

A Perfect Plan

by

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INT. NEILL HOUSE - NIGHT

The Living Room looks like any other living room in the world. It has a coat closet and doors off to the kitchen and the rest of the house.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE (V.O.)

The 7<sup>th</sup> National bank was robbed only moments ago by a pair of suspects driving a late model blue sedan. Witnesses say the suspects headed east. More on this late breaking story as it occurs.

The door flies open. Patricia runs in, laughing. John follows her with the large bag. He puts it down on the couch. He is very calm, while she is simply giddy.

PATRICIA

Oh my God, John, I can't believe we got away with it. They'll never know anything.

JOHN

Yes, it seemed to go well.

John looks out the window. She leans over the back of the couch and reaches into the bag, pulling out money. The bag is apparently full of it.

JOHN

Patricia, get your hands out of the bag.

PATRICIA

Come on, John, it's ok. What do you think Fred will think when the cops find the car in his driveway? What're you doing?

JOHN

Making sure no one followed us. I noticed a cop car down the street.

PATRICIA

No one followed us. It was perfect.

JOHN

Then I'm making sure that ol' bag, Keller, across the street isn't coming over to see what your hurry was.

PATRICIA

Ah, she's probably out with that stupid bridge club she's always hounding me about. God, I hate bridge.

JOHN

You ever just tell her that?

PATRICIA

Well, no.

JOHN

(under his breath)

Of course you wouldn't.

PATRICIA

I try to be polite and smile and nod.

JOHN

Hm. Well, her light's on. Binocular lady's probably peering at us through her goggles right now.

PATRICIA

She probably left her lights on to make people think she's home.

JOHN

She leave her TV on, too?

PATRICIA

I swear she does that. People do that in this part of town. Keeps away the burglars or something.

JOHN

Something like that.

PATRICIA

She's probably at Oscar's Karaoke Bar, or some nonsense like that.

JOHN

There's no such place as Oscar's Karaoke Bar.

PATRICIA

I made it up.

JOHN

I see.

John continues looking out the window. Patricia leans over the back of the couch next to the bag of money and starts feeling of it again. John turns to her.

JOHN

Patricia, I said, "Stop that."  
Take that bag and put it in the closet over there.

PATRICIA

This is finally gonna make us, you know?

JOHN

Not if you don't leave it alone.

PATRICIA

C'mon, John, think about it. No more working to just make ends meet. No more wondering about your next paycheck. No more creditors hounding us daily over the phone.

JOHN

(under his breath)  
No more listening to you nag..

PATRICIA

What?

John ignores her and continues looking out the window. Patricia cuddles the cash.

PATRICIA

Mmm... I love the feel of it.

She smells it.

PATRICIA

I love the smell of it.

JOHN

I said put it away!

PATRICIA

I can't wait to buy all kinds of stuff with it, you know? I can't wait to buy new clothes. Not the cheap ones, either, I mean the really nice, expensive clothes that the big stars wear. I've never had really nice clothes, you know?

JOHN

So we're poor. Why make an issue of it? Again?

PATRICIA

I'm not making an issue of it. I'm just saying.

JOHN

Saying I'm inadequate?

PATRICIA

No. Well ... not anymore. I mean, this plan ... it was genius. I didn't know you had it in you.

JOHN

You'd be surprised...

PATRICIA

What?

JOHN

You're not buying anything with it. Put it away.

PATRICIA

I may not be buying anything with it tonight, but later - when we're out of this dump - then I'll spend my little heart out.

JOHN

No, Patricia, you will not.

PATRICIA

Hey, I helped you with this, I deserve my cut of the money.

JOHN

You're my wife, though. What's mine is yours, right? I'll take good care of the money, and give you what you deserve when I think you should have it.

PATRICIA

Like hell. I want my cut and I want it now.

JOHN turns on her and pulls his gun. She looks scared.

PATRICIA

John, what're you doing?

JOHN

You want what you deserve? I'll tell you what you deserve. I planned this job from the start and I didn't leave any stone unturned. We got in and out without a hitch, just as I planned. We switched cars with that idiot brother of yours, Fred. We got all the way back here without so much as a siren in the distance. But now that we're here, there's only one thing left.

PATRICIA

What's that?

JOHN

Witnesses.

PATRICIA

But John, we had our faces covered and we didn't utter a word without disguising our voices. What witnesses?

JOHN

Only one. You.

PATRICIA

John, you're scaring me...

JOHN

You see, that was the part of the plan I didn't tell you. The police are looking for two people in a blue sedan. They probably won't give a second glance to one person in a red sports car.

PATRICIA

You won't get away with it. The police will figure you out.

JOHN

By the time the cops drag your body from the bottom of the river, I'll be long gone, never to be seen again. I'll have changed my name and be living comfortably in some other country, thousands upon thousands of miles away from here. It's a perfect plan!

