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Partners in Crime

by Nick Barrett

“Two men walk into a bar, but this isn’t a bleedin’ joke,” the heavy set six-footer said to his companion as they climbed down the stairs into the trendy TemperGate, “a bar that doesn't sell alcohol, it isn’t even funny, even for Notting Hill.”

The middle aged talker peeled off through the basement gloom while the other - maybe 15 years younger, taller, more athletic - went straight to the bar.

Lank haired, putty complexioned, cadaverous Charlie sat alone at a corner table. “Hello Charlie, you’re looking well,” the older man said without irony. “It’s been a while.”

Charlie, early forties probably, answered, “it’s been three years of that five stretch I got sent down for, Mr Browning. You still with Serious Crimes? I heard you made Superintendent.”

“Yes, I made Super, and still with the squad Charlie,” he sat down without shaking hands, “but I’ll be putting my papers in soon, so I need one last pay day. That’s my new DS at the bar. He’ll carry on with our arrangement, you can rely on him.”

“I hope so, I’m not doing another stretch.”

“Charlie, you're a professional burglar and safe cracker, its part of the job description that you go away from time to time,” leaning forward he added, “but if you do as I say you can avoid all that, because there will be no crimes reported.”

The younger man arrived carrying three drinks, which he put down with a nod to Charlie.

“You won't believe what they're serving in this place,” he said laughingly, “that's a Pious Pino Colada, this is a Virtuous Vodka and that's an Indignant IPA. Pick your poison.”

“Sounds lovely Dave. Dave knows a bit about the stolen art world, and he's finding out where a lot of it gets stashed, which is where you'll come in Charlie. That right Dave?”

Dave was thinking about how it would be, taking down this bent Superintendent, which is what he signed up for when he went undercover. This scam sounded promising though. Food for thought?

“That's it,” said Dave. “Art gets stashed away by drug dealers and the like,” he said. “They buy it to launder their cash, swapping it between themselves, maybe for knocked off art or maybe Bitcoin when it suits.”

“So they can't complain officially if it goes astray,” said Browning.

“Who do we sell it to then?” asked Charlie, knowing he had no option but to go along.

“Other toerags and low life - no offence,” said Browning. “Or maybe sell it right back to them. That's where I come in.”

“Be a shame to lose Charlie,” Superintendent Browning thought. “we had a good partnership of a sort. Once fitted up for murdering Dave during the next robbery, the big one, and then shot by me, I'll be a hero. No point taking loose ends into retirement.”

“To the success of a beautiful partnership,” Dave said as they all clinked glasses, all grimacing at the first sip.