

# The Heist

*Jennifer Bane*

## PART ONE

The knob turns slowly, a precautionary measure long-ingrained deep within him by now. Just with enough pressure, the door opens, soundless, barely allowing his slim figure to slip through unheard and unseen. A flicker of a smile lifts the corner of his mouth at the ease of the job. Side doors are always easier to enter as the security tends to patrol the main entrances. Truth be told, it's his father's fault that he's so skilled at breaking and entering. And larceny. His whole childhood was a mishmash of expert lock-picking, seamless entrances, and perfecting the delicate art of becoming invisible. He'd often imagined himself growing up to become a distorted version of a Robin Hoodesque superhero, accompanying with a catchy name and an attractive catsuit - but the reality of what he

truly does for “work” is the complete antithesis of a hero.

Now along the wall he slides, slinking and blending among the shadows where the carpet is thickest. Up to the hallway intersection, he stops a mere foot from the corner and stretches his black-clad arm, flicking out a pocket mirror with a soft *shink*. Almost bored, he watches the feet of a guard gradually disappear behind a heavy door. He then slowly counts to five before slipping around the corner into a crouch. With the stealth of a cat, he creeps past the door the guard disappeared into and gets to the dock entrance. Another soft *shink* has his lockpick out, already working on the handle.

Heavy, unexpected footsteps from the way he came have his brown eyes darting to the left. A cheeky smile curves his lips at the threat of being discovered and his hands work diligently, twisting and bending with the ease of practiced years. The guard is getting close - twist, twist, bend. Closer - bend, twist, bend. He's at the corner - twist, twist, CLICK! The lock falls as the guard rounds the corner and, like an unobtrusive breeze, he slips inside and slowly releases the handle. He holds his breath,

placing his ear against the door just as the footsteps come to a stop outside. Very slowly he counts to ten, his dilated eyes locked onto the door handle, almost daring it to turn down. A larger smile creeps over his face as he imagines all the fancy hapkido moves he would use if the guard did happen to check this room. Several seconds later he lets out a long sigh as the echo of the guard's retreat is heard.

Bummer.

Deciding to get on with it, he darts into the room weaving silently between the towering pallets of billion-dollar relics seemingly placed in no particular order. He smirks at his own gracefulness, at how his body bends and weaves like a weightless ghost, unnoticed and unnaturally beautiful - but always careful. His ex had the habit of commenting on his everyday movements and gesticulations, calling them artistic and otherworldly. He never argued with the observation.

Another few pallets pass. Not to his surprise, discarded plastic wrap and heavy-duty tissue papers are littered on the floor where someone has already pilfered for a prize this night - he just hopes it isn't the same one he's

here for. Counting under his breath he eventually stops at a tall, ordinary-looking pallet labeled “MANURE”. It’s truly brilliant on the owner’s part, as no one in their right mind wants to dig through shit. Sliding a small pocketknife from his thigh, he slowly cuts and peels away the plastic only to jerk back with a hand to his face.

“Oh...dear!”

Slipping around the pallet, he takes a second look before pulling down several large, heavy containers one at a time. Out of curiosity, he pops one open and nearly doubles over at the acrid smell. Sure enough, it’s filled with real, honest-to-god, perfectly formed spherical balls of multicolored shit. He shakes his head in exasperation and begins to dig.

Maybe ten minutes later and a third of the way into opening every single pungent poop tub, he stops, his eyes narrowing on a large and obvious three-star emblem staring up at him in silent mockery. Popping it open, he’s relieved to see three gemmed Faberge eggs glimmering up at him in the dim light. Carefully, he layers the beauties into his sturdy hip bag and straps it to his side with a *click*. Just as he turns toward

his exit, the *click* echoes back, except much louder and sounding eerily familiar to that of a gun.

Soundlessly, he falls to the floor and slides to the nearest shadow, his eager pulse in time with the now multiple sets of boots surrounding the large loading dock. Laser pointers cut through the darkness, illuminating stagnant particles of dust in the air. One nearly licks over his leg and he curls in on himself. One of his custom-made Neiman Marcus boots accidentally taps a shitball sending it rolling playfully across the concrete floor. His disgruntled eyes follow the gloopy offender accusingly as it leaves a slick residue trail through the pallets and past another moving shadow.

