

EASY HEIST

Jim Wisneski

1.

“It’s that easy?” Jerry Warren said with a big smile on his face. It complemented his white teeth glistening against the low light that hung from the middle of the table. Seated across from Jerry was Cullen Anderson, a serious man, with a serious job.

“No, Jerry, listen to me,” Cullen Anderson said in his rich Italian voice. Anderson was an important man, owning one of the most successful, and more importantly, profitable restaurants in Philadelphia. He was in his mid forties, had a small, round face, with narrow eyes. Completed with a black suit, and a red tie, Anderson sat with his hands folded together, calm, as he usually, was preparing to explain to his naïve associate of his next mastermind heist.

“VanBerg is not a man to be taken lightly. He is good. He is one of the best around, Jerry. Please, take this seriously.”

Showing his serious side, Anderson slightly tilted his head, and widened his eyes. Jerry understood what that face meant; he had dealt with it many times before.

“All I have to do is swap a briefcase, right?” Jerry asked while spinning the half melted ice cubes around in his empty glass.

“Yes. I know it seems easy, but trust me; VanBerg has a way of finding things out. And he is one mean guy. He never smiles Jerry. Never.”

“Neither do you,” Jerry said trying to lighten the mood a little bit.

Anderson didn’t bite. “If this is a game to you, then leave. Go. I’ll get someone else to do this, ok?”

Both men sat for a few seconds in silence, staring at each other. Jerry came back to reality and remembered that Cullen was his boss. He raised his hands as a sign of peace and let Anderson explain the rest of the heist.

VanBerg would be at a local comedy club, only a few blocks from the restaurant. He would be sitting at one of the small tables, watching a local comedian trying to make a name for themselves. VanBerg would have a black briefcase sitting next to him. Inside the briefcase, there would be one million dollars, all tightly wrapped in one hundred dollar bills. Jerry’s job was to sit behind VanBerg, swap the briefcase with an empty one that Jerry would have, and then just leave. VanBerg would leave, and later he would discover he had been ripped off. Jerry understood everything clearly, but it all seemed just too easy.

“You see, Jerry,” Cullen began, “VanBerg is going to sell off some stuff that he has stored with a local dealer. From what I got out of it, this dealer is going to move the stuff across the country. Bottom line, it’s all big money for anybody who gets their hands on it. The cops, for the most part are paid off; but only for the moment. VanBerg’s buyer is going to drop of the case of money and take with him a case that has directions to the stuff. That’s how their deal will go.”

Cullen paused for a moment and took a small sip from his glass.

“Then, we slip in, and switch the cases with ours. Inside ours, there will be nothing but fake game money. Just something extra to fuel the fire. In a rage and panic, there will be only one person who goes down for the heist.”

“The people VanBerg sold the drugs too,” Jerry said, understanding the situation.

“Yes, exactly. But please, do not forget, VanBerg is very smart, and very alert of his surroundings. He is almost a master at his job. Almost.”

2.

VanBerg was a tall, quiet man, with a strong powerful aura around him. From the second a person sees VanBerg; they become silent and look away. He had been a major drug trafficker for years, starting in Miami, and slowly working up the East coast. Miami made VanBerg enough money to travel, and keep moving anytime a city became “too hot” to deal in. New York City is where VanBerg became well known. He was known on the streets by poor locals, rich dealers, and even police. The only problem was the police had nothing on him. For all they knew, VanBerg was the president of VanBerg Financial Services and Real Estate. VanBerg’s father traded stock, and his mother sold residential and commercial real estate. He had an idea for both and knew enough to run a business. The business was his cover up for the deals.

It was before long that VanBerg became too big for his own name in the city. The police were investigating too much, the SEC was looking into some insider trading garbage, and his real estate section started to fall apart when seven of his apartment buildings were all set on fire due to arson. VanBerg always tried to fight back, but he wasn’t a moron. He sold the company to someone in the company who knew nothing about the drugs. He split from New York City and headed to Philadelphia.

