

BRANNIE

John Boston

John Melvin poured his coffee as he had done every morning, religiously for the last 28 years and 3 months. He sipped it and found himself thinking about the ball game last night and why managers get paid obscene amounts of money to make common-sense decisions that a 12-year-old could do. He wondered not what he had done wrong in his life but, what the successful person had done right. He was stuck in the horse latitudes of his life. Waiting for some kind of strong breeze to get him moving once more. He never imagined it would take the form of a 20-year-old knockout named Annie Hayes. It's the smallest things that seemed to make the biggest difference in our lives. He would need a pleasant diversion, cause what would happen that day at the shop was nothing short of a disaster.

Like Category 5 level shit storm.

John was let go by Seminole Tool and Die, where he had worked as a machinist for the last 28 years. It's the only job he ever had and the only job he ever wanted. It's all he knew how to do. He had risen from the ranks of janitor, right out of high school, to apprentice, to journeyman, to foreman, to shop manager. 28 years at fifty hours a week is a ton of time spent at work. He was let go, like the trash that was taken out every night at the shop. The company had been sold to *professional investors*. IE, *assholes with a ton of money*. The kind of people who have dumping on people like him since the beginning of time. The cigar smokers and the brandy drinkers. The Park Place type of people and John was pretty much Baltic Avenue as far as they were concerned.

There was a mandatory meeting for everyone. Anyone making decent money was let go.

"We have to return this company to profitability," said one of the suits.

"By getting rid of the most knowledgeable people with all the skills? How the hell is that going to do anything to help us?" asked one of his co-workers.

"You're getting rid of the people with pensions, so you can make us look more profitable when you sell us to someone else." said another co-worker.

The Union reps were present. There really wasn't much they could do. The company was required by law to give everyone who will be fired to give a 60-day notice. John had enough sick time and vacation time built up, so he wouldn't have to go back to work. He should have seen this coming. He wasn't really surprised, just surprised by how quickly they went about it. He was making almost ninety thousand dollars a year. Finding another job that paid even half that amount was going to be difficult. He was an excellent machinist and wouldn't have any problem

finding work but he had left production years ago and was too old to put that kind of stress back on his body.

Twelve-hour shifts are for the kids, not people his age.

He spent the rest of the day packing up his belongings from the office and saying his goodbyes to the people he had come to treat as they were his own family. They were there for him when his wife left him one morning and never returned home. She filed for divorce the next week. She had less and less contact with him and his son Brandon, as time went on. She never even showed for their last court date when John was awarded sole custody of their son. Brandon was a teenager by then and certainly aware enough to realize what was happening. His own mother had essentially abandoned him. He tried to be a good father to his son. He was always there for him but the pain and scarring by having his mother walk out of his life were simply more than he could handle. Brandon got into a little hot water at school. He beat another student so badly, he was arrested. Had he not been an all-star athlete, he would most likely have been kicked out of school. He was put on court order probation for a year and had to pay the kid's medical bills but was not charged with a crime, thank goodness. The mood around the house was *depressing*, to say the least. John was married to his job in many ways and couldn't be there for his son when he needed him the most. It hurt John immensely, which is why the day he met Annie, their wayward ship suddenly straightened its course. He no longer felt like the captain of the Titanic but the captain of a fishing boat out at sea. Things suddenly got a whole lot more interesting around the Melvin household.

"Dad, this my girlfriend, Annie," said Brandon

"Very nice to meet you. Would you guys care for some dinner?"

"Dad, you can't cook."

"No but Sarina, my secretary, can. She made enchiladas for our little um....*going away party*."

"My dad's company fired him after he's been there for like thirty years."

"What? That's horrible," said Annie.

"You should sue them, dad. Don't let them get away with this."

"Well, they gave me a pretty generous retirement package. I get paid my entire salary for the next six months. I've got a 401k and a lot of benefits. I'll be fine."

"What kind of work are you in Mr. Melvin?" asked Annie.

"Oh please, call me John. We're not very formal around here. I'm a machinist."

"Dad, you're like the best machinist ever. My dad can machine a bearing to within a thousandth of an inch by just looking at it. He's been on the internet before. No one said it was possible but he did it." said Brandon.

Dinner was pleasant. Small talk, but pleasant talk. John had no idea Brandon was even dating someone, let alone a knockout like her. She was the complete package: beauty, brains, and best of all, she was loaded. She drove a BMW. Not some twenty-year-old BMW, like a new 2021 BMW. The kind is exclusively reserved for Park Place-type people. The more he got to know her, the more he liked her. She was nothing like his wife. She had pink hair and wore a skin-tight dress but it wasn't cheap or slutty. It was probably very expensive. The girl came from money, you could almost smell it on her. For the first time in a very long time, things were beginning to look up the Melvins. The sun was beginning to poke through the storm clouds.