Great.

From the darkness, he counts. Five men; one by the main entrance, two minglings next to the loading dock, and the last two weaving silently through the pallets. His eyes flash as they take in the possible exits, now narrowed down from a healthy four to a very questionable one. That leaves the roof exit - which he could never make without taking

several bullets, and the trash shoot - his absolute last but regretfully only resort. Another laser flits dangerously close to him and he backs up until his back hits the pile of opened shit-filled crates.

Once again he holds his breath, listening intently and being rewarded by the faint squeak of boots coming up behind him. With a breathy smile and a hefty shove, the pile of crates comes tumbling down on a guard, balls of shit flying freely. Not wasting a moment, he jumps over the guard and springs toward the far wall. A shot rings out. Then another. Lasers flash just over his head as he ducks and slides through the muck on the now slick concrete. Stopping only three pallets away, he curses under his breath at both the bullet that whizzes past his ear and for his custom-made ten-thousand-dollar spy suit. His lip quivers as he wipes shit-slime from his arm onto his leg. Great. It's ruined.

Not missing a beat, he jumps up ready to navigate the numerous pallets in the warehouse from hell. Every few meters he pauses. Stop. Listen. Proceed. And because nothing exciting is happening, it's taking FOREVER. Picking up

the pace, he moves to duck behind a rather large and incredibly ugly statue of Zeus just like a knife slices into his shoulder. Oh. Hell. No. Two sharp jabs to the throat and one to the eyes, taking the man to his knees, followed by a fist that slams the guard's sternum robbing him of his breath. He finishes with a swift roundhouse kick taking the man down for the count, his head *clinks* as it bounces off the floor.

Piece of cake.

He takes a brief look around before crouching to search his victim. Long, thin fingers deftly cover all pockets and weapons and then land on a grenade which he excitedly snatches up. It's a bit heavier than he has imagined and he runs the pad of his thumb over the visible bumps with fascination. He had never used a grenade before.

Having made the decision to use it, he moves to stand behind another smaller, even uglier statue. "Why?" he wonders aloud, studying the inept lines and horrible coloring. Poor Zeus. It's as if the person creating this said, "*How can I make this otherworldly being look as sickly and depressing as possible and*

*still make money off some rich sap?"* He barely contains a heavy sigh at the disfigured Aphrodite. "What sick bastard did this to you?" She doesn't reply.

With a shake of his head, he struggles to focus. A laser is onto his right. A heavy breather down the middle. The exit is one hundred meters to his left. He pulls the pin and tosses the metal menace behind him and sets off at a run. The explosion goes off far sooner than he anticipates and sends him flying, hitting the floor before sliding to a jolting stop against the wall. With shaky legs he stands up, coming face to face with the garbage shoot. "Ah . . . finally," he mumbles, throwing himself through the hatch headfirst.

## **PART TWO**

It's been the week from hell, but you're here - regretfully. The job is simple: guarding of the priceless relics somewhere in this huge building, from the unknown thieves. The management doesn't find it useful to share important information with their team, but if you were one, you would at least give a hint.



Even it's a lie. You'd probably place them close to but not right on the desired objects with imminent threats of a superhuman robber capable of decimating large cities with a single glare, you know . . . for motivational purposes. But you aren't the boss. And you're a woman in a job primarily dominated by thick-headed jock types, you never will be.

You sigh heavily. This, sadly, is the reality, which dictates that you must have a boss who thinks he owns you, a boyfriend who thinks you should worship him, a father who believes you're too weak for a job in tactical ops, and co-workers who want you to fawn over how amazing they are. Just yesterday, your team captain, Jackson the Great, pulled his shirt over his head and flexed his pecks at you, shooting you a knowing wink. If only he'd use that God complex to rush off to save the world from eternal destruction on some hyped-up but completely unsuccessful fatal bender. Unlikely, but a girl can dream.