PATRICIA

But why?

JOHN

Because you irritate the holy hell out of me, and I wish I'd never met you, that's why.

PATRICIA

I'll scream.

JOHN

So scream.

Patricia screams. John fires. The sound echoes violently throughout the house. She falls to the floor behind the couch, dead.

As calm as can be, JOHN puts his gun away and looks down at his now-ex-wife. He walks back over to the window and looks out. HE nods and walks

INTO THE KITCHEN

where he washes his hands in the sink. He reaches under the sink to retrieve a pair of rubber gloves, as one might use for general cleaning.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

he stands over Patricia's dead body, donning the gloves.

KNOCK, KNOCK. John's head snaps to the door, his eyes grow wide.

JOHN

Who is it?

OPHELIA

This is OPHELIA KELLER from across the street. What's going on?

JOHN

Just a minute!

John looks around frantically for a moment. He opens the closet door and throws in the bag of money and his gun. He looks at the closet and the body. He shakes his head and sighs.

Ophelia knocks again.

JOHN

Hang on!

She knocks again. John shuts the closet door and looks around frantically. He looks at the couch and pushes it on its front. Ophelia knocks again.

OPHELIA (O.S.)

Mr. Neill, you're scaring me. I heard bad sounds. What's going on in there?

John kneels down and rolls the body underneath the couch. He pulls the couch back down. It wobbles slightly, since couches weren't meant to have dead women under them.

He runs to the door and opens it. Ophelia barges in.

OPHELIA

I heard all kinds of screaming and shooting coming from over here. I done called the police. What's happening?

JOHN

Nothing is happening.

(beat)

Why did you call the police if you were coming over here yourself?

OPHELIA

Better to be safe than sorry.

Ophelia looks around the room suspiciously. John remains calm.

JOHN

I see. Well, we're not going to be needing the police tonight.

OPHELIA

Where's Patricia?

JOHN

She's out.

OPHELIA

Out where?

JOHN

With a friend.

OPHELIA

What's her friend's name?

JOHN

Ophelia, you may be the self-proclaimed neighborhood watch, but I hardly have to tell you every detail of our lives.

OPHELIA

I think you're hiding something, that's what I think. What did you do to your wife?

JOHN

You're being mighty accusatory, aren't you?

OPHELIA

Where is she?

JOHN

Out.

OFFICERS ANDERSON and HARRIS appear at the open front door and knock.

ANDERSON

Good evening. I'm Officer Anderson, this is Officer Harris, and we got a call about some kind of disturbance concerning this address.

OPHELIA

Officers, this man has done something to his wife. He won't tell me where she is.

JOHN

Good evening Officers, I'm John Neill.

Hands are shaken all around.

JOHN

My wife is out tonight with some friends. She'll be back later on.

OPHELIA

He hasn't been able to tell me who she's with or where they went.

JOHN

You never asked where they went.

OPHELIA

You should have just told me.

JOHN

Hardly necessary.

HARRIS

Sir, can you tell us where she is just to help appease your neighbor?

JOHN

Certainly. She went out to Oscar's Karaoke Bar with her bridge club.

OPHELIA

I didn't know she played bridge.

JOHN

We do keep our blinds pulled for a reason, binocular lady.

OPHELIA

But I've asked her about playing bridge before, and she never seemed interested.

JOHN

Perhaps she found you so obnoxious, she had no desire to play with you, so she never wanted to play with you and your little club.

OPHELIA

He's lying. I'll bet he did something to her... I'll bet he done shot her just now and hid her body. Let's search for it!

ANDERSON

I don't think that'll be necessary.

JOHN

If you officers wish to take a short break, perhaps you'd like to stay for some coffee or something and wait for her.

OPHELIA

I'm definitely waiting for her - all night if I have to.

JOHN

Oh, I hope not...

HARRIS

I think we have a break coming. Do you have decaf?

JOHN

Uh, are you sure you have time? You're on duty right?

Harris and Anderson look at each other. Harris shrugs as if asking Anderson, and Anderson nods.

ANDERSON

I think we can hang a few minutes.

JOHN

Uh, let me see what I have in here.

John worriedly backs into the kitchen. He stands in the doorway for a moment watching them, wondering if they may know something, but turns away and exits.

Ophelia sits in a chair, while the Officers meander over to the couch, but don't sit just yet.

OPHELIA

I'm telling you, officers, I heard a scream and a shot like a gun come from over here.

ANDERSON

Miss Keller, to be honest, the only reason we ended up being here was that we lost the coin toss. You'd best be careful about calling in many more false alarms.

OPHELIA

I'm telling you it's true.

HARRIS

If the guy had just killed his wife and stuffed her somewhere, would he have invited us to stay for coffee?

