

B&E

By Mark Joseph Kiewlak

Petite was in the bathroom brushing her teeth when we met.
I had made it upstairs without so much as the creak of a floorboard, when I saw the slit of yellow light under the door.
Common sense tells you to always take out the ones who are awake first.
I turned the knob gently.
Unlocked.
Petite was standing before the white porcelain sink, weight on one leg, hand on the opposite hip, other hand working the brush, when I made my entrance.
She saw me first in the mirror.
She didn't turn, didn't stop brushing.
This was what first tipped me that Petite was different.
One of the Unique.
Like myself.
She had a way about her.
Just like that Billy Joel song says.
I didn't know what it was.
Sing along, you know the rest.
Petite threw her chin at me in the mirror.
I shut the door softly and stepped toward her. She took the brush from her mouth and held up the first finger of that same hand, telling me to hold on a minute.
Then she finished brushing.
I stood next to the tub, on a plush pink rug, and waited. Why, I wasn't sure. Because she had told me to, I guess.
She rinsed her mouth, then stuck her face close to the mirror, pushing her lips apart with her fingers and examining the pearly whites.
I noticed no fangs.
Whether I was relieved or disappointed I couldn't yet say.
She tugged down her nightshirt, which had a giant panda on it. The tug brought it less than halfway to her knees. She turned to face me at last.
"Howdy-do," I said.
"Rob or rape?" she said.
"Got any valuables," I said, "in the medicine cabinet?"
"Box of Trojans," she said. "They've been valuable on several occasions."
"Got my own," I said.
She cupped her hands under the edges of her nightshirt. "We going to use one?"
"What?"
"To protect yourself," she said. "You don't know where I've been."
I took a step back, feeling the icy skin of the tub through my pant leg.
"Watch your step," Petite said.
Maybe the fangs grew only as needed.
"You want me to do you?" I said.
"Figure you will anyway," Petite said. "I'm not in the mood for a rape, so, if I give it to you freely, maybe you'll go easy and not kill me..."

She lifted her shirt enough to reveal a lacy pair of pink panties which matched the color of the rug I was standing on.

"...but even if you do," Petite said, "I really don't give a damn."

"I -- I don't want to," I said.

"Rape me or kill me?" Petite said.

"Either," I said.

She tugged her shirt back into place. The panda bear across its front was enormous. I wanted to hug the very life out of it.

"I'm leaving here," Petite said, "and I'm taking you with me."

I didn't know what to say.

She came over and started patting me down. And I let her. I was frozen, in some type of shock.

I didn't know what it was...

"Gun? Knife?"

"Knife's in the small of my back," I said. "Gun's in my pants."

"Chambered?" she said.

I had to look away from her face.

"More than one round?" she said.

"I'm getting out of here," I said.

Petite curled her finger through one of the belt loops in the front of my jeans.

"We'll leave as soon as I pack," she said. "And say a proper good-bye."

She tugged at my jeans. I clutched her wrist. "You don't know anything about me..."

"Like what?" Petite said. "That you're a thief? A murderer? A rapist?"

"Not necessarily in that order," I said.

"I know I like you," Petite said. "I like the way you hesitated when I told you that I was yours." She twirled her finger, twisting the loop, and drawing my waist up against her own. "And I like your looks."

I studied my face in the vanity mirror. "I'm as ugly as an old lady in a bikini."

"Let's go down the hall," Petite said. "There's someone I want you to meet."

I followed her as if in a dream into the bedroom.

Her husband was asleep.

I don't know what I expected to see. A stocking cap with a tassel? Drool on the pillow? He didn't look henpecked.

Hubby slept on his side facing the doorway. The sudden light from the hall didn't wake him. Neither did Petite's packing. Except for the rise and fall of the blanket over his chest, I would've thought she'd already killed him.

I whispered from just inside the doorway to Petite.

"What's he do?" I said.

"He sells men's clothes," Petite said. "Not what you would call men's clothes but, you know, what every uptight, arrogant, in-need-of-breast-feeding man is supposed to be wearing this season."

She drove her palm down on a pair of jeans to fit them into the suitcase.

The husband stirred.

Petite had instructed me to shoot him if he woke up.

Hubby called out to her.

Petite nodded her head toward the bed.
 I tore the pillow from beneath his head and jammed it down over his face before he could get his hands up.
 Petite zipped her case and came over to the bedside.
 “Don’t kill him,” she said. “The kids need him.”
 I nearly lost my grip on the sides of the pillow. “You got kids?” I said. “You’re leavin’ your kids?”
 “They’re his,” she said. “I’m just the step.”
 I thought of that Brady Bunch episode where Bobby wants to run away and Carol volunteers to go with him.
 Her husband almost had his hands free from the tangle of blankets.
 I brought my fist down on the pillow, again and again, until his hands gave up the fight.
 I lifted the pillow off Hubby’s face. Its underside was soaked with blood.
 Petite didn’t smile. She didn’t look victorious.
 “Is he alive?” she said.
 I pointed to his heaving chest.
 She took his horn-rimmed specs from atop the alarm clock and snapped them in two. She nodded towards the door.
 Bobby shoulda’ went.
 I lugged her case down the long hall, banging it off every other spindle of the staircase’s wraparound railing.
 She went into the kids’ room alone.
 When she came out I said, “Why no toys around the house?”
 “End of the hall’s the playroom,” she said. “No toys allowed anywhere else. He’s big on discipline, you know?”
 Downstairs, she threw on a red raincoat from the closet. Underneath, she still wore the nightshirt, barelegged and barefoot.
 “Aren’t you gonna change?” I said.
 “I already have,” she said. “Can’t you tell?”
 “At least some shoes,” I said.
 “Walk a mile in mine, Ace,” Petite said, “you won’t wonder why I’m leaving them.”
 I carried her and the case down the block to my running car. As I threw the shifter into drive she leaned across the seat into my lap and kissed me with her open mouth.
 “We’re headed for the top,” Petite said.
 My mouth tasted like Crest.

Mark Joseph Kiewlak has been at this pulp stuff for fifteen years now. Two of his stories are coming up in Hardboiled, and one in CrimeSpree. In recent years his work has appeared in Hardboiled, Crime Scene, Mysterious-E, AlienSkin, Black Petals, and The Bitter Oleander. He’s also been published by DC Comics.