And yet you digress, or at least when it comes to Sal, the only sweet man in your division. You rarely find him among the misogynistic quips or joining in on the bro-

downs at the local bar. He's not that kind of guy. You think he's probably married to a lovely woman with an adorable child either on the way or already hugging his legs, but you've always shied away from personal conversations. Regardless, he always greets you politely, smiles without adulterous intent, and asks for your opinions before missions.

In walks your boss, Run-my-mouth Raymond, and immediately your decent mood deflates. Like his employees, he's buff; arms solid and thick like tree limbs. But his brain is just as thick, completely impenetrable to common sense. He runs your new job by your team too quickly, casting the occasional glare your way as if you've personally offended him by being in the same room. After a long and useless diatribe, he essentially says "Good luck" before turning the five of you loose in the huge building. Sal, such a wonderful man he is, asks where you'll be scouting.

"Warehouse docking...where the majority of unsecured goods are kept."

He lets the information settle for a moment and nods, as if in agreement that your logic - that all the displays in the actual museum are

guarded by lasers and pressure sensitive flooring and such - is sound, because it is. Not to mention the previous break-in earlier that day in the exact same room. At this point, it's really just common sense. You smile at him and leave for your post. Before you round the corner your team captain, Jackson the Great, yells at you.

“Hey Sanders, let me know if you need saving. I'll be right there!”

His seedy blue eyes linger over your petite five-foot-four frame and he smiles in his sexy come-hither way. Yes, he may have the whole dreamy-eyed look with floppy hair and a body akin to a Greek god, but you still insist on your partners having intelligence beyond that of a goldfish. Even his tagalongs, who you've dubbed Buddy Brad (always attached at Jackson's hip) and Ridiculous Rodrigo (believes he's better than everyone), join in on the harassment with chuckles and catcalls. Your stomach rebels, threatening to force lunch-flavored bile onto the shiny tiled floor, but you hold it together for the sake of unwanted confrontation and instead turn the other cheek,

more than eager to be as far away from them as possible.

Two blissful hours later your somethin'-ain't-right radar goes off, tingling your skin. Your perch on the landing gives you a good vantage point but you walk its length because it feels right. Just as you come to the end of the dock you spot him; a small body, blending in with the shadows, gliding silently between the too tall stacks of pallets. You shrink back and follow as he makes his way deeper into the building, relying heavily on your unchallenged title of 2016 Hide-and-Seek champion.

Curious to see where he's going, you skim along the wall only to realize that you've lost him. Your lips twitch in agitation as you wait silently, eager ears straining for any sound that you weren't hallucinating. Several more minutes of silence makes your hackles rise and you shimmy along the ledge further, beginning to think you have imagined a perp after all. Still nothing.

But you don't give up. You pad another few yards ahead and crouch just in time to see a shadowy figure set something large in an

already carefully cultivated stack. Damn, this guy is quick. You nearly curse aloud at how foolish you've been and quietly duck into a dark corner to type out an alert on your coms device to your inept crew. It's regretful but necessary.

You decide to descend into the warehouse to give a closer chase. It takes a full one hundred and ten seconds to retrace your steps the length of the landing and descend to the ground floor and another fifty-five seconds to circumnavigate the maze of skyscraper pallets as you begin to retrace the perpetrator's steps. It's here, in this moment of excitement and heart-pounding adrenaline that you feel empowered, like an African wildcat stalking your prey through the depths of the Congo. It's the rush.

From the corner of your eye, you spy Rodrigo entering on the landing. He slips on his night vision goggles, sees you and nods as if telling you to stay put. You shoot him a few hand signals letting him know which way to keep watch and that you're giving chase. He ignores you but points his gun in the direction you gesticulated. Not letting his arrogance get

to you, you deftly sidestep shards of glass and a rolling ball of something smelly and wet before following its liquid trail. A faint *clicks* up ahead lets you know you're nearly there but before you get any closer, Rodrigo, who probably thinks he's a damn sharpshooter, takes aim on the landing and cocks his gun.

