

Title (up to 20 words) - The Blind Heist

Strapline (up to 40 words) - **December 5th 1952**

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

Shivering as an icy chill climbed up my back, I wrapped my threadbare coat around myself, hoping to create a semblance of heat for myself.

The dreary weather sent a nauseous feeling of guilt into my chest as I pictured Lucie shivering in her sleep, with nothing but a thin, scratchy blanket as her only source of heat. Nowadays she is too weak to do anything else. I hated leaving her alone during school time but I couldn't afford to raise any more suspicions after what happened to our mom. Suddenly, my ears were ringing with a cruel laugh and my lungs were burning as poisonous cigar smoke, filled them.

Shaking away the turbulent rush of memories, I tried to be grateful for having a roof over our heads, even if it was leaky and barely holding up. However, my mind couldn't help but fret over how low we were running on food supplies. Last year we were shockingly underprepared for the winter and as much as we prepared ourselves for this year, the thick of winter was upon us, and once again we had seriously underestimated the harsh London weather.

The morbid thoughts consumed me as I tried to focus on what Stuart was saying, but they were always there, hovering at the back of my head like an incessant dark cloud, keeping me from being like any other 14-year-old boy. I envied the other kids, all they had to worry about was bringing their caps to school, not whether they would be able to feed their sister.

Somehow, we had reached the Huntress fountain in Hyde Park. The water had completely frozen and my mind conjured up the image of Stuart and I slipping and sliding on it. I despised myself for it, but I wanted to let go for a minute and go have fun, but it wasn't just me now. I had to think of Lucie too.

Looking over at Stuart to tell him I was off, I found him standing on the edge of the fountain in an exaggerated impersonation of the statue. With his cap as the head of the arrow, combined with his crazy facial expressions, a startled laugh escaped me. That's how it always was with Stuart. Somehow against all my worries, he always manages to crack a smile out of me.

Stuart was the only other person who knew of my living conditions. He could tell instantly that something was up when he spotted my rumpled appearance and haggard expression. It wasn't long until he had managed to coax an explanation out of me. It was simultaneously terrifying and a huge relief to get it off my chest. Confiding in Stuart was the best thing I could've done and he is the biggest reason Lucie and I have survived for this long.

The sudden reminder of my sister broke me from my train of thought, and I was surprised to see how dark it had gotten. Feeling a sudden panic overtake me, I spun around and asked Stuart for the time.

"Half-past" he replied in a confused tone. I slumped my shoulders in relief knowing that she wouldn't have woken up by now. The mere horror of having left my sister for the whole day ate away at me, but before I could fall into a downward spiral of negativity, I remembered why I thought I had lost track of time. I tried to figure out why it had gotten so dark all of a sudden. It wasn't long until I spotted the culprit.

I watched with an uncomfortable fascination as an inky black...fog(?) leaked from the sky and shrouded us in suffocating darkness. It was like the black cloud in my mind had projected itself on the world.

My heart nearly jumped out of my chest as I heard Stuart's voice from behind me. I turned around to glare at him through the sooty haze, but before any words could leave my mouth, I had recognised the glint in his eyes. It was heist time, well at least that's what Stuart liked to call it. I'm ashamed to admit it but our 'heists' have been one of the biggest reasons we haven't died from starvation and as unethical as they were they helped. A lot. To simply put it, when the weather gets foggy, Stuart and I would 'borrow' some items off people, and before they can realise what happened we would have run away with the fog blanketing us from their sights.

"No" was all I said. Stuart lived for the rush and thrill of the chase. He was constantly on the lookout for the first sign of mist, and regularly reminded me how it was the only thing exciting in his life. On the other side of the spectrum, I loathed having to stoop to such levels, but I knew I would do unspeakable things if it could help Lucie survive. However, there was something about the weather that had planted a small seed of unease in me. I couldn't explain it, but something about it seemed to be warning me to stay away.

"Oh, come on, it'll be fun," he said, adhering to the script we had unconsciously created over the years. I had lost count of how many times this exact conversation has repeated itself. He'll probably mention my living conditions next

"Jamie, I know that conditions are very tight right now..." as expected, and the wild card...

*Lucie*

"It'll help Lucie" It was like she was the magic word. Slowly I felt my resolve crumbling as I pictured her not having a proper dinner like yesterday, and I knew at that moment that no unease or fear would stop me from trying to help my sister. I had made a promise to my mom

and I planned on keeping it. As easily as I had read his expression, Stuart also knew that he had won me over.

Guess it was time for a blind heist.