

OUTWIT

1. Agent Provocateur¹

Heidi peered past the shelf, toward the counter, in the direction of that rumbling baritone voice.

Nothing. No one.

Only a red gauzy curtain hanging across an archway behind the counter fluttered a little. Heidi shrugged and went back to her shopping, glancing at the top shelf.

There sat the only vibrator she'd ever heard of. According to Kim Cattrall's character Samantha on *Sex in the City*, the 'Rabbit' was the 'cat's pajamas'. *Or, the cat's silky lingerie and bustiers*, Heidi thought.

"Ah, the Rabbit." Heidi jumped as the man's enormous hand reached above her head. "Would you like me to get one down for you?"

He didn't wait for her to answer. Instead, he thrust the Rabbit in her left hand while pumping her right hand vigorously.

"Name's Ralph. The girlfriend loves this thing. No complaints from customers either."

Ralph. Think Hugh Hefner meets lumberjack.

2. The Punishment

As Heidi sat at Ralph's funeral remembering that first meeting and how the Rabbit had felt like hot coals in her frail hands, a small smile formed on her lips. Who ever would have believed she'd be one of five people attending the guy's funeral service. It was equally surreal that a guy as robust and full of spit and vinegar as Ralph could cease to exist.

Heidi recalled her disbelief when he'd told her he was turning 65. She'd pegged him at 50 max. When asked his secret, Ralph would say there were many, but one thing for sure, he considered his morning bourbon and his evening bourbon a sacred ritual.

That was thirty years ago.

¹ Agent provocateur according to the Collins Dictionary:

noun a secret agent employed to provoke suspected persons to commit illegal acts and so be discredited or liable to punishment

Origin according to the Oxford Dictionary: late 19th century: French, literally 'provocative agent'

Heidi hadn't thought about Ralph for at least 25 of those 30 years, but yesterday while scrolling through her Twitter feed, she'd noticed his name. She typed the name in the search function, but there was only the one tweet by a handle called Fake Name. The tweet said "Who's game for a BBQ?" followed by a link to Ralph's obituary:

RALPH FITZPATRICK DEAD AT 95; SLEEZY SEX SHOP OWNER, ALL-AROUND CROOK AND ARSEHOLE FINALLY KICKED THE BUCKET

Better yet, someone kicked the bucket for him.

On February 8, 1929, Ralph Fitzpatrick tore through his poor mother's uterus, the first of a long list of cruel acts he would inflict on her, and later on others. It was the coldest day of the Depression in Wyoming when Mavis and Billy-Joe Fitzpatrick first glimpsed their son, face like a slapped arse and smelling funny. Billy-Joe circumcised Ralph with a rusty pocket knife and then doused the prick with bourbon to ward off infection.

I'm happy to report that Ralph was deprived of his final wish, which was to be run over by a bourbon truck while heading for his date with a virgin. Sadly, the knife used to inflict the 13 stab wounds was probably too sharp to make his death as slow and painful as he deserved.

Bottom line: Ralph was about as useful to society as an ashtray on a motorcycle.

His only redeeming quality was his skill at grilling a mighty fine bourbon burger. In his will, he asked to be mixed with equal parts bacon fat and bourbon and then broiled. He'll be cremated tomorrow following a funeral service he ordered for happy hour, 5 pm at Rock Church, 222 Sackville Drive. A barbecue will follow at an as yet undisclosed location.

Hallelujah!

3. The Crime

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