There was light at the end of the tunnel.

John spent the next few weeks working on his special project that he was going to present to the owners of the hedge fund that had bought out the company. He was in his early fifties and finally felt as if he had some type of control over his life. He woke up the next morning and didn't have any place to go. He was a free man. It was as if he had been paroled from a maximum-security prison. Best of all, he was being paid for it.

He could get used to this.

He made his way downstairs and was surprised to see Annie in the kitchen making breakfast. He didn't even hear them come last night.

"Hi, I didn't know anyone was here."

"I crashed here last night. I hope you don't mind. It was really late." she said.

"No problem."

"Brandon slept on the couch and I slept in his bed."

"I see. What are you making?"

"Poached eggs. They're his favorite."

"I didn't know you were so handy in the kitchen," said John

"I'm handy in lots of ways," she said smiling.

John suddenly got an erection and moved behind the counter. Annie had pulled the most incredible-looking breakfast out of nowhere. He didn't even know he had any of these utensils in the kitchen. He had to sit back and watch her do her thing. She made it look so effortless. John was hopelessly lost in the kitchen. He was a superstar on the grill but, in a regular kitchen, he could barely boil water without screwing it up. She turned and he watched her walk away. She was carrying her breakfast for her man.

"Do you want anything? It's the least I can do," she said.

John was stunned. This one was a keeper for sure. He had to make certain his son didn't let this one slip through his fingers.

Over the next few weeks, he would see more and more of Annie. He woke up one night in the middle of the night and could hear sounds coming from Brandon's bedroom. He put his ear to the door. The kids were clearly engaging in R-rated activities. He walked back to his bedroom and into his closet. He had accidentally punched a hole in the drywall a few years ago when he was re-doing the closet and had slid a small cover plate over it. When it was removed, he could see right into Brandon's bedroom. He made certain the lights were off and removed the cover plate. It was dark in Brandon's bedroom but he could clearly make out Annie on top of him, riding him like a stallion. They both seemed to climax at the same time and Annie fell on top of him.

"Jesus, you made me cum like five times," she said.

"I'm sorry. I'll do better next time," he said

They both started laughing and she lit up a cigarette. John was surprised. That was one habit she was definitely going to have to drop if she was to stick around.

"What are you doing. Put that out," said Brandon.

"I always smoke after sex."

"Not in my house you don't."

That's it my boy, lay down the law with that wild stallion. Let her know there are rules to be followed around here. Don't let her think she can do whatever she wants. She ain't paying for this house, I am.

John felt guilty for watching them have sex. He just couldn't turn away. It wasn't that he wanted to watch, he just didn't want anything to go wrong. He wanted this to work so badly. He just wanted his baby boy to be happy. He wanted them to have the fairy tale and live happily ever after, the exact opposite of his marriage. His son just needed some help, some guidance. A guiding hand, to help him in these difficult times. John was like his son's life coach in many ways. He had big plans for the two of them.

Cause the very last thing he wanted was for the wheels to come off this bitch.

"Dad, I've got a favor to ask," said Brandon one evening.

"Ask away."

"I was hoping that Annie could stay with us for a few days. Her luxury apartment is overrun with termites. They have to spray. She can't return for 72 hours."

"Sure. Be nice to have the company. How are you two doing?"

"Great. I guess you old folks would say we're going steady," said Brandon.

"Wow, my boy got himself a real-life girlfriend. The only woman I ever dated was your mother," said John.

"You really missed out."

"That I did son. Is she going to be staying in your room?"

"Well.....yeah, I mean if that's okay."

"Look Brandon.....she's more than welcome to stay in the house. Just don't her pregnant, not yet anyway. Not till you guys know one another a little bit better."

"Okay.....I won't get her pregnant. We can still have sex though, right?"

"Well.....*boys will be boys*," said John smiling at his son.

His son smiled back at him. They understood one another without saying a word. He still couldn't believe his son landed a woman like Annie. Not to take anything away from Brandon but, he was batting way out of his league with her. He just didn't want to see his boy get hurt. John knew all about hurt. He knew it far too well.

That bitch of an ex-wife had pretty much cut his heart right out of his chest when she left.