The echo bounces off the walls like a plastic ball and, as a result, the whole warehouse goes eerily silent. Knowing their cover is blown, red laser sights flash through the darkness flitting this way and that over graffitied pallets, searching the vast darkness for their victim. You stay put, listening to the squeak of boots when a huge crash sound. Bullets fly and you crouch down, catching a glimpse of a shadow darting three pallets ahead before disappearing again.

You take the chance to move closer to where the thief was working. Buddy Brad groans and shifts slightly under the dozen or so heavy crates, his face covered in shit. You leave him there and dart to your right, eager to again catch sight of your perp. A brief scuffle followed by a faint thump makes you pause and shift your approach. You move to the side then

stop, watching as the thief crouches over a body and takes something small from his side. A peek through your scope reveals Jackson lying face down on the floor and the thief . . . casually staring up at a huge statue of Zeus, almost as if he were pursuing the lobby of the museum as a visitor.

Unable to keep the smirk from curving your lips, you level your rifle and take aim, your finger hugging the trigger like an old friend. The thief shifts and a loud clink sound in the warehouse, this time to your left, and you lower your gun just in time to see a grenade slide under the same pallet the thief looted. Before you can move, a blast explodes sending crates and disgusting, smelly balls all over the warehouse.

The next second you're laying several yards away in a stack of paintings listening to the screams of both Rodrigo, who is probably now blind, and the museum alarm as they rent through the darkness. Your head throbs and your ears are ringing but you manage to get up, automatically searching for the thief. This time you don't hold back the curse as your eyes land

on the door to the garbage disposal swinging gently on its hinges.

You have half a mind to follow him, to track his lucky ass through the busy streets of New York, but a new loud cry echoes through the room. It's your boss, and the new noise to enter the cacophony from hell is the curator, who is wailing at the numerous destroyed pallets that have toppled to create a crater-like mess.

“Oh...nooooo! How could you let this happen? Those eggs were worth millions!”

Raymond makes his way toward you, eyes on fire, kicking crates as he goes. You deduce he seems angry. Curses and spittle flow freely from his mouth as he glares down at you because apparently, this is your fault. You stand there silently, eyes hard, body tense, covered in shit. Thankfully, Raymond stops yelling as Sal walks up holding Buddy Brad steady. Just behind them, Jackson rubs his throat. You're now thinking of renaming Action Jackson. Rodrigo continues to scream on the landing, “My eyes! My eyes!!” which makes you roll your own in exasperation. Raymond lets out a frustrated yell that scares



the curator into silence before thrusting his hand at the dock entrance, signaling for you to leave.

### **PART THREE**

The day started out pleasantly enough. I donned my raincoat and headed to my favorite corner coffee shop. Soy french vanilla latte. The lovely barista, Cydni with a C, smiled prettily as usual and I left her a generous tip. Standing by the window, I watched as people ran through the rain; children skipping over puddles and couples pulling each other along with entangled hands. Across the street, a young man, maybe twenty, made eye contact with me. I checked my watch, knowing it wouldn't look good if I was late to the Museum, especially today, so I threw the still full coffee in the trash and tugged my raincoat closed to step outside.

Two blocks later, I rounded the corner and moved halfway into the alley trading a thick envelope with the rough young thug. His friends had moved in behind him, all three of them very thuggish looking with angry tattoos

and menacing smiles. I smiled back, quite genuinely.

“I expect you won’t have any issues with your task at the museum?” The young thug’s smile got wider. “Your silence is encouraging.”

I’m still smiling forty-five minutes later when I stroll into my large corner office. My assistant, Ashley, brings me a fresh coffee. Black, one sugar. She then begins to relay the events of the day, including the meeting I have with Mastivity Co., a private security firm said to employ military-grade personnel. Our board seems to believe we don’t need the extra protection because there hasn’t been a break-in in nearly a decade. I make the call anyway.

Three hours later I summon my assistant. She frowns when I tell her I need to cancel my one o’clock appointment without giving her a reason. Ashley is sweet, but she’s not my wife. My wife’s dead. I don’t owe either of them anything. I stand up for the first time in hours, leaving behind the full cup of cold coffee and my confused assistant. The day is just beginning.