OPHELIA

It's a ploy, I tell you.

The Officers sit, and the couch, predictably, wobbles.

HARRIS

Hm.

ANDERSON

What is it, Harris?

HARRIS

His couch doesn't sit very even.

ANDERSON

Could be the floor or something, maybe.

HARRIS

I'll just have a look to see if I can fix it for him.

Harris gets down on his knees to have a look as John re-enters the room. John speaks before the officer has a chance to see anything.

JOHN

Well, I don't have any- What're you doing?

Harris looks up.

HARRIS

Your couch is wobbling a little.  
I thought I'd have a look for you.

JOHN

No, that's ok. I was going to  
take care of it a little later.  
It's a leg that broke off. I can  
take care of it.

HARRIS

Are you sure? We could lift this  
baby up right now and have it done  
before we leave.

JOHN

No, no, that's ok. I wouldn't  
think of putting you out like  
that.

HARRIS

It's no trouble, I insist.

JOHN

I won't hear of it. Uh, well, it's  
kind of embarrassing, but I don't  
have any coffee.

HARRIS

Ah, man.

JOHN

Yeah, it sounds kinda pansy, but  
all I have is milk and some cran-  
grape juice. Sorry.

Harris is visibly disappointed, and looks over at Anderson.  
Anderson shrugs.

ANDERSON

I could go for some of the juice,  
if that's ok.

HARRIS

Could I get a milk?

John looks as if he's caught again, but recovers.

JOHN

Sure. I'll be right back.

Suddenly, ANDERSON'S RADIO goes off. John stays in the room. During Anderson's conversation with the Dispatcher, Ophelia walks over to the closet door, shadowed by John.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Any unit in the vicinity of Ashman and Menken, please respond.

ANDERSON

This is Unit 7, Officer Anderson, we're at Woodriver and Patterson.

OPHELIA

And what do we have in here?

She moves to open the door, but John prevents her from opening.

JOHN

Nothing that concerns you.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Unit 7, we have a domestic disturbance at 731 S Ashman. Requesting police intervention.

OPHELIA

(to John)

You hiding something in there?

ANDERSON

(to Dispatcher)

We're on our way.

(to Harris)

C'mon, Harris, you heard 'em.

JOHN

(to Ophelia)

Only my private life from those whom it doesn't concern.

HARRIS

Sorry, Mr. Neill, but we have work to do after all. Perhaps another time.

JOHN

Oh, sure. Sorry you couldn't hang around.

He shakes their hands as they head for the door.

OPHELIA

You're not leaving, are you?

HARRIS

Sorry, ma'am, duty calls.

Suddenly, the RADIO crackles to life again.

UNIT 3 (V.O.)

Unit 7, this is Unit 3, I'm only a block away from there, I got it.

ANDERSON

(to Unit 3)

Roger, Unit 3. Thanks.

UNIT 3

Roger. Out.

ANDERSON

Well, I guess we have a little time after all.

HARRIS

Is the offer still open on the drinks?

JOHN

Uh, sure.

JOHN backs away. HARRIS and ANDERSON sit back down on the wobbly couch. JOHN exits. The couch wobbles.

HARRIS

Oh, I forgot about the couch problem.

ANDERSON

Oh, well.

HARRIS

Kind of bizarre how he wouldn't help us fix it, huh?

ANDERSON

I'm sure it's a male pride thing. He's gotta do it himself.

OPHELIA

I'll tell you about weird. That man owns no tools. I swear he's never done a day of handyman work in his life.

HARRIS

And how would you know that?

OPHELIA

I know everything.

John enters with milk and juice for the Officers.

HARRIS

Mr. Neill, do you own any tools?

JOHN

Of course I do. Why?

ANDERSON

Miss Keller, here, thinks you don't and that you're lying to us about the couch.

JOHN

Ms. Keller, here, thinks she knows a lot of things. I'm sure she's told you by now that she thinks she heard my wife scream and that I shot her. Right, Ms. Keller?

They laugh.

HARRIS

Yeah, I think she mentioned that.

JOHN

Next thing she'll be telling you  
is that I robbed the 7<sup>th</sup> National  
Bank tonight, right?

They laugh again.

ANDERSON

Yeah, I can see that coming...

JOHN

And - and this is the best part,  
I'm telling you - and that when we  
got home from this dastardly  
crime, I killed my wife in cold  
blood so there'd be no witnesses.

They laugh even harder.

HARRIS

And you'll dump her in the river,  
right?

ANDERSON

And skip the country before we figure  
it out?

They laugh even harder, if possible.

OPHELIA

It could happen.

Dead silence for a beat as the three look at her, incredulously,  
but only for a moment. They guffaw as hard as possible at the  
absurdity of the idea.

After a moment, the Officers and John recover, still in tears.

HARRIS

Hoo, boy, that's rich.