John was now referring to the couple as BRANNIE. The two of them were now taking up a considerable slice of John's precious time. He began writing down a few ideas in a notebook he kept in his bedroom. He was making notes about the two of them and how he felt their relationship could be improved. He called it THE BRANNIE PLAYBOOK. He had watched them have sex now a few times. He noted the times and how they reacted afterward. He still had to know as much as he could about Annie Hayes. He had done some internet stalking but, had only come up with some very basic information. She lived in Connecticut and had gone to a very exclusive prep school. She was one of those *upwardly mobile* types of individuals, always reaching for one more rung on the ladder than the rest of us. He figured once her parents got wind of Brandon, they would cut her off and the two of them would be on their own. John had to come up with some kind of a plan for the two of them at that point. He wasn't going to let this cruel world destroy their love. They were going to make it and make it big. John did have a comfortable nest egg to draw upon if needed. Right now on page 16 of the playbook, he was jotting down ideas about what type of vehicle the two of them could purchase together. Something practical, yet classy. Annie remarked that she only drove BMWs, so he was thinking SUV. He knew it was going to take a considerable sum of money to keep a girl like Annie around, which meant he was going to have to step in and help his son. It was like an investment in future happiness.

"Dad, what are you working on in the garage?" asked Brandon

"Oh, just a little something for my former employer."

"Why? They fired you?"

"True but, this is something we've wanted to do for a long time. Me and the boys. I' the only one who actually decided to follow up on it."

"What is it?"

"Just a little token of our appreciation. You know, we can't let the rich people of this world have all the fun."

"So, it's like a clock or something?" asked Brandon.

"Kind of. It's sort of a surprise. As soon as it's finished, I'll be happy to show you."

"I can't wait."

"Are you and the Misses going out this evening?"

"Yes. We're going to hit a few parties, then crash back at her place. I appreciate you letting her stay here. She says she wants to cook dinner for all of us as a way of saying thank you."

"I'd be happy to eat her food. That gal can cook."

"You should see what else she can do," said Brandon winking at his dad.

John smiled and went back to reading his magazine. He had neglected his little project for far too long. It wasn't going to build itself. He had never done anything like this before. He didn't want to screw it up.

Gotta be a first time for everything.

He spent hours working on the playbook and his pet project. He tried to learn everything he could about Annie. He figured she came from money and would be used to a very luxurious lifestyle. Brandon's idea of luxury was eating at a steakhouse. He was going to have to kick things up a notch if he was going to keep this train on the tracks. He was going to have to know all about designer clothes and shoes. Learn how to lay golf or tennis. Maybe dabble in stocks. He couldn't tell her people he worked in a warehouse. That just wasn't going to cut the mustard. John had so much to teach the boy and such little time to do it in. He wished he could simply transfer everything he knew about women, which wasn't much, over to his son's head. Every little bit helps. Every little bit of knowledge brought him one step closer to sealing the deal. Great sex is great but it wasn't going to keep a girl like Annie on the hook for very long. For him to keep a girl like her, he needed a plan and he needed one quick. Girls like her come along once in a lifetime and they usually don't come across men like his son. The stars were aligned on this one.

He figured the best and only approach was to take things one step at a time. Annie had to understand that he and Brandon were not made of money. He hoped and prayed that she could see her guy was making progress. John just couldn't understand what a girl like her was doing with his son. He was a good kid but he was not really a diamond in the rough. He had anger issues. He was moody. At times he could just be a dickhead. Still, he had some kind of secret sauce to keep her around. She wasn't just his girl, she was like a permanent attachment on his

arm. They held hands and were never apart from one another. He was so happy to see his son so happy. He didn't want this fairy tale to end but he knew things would have to change for it to keep going. He hoped Brandon understood that as well.

A girl like Annie always has options.....maybe too many options.

He spent the evening sitting in his closet, watching the two of them in Brandon's bedroom. Not a whole lot going on. He was on his phone and she was on his phone. They had been like this for almost an hour when Brandon got a call.

"Jose.....como esta?"

"Yeah.....yeah, we can do that. No, no problem, the more the merrier," he said and put his phone down.

"Well, kiddo. It's showtime." he said.

"Come on Brandon, not tonight. I hate those parties. They're so.....*lower class*."

"What? Jose is a good buddy of mine."

"He's your dealer. He's not your buddy," she replied.

"Let's not split hairs here. He said at least a thousand, maybe more."

"Brandon.....I don't want to do this anymore. I mean it was fun at first. Now, it's like a business. I don't like this. I don't like the person I've become." she said.

"Babe, it's just for a little while longer. Once we have enough money saved. We can finally break free. It's either this or work at shit jobs for the rest of our lives, like my old man. Is that what you want?"

"Being a hooker isn't fun. Not at all. I don't mind doing rich guys but, come on. A bunch of horny beaners? Let some hood rat have those guys."

"How are the sugar daddies doing?"

"One went back to his wife, the other one wants to take me to Martha's Vineyard this weekend."

"We're going to need some new whales."

"I know. I'm bleeding the guy dry and he doesn't even seem to care. A thousand dollars is like one dollar to rich people." she said.

"You think the big money is with the sugar daddies?"

"I know it is. I think pretty soon, I'll get a key to his secret condo his wife doesn't know about and we'll be set. Once I get the keys, it won't be much longer till I get a credit card."

