

Hit

By Annika Sage Ellis

“You sure he’s dead?” Pete Wyman asked, wringing his hands like wet towels. “Positive?”

Vivian de Fiore took a long drag of her cigarette, tapping the ashes onto the ground with dark gloved fingers. “As sure as the day I was born, sugar.”

They were sitting on a motel porch in a town so small it barely had a name. The cheap wire chairs barely held their respective weights, and two glasses of even cheaper bourbon rested on the matching table. The bottle itself sat half empty, glowing in the brown-orange light of the evening sun.

Vivian took another drag and surveyed her client. He hadn’t touched his drink, but he shook so badly, he likely would have spilled it. He kept adjusting his perfectly tied Windsor knot, brown tweed jacket slung over the back of his chair. She knocked back the rest of her own bourbon, cigarette pinched between her fingers.

“Relax, Wyman,” she insisted, producing a package of Marlboro from her purse. “Have a smoke, you’ll feel better.”

“I don’t smoke,” he said, barely whispering. “And you’re *absolutely* sure you got rid of the body? And the evidence of a break-in? And—”

“What, are you writing a book? Listen, sugar, I’m not the best hitwoman in the country for nothing.” She put the Marlboros away and popped the cigarette back into her mouth. “Have a little faith.”

“What if they followed you here?”

“No one’s going to know he’s dead until the maids call him down for breakfast tomorrow morning.”

Pete’s already pale face flushed green. “He was *rich* and *powerful*. People aren’t going to take this sitting down.”

“They never do.”

“This was *such* a bad idea.”

As entertaining as it was watching a first-time client mutter nervously to himself, it had been going on for fifteen minutes, and Vivian had more important things to do. Like get paid and skip town before anyone could trace her. She took one last drag of her cigarette and ground it out on the table.

“Where’s my money, Wyman?” she demanded.

He jumped. “The...”

“Money. M-O-N-E-Y.”

“O-Oh, yeah. One second.”

Pete hefted a brown leather briefcase onto the table, scooting his untouched bourbon out of the way. While he rummaged through the contents of his luggage, eyes darting around nervously, Vivian reached into her purse and gripped the cold metal of a handgun. If he tried anything funny, her contract allowed for a “retaliation” of sorts. Fortunately, most of her clients didn’t read the fine print.

Finally, Pete produced a thick yellow envelope from his briefcase, slapped it on the table and snapped the case shut. Vivian took it.

“Much obliged,” she said.

“Yep,” Pete squeaked. The metal chair screeched as he stood up and shoved one arm through his jacket. He had his back to her.

She cocked an eyebrow. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“I paid you. That means I can—”

“Sit down.”

Pete whipped around. “But—”

Vivian pulled the gun out of her purse and cocked it. “Sit *down*, Wyman.”

He sat down. She trailed his head the whole way.

One-handed, Vivian ripped open the yellow envelope with her teeth, dumping the contents onto the table: a thick stack of hundred-dollar bills. She took her time counting each one, out loud, gun hand not wavering for an instant.

“Thirteen hundred, fourteen hundred, *fifteen* hundred. Hm.” Vivian frowned as she placed the last bill on the stack.

“There. The amount we agreed on.”

“Not quite.” She flicked her gaze from the money to the man.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re five-hundred short.”

“But you *said* fifteen.”

“I said two-thousand *plus* a five-hundred-dollar proof for me. That first five hundred didn’t go toward the job, sugar.”

“But I have *confirmation* of you agreeing on *fifteen*.”

“And I have a business to run, Wyman.”

Pete worked his jaw like a fish out of water. “I—”

“Well? What’s it going to be?”

“I—” He sucked in a breath and shouted, “I’m through with this!”

Pete jumped out of his chair so fast he kicked it over, whipping a gun out of his jacket and shaking like a wet dog. Vivian grinned, genuinely impressed.

“Well, well,” she said. “I didn’t think you’d have the guts to pull one on me.”

He cocked the gun with his unsteady hand. “Think again.”

“Come off it, Wyman.”

“I—I’ll shoot!” He white-knuckled the gun with both hands.

“Put the gun down, sugar. I’m a professional.”

“So?”

“So, no matter how good of a shot you think you are, I’ll be taking you down with me.”

His face paled, but he didn’t move.

Vivian raised her free hand above her head. “I’m going to put the gun down, Wyman. You should do the same.”

“Wh-what?”

“There’s been a lot of death today. You want to contribute any more to that number?”

Inch by inch, she moved her gun hand toward the table. Metal on metal clinked as the weapon reached the table. She folded both hands in her lap.

“See?” she said. “Nothing to worry about.”

Pete swallowed, every muscle in his body jumping erratically.

“Put the gun down, sugar. No one else has to die today.”

His eye twitched. With jerky movements, he inched back toward the table and dropped his gun like it burned him. “There,” he wheezed.

Vivian smiled sweetly. “Pleasure doing business with you, Wyman.”

Before he could react, she snatched her gun off the table and fired into his head. He didn’t have time to make a sound before he died, face frozen in permanent shock. He dropped to the ground, lifeless, a small ocean of blood pooling from the hole in his skull.

Vivian took care to avoid the gore as she came around the table, plucking Pete’s gun off the table and crouching down to put it in his hand. As an afterthought, she unlocked the briefcase. There wasn’t much to see—messily organized papers, letters in sealed envelopes, and the case of a handgun. How cute.

Satisfied, Vivian left the bloody scene behind, sliding open the glass door of the motel room. The sickly yellow decorations that assaulted her eyes were made no more charming in the fading daylight or the smell of blood. The faster she got out of here, the better.

She sat down on one of the twin beds and picked up the landline phone. She dialed and waited. It only rang once.

“Hello?” a gruff voice answered.

“It’s V.”

“Did you take care of it?”

“Body’s cold on the back porch.”

A low whistle. “You weren’t kidding about getting it done fast. Serves him right for trying to cross me.”

“I couldn’t agree more, sugar.”

“As promised, I have your thirty-thousand waiting at my estate.”

Vivian grinned into the receiver. “I’ll be by in an hour.”