CHARITIES SHELTERS HOMELESS, with single bold underlines beneath each word. His script looked deliberate and frantic in just the right way, he judged, as he plopped the pad flat and askewed back onto Quiggley's zinc-hued desk. He locked the front doors on the way out, tossed the black valise into the truck bed, and sped off on his way to meet Dotty, the cute little blond stewardess he'd entrusted with getting the round-trip tickets for Singapore.

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