It's two twelve when I get the call. There's been a break-in at the museum warehouse. I text my driver to come to pick me up from Tommy's shop. Tommy's a good boy. He used to specialize in fancy wood ornaments, but I saw potential and hired him for side jobs. That was six years ago. Now, Tommy has dozens of high-paying customers, me included. He creates what I want and I sell it for profit. Lots of profit.

My driver picks me up and I climb into the back of the limo. "Good afternoon sir! I know it's gonna be a long rest of your day, so I got you a coffee. Caramel macchiato with extra foam, just the way you like it."

Delores smiles so big her white teeth nearly overtake her small face. A real peach, this one. Two years ago, she had just been fired from some low-end department store in Queens when she bumped into me, mascara running down her chubby cheeks. I dropped my coffee. She apologized and offered to get me another, which I vehemently denied, and agreed to sit with me instead. An hour later, I'd hired her to be my driver for twenty times more than what

she made at the department store plus a starting bonus. That same afternoon I bought a limo.

The car jerks to a stop, jerking me from my reverie. Delores again smiles her huge smile in the rearview and I wonder if she even has a driver's license. But that's something I'll worry about later. I return her smile and pop open the door.

“Oh, sir...don't forget your coffee now.”

I take the cup. “Thank you, Delores. I don't know what I'd do without you.”

Stepping from the car, I notice the many police cars parked outside the museum. This can't be good. I flash my ID badge to an older officer before walking up the ridiculously long loading dock. Once inside, I navigate the maze of towering pallets until I come upon the scene. Packing paper and plastic wrap are strewn across the room. Shards of glass from priceless relics litter the floor and spray paint covers a large majority of the surrounding pallets depicting gang symbols. There are two detectives on the scene; one checking the merchandise while the other barks orders. I approach the latter.

“Good afternoon detective. I know it’s going to be a long rest of your day, so I got you a coffee. Caramel macchiato with extra foam, just the way you like it.”

The large man looks confused but accepts the drink without question. I spend the next thirty minutes casually leaning against a pallet labeled “MANURE” while listening to the details of the break-in. The thugs just made a mess and then got away. No real loss for the museum. Typical. The museum relies so heavily on the security system that they don’t have a physical security team on site.

I check my watch and excuse myself, promising to keep in touch, and once again head back to my spacious corner office located on the third floor of the museum. My assistant makes several trips in and out before leaving another steaming cup of coffee on my desk. Black with a side of sugar cubes and a pot of cream. My eye twitches.

Not five minutes later Ashley lets me know my three o’clock has arrived. The representative for Mastivity Co. is a large, fast-talking man. I get that his name is Raymond, that they’re the best, and what they charge. I

inform him that there is a priceless artifact that needs to be secured until morning. He nods and shakes my hand without even asking any details and I don't divulge. Sometimes, business deals are that simple. I offer him some coffee, but he declines, preferring to take his leave.

Another hour and a half go by and I hold out hope that everyone is leaving for the day. My hope bubble bursts when the museum curator, Lincoln Busby, walks through my door. I briefly ponder if Ashley let him in, if he bypassed her, or if she's gone for the day. It doesn't matter. He's here. Now I must tolerate him.

He talks. And continues to talk - most notably about how worried he is for the launch of the new exhibit, the cost we're asking from the investors, the recent break-in and if the merchandise is safe, and if he should stay in the building overnight, just in case. This goes on for thirty-seven minutes (I'm checking my watch) until I finally stand to pack my things. Normally, I'm quite civil with everyone I meet but Lincoln is the whiny type, always complaining about something, regardless if it's

to the correct person or even relevant. Just as I reach the elevator, I pause.

“Lincoln, you do whatever you think is necessary. Have a good night.”

