A Perfect Plan

by

George Willson

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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 7th 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.

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 7th 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