"What about the college tuition line you were working?"

"He wants to write a check to the college. I have to enroll and everything, then cancel to get the money."

"Patience baby. It will all work out in the end."

"He doesn't want to wear a condom either. Are you okay with that?"

"I guess I'm going to have to be. We're talking a whole lot of money here. We don't want to lose this guy. If you won't do it, he'll just find another pretty girl who will."

"I wish everything didn't have to be about money. I just wish we could have our dream life right now," she said putting her arms around him.

"Baby, I didn't come up with these stupid rules, I just have to live with them."

"You going to call back Jose?"

"Yeah. Everybody needs a day off once in a while. Hey, I was thinking about bringing Julie in. She's young and pretty and wants to make some quick money. What do you think?"

"How much are you going to take?"

"Ten percent. I think we could make a lot of money with her. A lot of guys like the whole freckle-faced, innocent teen girl thing."

"Innocent? If there's one thing Julie is not it's innocent."

"I know. We just have to let her dudes think she is. She plays the role pretty well. I'm sure we could make some quick money with her."

"Just don't get any ideas with her. You're mine and only mine," she said kissing him.

John couldn't believe what he had just heard. Annie was a high-priced hooker and his son was her pimp? What kind of madness is this?

He closed the small cover linking the two rooms and walked outside. He was both hurt and angry. What about their fairy tale wedding? What was going to happen to their fairy tale honeymoon in Bali? John never even had a honeymoon. He had to be back at work on Monday morning. He only had the weekend off. He was already looking at hotel prices on the beach in Bali. He was looking at prices of baby carriages and strollers. It was for nothing. His son and his whore were never going to get married. He would never let his son marry a whore. Whores belonged on the street, right alongside the rest of the garbage, not sleeping in the same bed as his son.

He walked into his shop and turned on the lights. He was too worked up to go to bed. Some nights he got so lost in his project, he slept right in the shop on a cot. He was almost finished. It really looked beautiful. A work of art. The kind of thing that he could showcase on television. He

was an old-school craftsman. It was almost finished. He should have finished it last night but, he was too tired.

He had even made a chart in his shop, diagramming how he was going to keep the two of them together. He ripped it off the wall and threw it in the trash, right alongside the rest of his life. Everything had gone to shit for him. His last refuge was his son and now that was gone. He didn't even want the two of them in his house anymore. Let them go have their fake life, surrounded by other fake people. Anyone who would pay for sex is not a person John wanted to associate with. Sex is supposed to be special, between two people who love one another, not something to make money on. Where had he gone wrong with Brandon? How did it come to this?

He threw away his BRANNIE PLAYBOOK. Hours upon hours of work right down the tubes. John was circling the drain. His last bit of hope was his project. He was going to complete it tonight. It was going to be ready to go on a moment's notice.

To hell with the rest of the world. His human experience thus far has been a total failure. Maybe it was all meant to happen this way? Maybe God wanted everything to fall into place before it was ready?

John felt a lot better now. He wasn't angry anymore. It had to be this way. He couldn't just walk out on them when they needed him the most. God was practically ordering John to finish it.....and John didn't want to let God down.

"Brandon.....what exactly are we doing here? Why are we watching your father?" she said looking through a little hole in the side of his shop.

"Do you see what he's building?"

"Yeah. What is it?" she asked

"It's an IED."

"What's that?"

"Improvised Explosive Device. Like the one McVeigh used in Oklahoma City."

"Who?"

"Never mind. It's a giant bomb. See those 55-gallon barrels? They're filled with diesel fuel. Once the bomb goes off, it's going to create a gigantic fireball. It's going to be one hell of an explosion. The detonator is what's taking so long. It's not like on TV, where you just use wires and an old alarm clock."

"Brandon....we have to call the police. What if he actually uses it on somebody?"

"Yeah. I guess I just didn't want to admit how far off his rocker dad has gotten. He's certified bats shit crazy. Like, he belongs in a nuthouse. Hope it's not hereditary."

"He's building a giant bomb, honey. He's lost it," she said looking away from the little hole in the side of the building.

"Come on. We'll deal with him once we get back. I don't want to keep these guys waiting. Rich people expect everything to be perfect. I hate that about them." said Brandon as they walked away.

John had to marvel at what he had created. He was going to leave his mark on the world after all. He began to think hard about who he should use it on. He was going to use it on the hedge fund headquarters that bought his company and destroyed it for a profit. They're a good target.....*but, maybe there's an even better one.*

A target much closer to home. A target that needs to be taught an important life lesson. One that money simply cannot buy. John liked to think in many ways, he wouldn't be killing the three of them, he would simply be starting over. A fresh start for all of them. The life they were leading was only to lead to their destruction. He was really saving them from themselves.

Like any good parent would do in this situation.