Mollified, the man adjusts his glasses but nods nonetheless and I gratefully escape down the elevator and into the parking garage. Delores smiles brightly but notices my exhausted form immediately. My curiosity clicks and I ponder on why it is that she’s so astute at gauging my reaction and attitude most aptly on nearly everything - except coffee. It’s honestly baffling, to say the least because she *has* to know that I don’t like it. But again, that point of thought is irrelevant as long as she continues to smile.

“Sir, if you don’t mind my sayin’, you look like you’ve had a rough day. I take it you’re gonna continue to work from home?” At my nod she frowns, then seems to brighten a bit after making a decision. “What do you say we stop by and get you a coffee? The place you like in the corner?”

I blink a couple of times at the irony of her question but nod, giving her the go-ahead to set off to our destination. She takes the side roads

and keeps the engine running while I run inside. A quick glance lets me know Cydni with a C isn't working this shift and I nearly forego the bitter beverage, but I cave and buy something. Iced chai latte. The rain has started up again so I jog back to the limo, slipping into the back raising the beverage up for her to see. Her returning smile lights up the whole limo. My heart swells. It was worth it.

She drops me off at my flat in Manhattan. It's expensive and nicely decorated. I head straight to the kitchen and pour the coffee down the sink, disposing of the cup in the trash. My next stop is the theater room where I tell Alexa to bring up the museum feed. Ten thirty-two-inch televisions pop up, each with a different vantage point of the building - because mankind gains dominion over all he surveys.

Next, I order dinner and get my laptop out. Dinner arrives thirty or so minutes later and I sit in one of my plush chairs, watching the security team patrol the museum grounds. Only one has sense enough to guard the warehouse. It's the woman. I smile. Good girl. Maybe I'll offer her a job after this. I also spy Lincoln



sitting at his desk watching what looks like porn. The camera oscillates to angle behind him where a woman with large breasts is smiling prettily. I quickly change the feed.

Another hour rolls by where the security feed of the museum thankfully has some action, and I sit forward as the female guard begins sneaking down the stairs to the ground floor. I watch as she moves between the pallets, periodically raising her gun to look down her sights. Finally, I spy what she's hunting.

A lone, shadowy figure has cut into a pallet and is going through the large tubs at a rather rapid pace. It's not long when he finds what he's looking for and slips it into his bag. That's when all hell breaks loose.

Although there isn't any sound, I sit forward in rapt attention watching what has the potential of being a decent B level action flick. Red lasers fill the room and I laugh out loud when one of the guards gets smashed by a stack of crates. It gets even better when another guard happens upon the thief and gets his ass kicked. I'm absolutely blown away at how dangerous this guy is and find myself wishing I could meet him in person. A sudden blast lights

up the screen and I frown, cursing at the television when dust fills all the potential views of the room.

I wait patiently and scan each screen noting that the members of the security team I'd hired are looking pretty bad. One is rolling on the floor, presumably screaming, another is being held up by his friend. The young woman stands apart. All of them are covered in shit. They are soon joined by their boss who is yelling so loud that his face has turned red and I find myself reinforcing my decision to offer the lady guard a job. I nearly double over at the sight of Lincoln stumbling through the muck, his face contorted in a pained wail at the destruction in the room. I laugh. Hard. It's too much. I can't take it anymore, so I tell Alexa to turn off the feed.

My smile won't go away. Even though it's been a long day with many trials and hurdles, I've somehow managed to come out on top. This thought spurs me toward my bookcase along the wall. I reach up and tug gently on a worn copy of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* making the shelf pop out and my eyes light up at the three stunning Faberge eggs glimmering

vibrantly in the display case. Yes, a good day indeed.

I sit back to my chairs, looking at the black screens, and sigh: “Oh, poor guy, trying so hard but find the fakes. Such a wonderful scapegoat.” The rain outside has started up again, this time more heavily. November is nearly over, and the Christmas holidays are looming close bringing to mind the barista Cyndi, my assistant Ashley, Tommy, Delores, the whiny Lincoln, and the ridiculous members of the board. What to gift for Christmas? I ponder this for a moment before a brilliant idea comes to me and I quickly navigate to a web page that sells the best high-end coffee and espresso gift sets.