ANDERSON

Oh my goodness... Well, Mr. Neill, we should be going. Thanks for the drinks.

JOHN

Anytime. Keep up the good work.

The Officers get up and walk to the door.

OPHELIA

Wait! That's it? That's all you're going to do? Just have a laugh and be on your way without even looking for anything?

ANDERSON

Miss Keller, you need a hobby. Seriously. 911 is considering blocking your number.

OPHELIA

Well, look under the couch. At least look. It can't hurt nothing, right?

John's expression drops, but the Officers look at each other with a "what can it hurt" expression.

HARRIS

All right, what the heck. Come on, John, let's see your dust bunnies.

JOHN

You're not seriously going to make me lift up my couch, are you?

ANDERSON

Well, we can help if it's too heavy, I suppose.

JOHN

Seriously, though. You guys need to be out saving the world, not looking under some guy's couch, right?

OPHELIA

You see? That attitude alone  
tells me he's hiding something.

JOHN

Ophelia, stop!

John leans on the couch for a moment, and then sits on it with  
his head in his hands, as if sobbing.

ANDERSON

Mr. Neill, are you ok?

JOHN

I'm sorry. It's just that I'm a  
little stressed lately with work  
and bills and all, and Miss Nosy,  
here, doesn't help me any. I  
assure you my wife is out with  
some friends, and I can even have  
her call you when she gets in. If  
you don't hear from us by  
midnight, I swear, you can come  
out and lock me away or whatever  
you do to seedy characters, ok?

OPHELIA

Do you really believe this—

JOHN

Ophelia, please!

HARRIS

Miss Keller, I must admit that  
you're being a bit much right now.  
Accusing someone of the murder of  
his spouse is not exactly idle  
conversation.

OPHELIA

But—

ANDERSON

I agree.

Harris walks over to JOHN and puts a caring hand on his  
shoulder.

HARRIS

Mr. Neill, I know how these things can build, and I'm sure tonight's not helping you any.

JOHN

Look, my wife went out tonight to get away from me for awhile. Apparently, I haven't been all too pleasant to live with lately.

ANDERSON

I know how bills can do that to you.

JOHN

Yeah.

HARRIS

Well, we'll get out of your hair.  
(to Ophelia)  
Come on ma'am.

OPHELIA

That's it? You're gonna fall for this Oscar-winning performance? I demand you search the place.

ANDERSON

Ma'am, I think you've helped enough for tonight. Save it for when Mr. Neill's feeling more sane, ok?

OPHELIA

But-!

HARRIS

Enough. Come on.

OPHELIA

I'm a private citizen, I demand to wait for her.

She pushes past the Officers to sit on the couch. They make no move to stop her, but John does.

JOHN

Look, I can get you for trespassing. Why don't you just watch for her out your window, like you usually do?

OPHELIA

No! I'm waiting here.

She eventually manages to push past John, and plops herself on the couch from an angle, shifting it. John looks worried for a moment, but recovers. The Officers walk over to her, and take her arm.

HARRIS

Ma'am, if you don't leave, Mr. Neill can press charges against you, and you don't want that.

Ophelia folds her arms and doesn't move.

ANDERSON

Ma'am, let's go.

OPHELIA

Fine, I'll go. But under protest.

Ophelia rises and walks to the door, looking back to the couch. The Officers follow her. A small trickle of blood runs out from the underside of the couch. Ophelia points and gasps.

OPHELIA

Look! I told you! Something is under there!

The Officers turn to this revelation. They go over to the small stream on the floor.

JOHN

Gentlemen, I confess. I spilled some juice there earlier and was too embarrassed to show you.

This doesn't faze them. John jumps up and tries to block their way, but they push him aside.

Harris leans down and touches the small stream, and looks at his fingers.

JOHN

It's syrup. I dropped my pancakes  
this morning! Just haven't  
cleaned it.

Harris looks up at John, and then nods to Anderson. They both walk to the back of the couch.

JOHN

No! Iodine, cherries, could be  
anything!

John runs over to stop the Officers from lifting, but Harris puts up a hand.

HARRIS

I suggest you stand clear.

Ophelia runs over to look as they lift up the couch. When the couch is up, John looks caught. The Officers looked disgusted. Ophelia puts her hands over her mouth in an expression of pure horror.

The Officers look at John. They put the handcuffs on him and lead him out. Harris remains standing over the body and speaks in pantomime into his radio. Anderson's voice fades into the background.

ANDERSON

You have the right to remain  
silent. Anything you say can and  
will be used against you. You have  
the right to talk with a lawyer  
before being questioned and to  
have the lawyer present during the  
questioning. If you cannot afford  
a lawyer, one will be provided for  
you before questioning begins. Do  
you understand these rights as  
I've explained them to you?

THE END