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Something Overheard

by Miriam Silver

As a child I realised my sisters ignored me, treating me as if I had no ears so couldn't hear their stupid conversations. To them I was just a nuisance, a parental mistake, my sister Gladys frequently this made clear.

“Don't let him shake anything, damn and blast that boy, he's done it, wish they'd never had him, gotta start again.”

Gladys always ignored me unless she was complaining at my presence, telling me to be quiet, move out of the way or go and help mother, which encouraged Edith and Fiona. Altogether they made me feel like an unwanted pest.

All three of them were, to my young eyes, grown up by the time I was born, verging on either leaving school or going to work. I never interacted with any of them inevitably growing up a lonely child, enjoying my own pursuits, keeping out of everyone's way but always listening, I have them to thank for becoming a first class eavesdropper.

I heard them planning to wear lipstick as soon as they were out of sight, I knew they were meeting boys without mother's permission, and I saw Fiona steal from my money box, but I never told anyone inevitably maturing into a slightly scheming devious young man who found life easy both at boarding school and university.

That was where I used every opportunity to listen, not so much to learn as to accumulate information sure I'll find some use for it in the future.

I know my eavesdropping avoided me becoming further seriously involved with a girl who, though swearing her devotion to me was actually seeing my friend, actually seeing us both at the same time, so naive of me. That cured me, I went it alone after that.

Qualifying as an accountant finding a job with a reputable firm was my first step into moving up and on, my listening powers enabled me to take the business that others found boring. I was invited to grand offices, hotels and gated houses, my attention to detail gave me a reputation for reliability.

Working in the office of a well-known hotel one day a person from one of the houses for which I had done their accounts checked in. Knowing that a visiting employee is invisible, I peered out, to relieve the boredom really and overheard,

“Doesn’t matter, whatever,” she said carefully looking around.

“Did you make it definite?” her companion asked.

“Yes, yes, he’s bringing it.”

“Hope it’s not obvious, difficult to disguise.”

“Shush! don’t be so loud, don’t want anyone to hear.”

I was sure I recognised them, and waited as they took the lift to the 4th floor, too far for me to hear anything further. I was sure I remembered them having unaccountable money, also their behaviour was a bit secretive. They kept looking behind, as if expecting someone to follow them.

Soon afterward I heard a man’s voice ask for them, would they come down, perhaps he’d go up, I saw he was carrying a parcel done up with coloured paper. The desk attendant must have phoned them because I heard him say,

“They’ll be down in a minute, they know you’re waiting.”

Hearing this I made some excuse to come out and search the reception desk hoping I would catch them in the act of accepting what could be drugs in return for their unaccountable money. So positive I was that I’d caught someone involved in money laundering.

I didn’t have to wait long,

“You’re on time, thanks, we’ll be able to get it hidden,” he sounded relieved.

“Yes, be a lovely surprise for her, she’s always wanted a J.K.Rowling first edition.”