In Philly, he was directed to a man named “Big Tommy”. “Big Tommy” dealt only small supplies through the back room of a small grocery shop his uncle owned. Those small deals added up though, and “Big Tommy” wasn’t short on change. The cops started to come down hard on the bigger deals, hoping to stop the smaller ones. “Big Tommy” knew better, and had most of the cops paid off. Part of his pay off to the police was that he could bring in as much as he wanted, but he needed to keep the deals small. The smaller the deals, the quieter it would be for “Big Tommy”. Plus, who is going to bust some low life punk trying to get a high from his fast food paycheck when there are dealers passing millions into the country on a daily basis? It was those low lives though that pushed “Big Tommy” to the point where he was now. Dealing with fifty people a day was hard, but now because of word of mouth, he couldn’t get a break. Now he understood why people dealt big. He knew that one big deal could let him rest up for a long time, hell, maybe he could even quit for good. As a businessman, he imagined himself with suppliers, dealers, trucks, driver, and plenty of buyers. He was tired of being the dealer; he wanted to be the big man in the background. As long as the cash flowed in, who cares? “Big Tommy” dreamed of living somewhere warm all the time, soaking up the sun, having cold drinks, and women. Lots of women.

“Big Tommy” knew about VanBerg long before the two men met. He even had dealt with him earlier in time, as VanBerg moved up the East coast. VanBerg had even approached “Big Tommy”, looking to get rid of some old stuff, and maybe retire. “Big Tommy” knew that a million dollars worth of drugs could go a long way in different places. Part of the deal was that VanBerg would also supply “Big Tommy” with a team of driver’s and sellers to help him push the stuff across the country. Within a few weeks, maybe a month or two, “Big Tommy” could go quit for good.

Here’s the deal: One briefcase contained a piece of paper. On the paper, there were directions to the stash of drugs, and phone numbers to all those that were going to be responsible for the cross country delivery. “Big Tommy” already made up his mind that the second he meets with the crew and sees the drugs; they are to leave and find a calmer place to finish business. Even though there wasn’t supposed to be too much action involved with the deal, “Big Tommy”

liked to keep things as calm as possible. The second briefcase would contain the sum of one million dollars in cash. And that's what VanBerg liked and wanted; cash. It seemed like a pretty straight forward deal, and everyone would be happy. VanBerg would have his money, and "Big Tommy" could step back and let everyone else do the work. It was rare that VanBerg could smile, but with the thought of a million dollars sitting next to you and retirement a day away, who couldn't help but not only smile, but laugh?

3.

Underneath the table at the restaurant, there was a third briefcase and that one contained nothing but fake game money. Anderson had always moved a little faster than he should have when it came to deals and especially heists. The restaurant was nothing but a cover up for his "other job". The restaurant made good money, and damn good food, but that didn't mean much to Anderson. He had heard stories of some big guy in New York City who was taking over the city. He also knew that even man had a soft side, and when VanBerg charged out of New York, Anderson knew it would only be a matter of time before he ended up in Philadelphia.

"Is there anything else I can get for you, Mr. Anderson?" a young waiter asked with a pleasant smile on his face.

"Rum and coke."

The waiter nodded and walked away.

Cullen's eyes followed the waiter until he was out of sight. He positioned his eyes with Jerry's and finished explaining about the heist. "I have reserved the table directly behind VanBerg for you. All you need to do is walk up to one of the bouncers outside and tell him Williams. After that, go to your table, stay calm, and do not add extra words, or do anything stupid. You got me?"

"Yea."

As Cullen was about to speak again, the waiter walked back to the table with a rum and coke in his hand. "Here you are, Mr. Anderson."

Cullen nodded and the waiter left.

Jerry reviewed the whole heist with Cullen one last time, and then proceeded to take the briefcase full of fake money and leave. At the front door, the same waiter held it open and said, "See you later."

Jerry found the black Mercedes that Cullen had given him for the evening. The club was only a short distance from the restaurant. The ride there gave Jerry a few minutes to be alone and make sure the whole thing was going to work. How could it not, though? Once the briefcases were switched, Jerry would call Cullen, and they would meet back at the restaurant. This time, they would meet in the basement, where all the real business was done. There, Cullen would get his money, and Jerry would get ten percent. Ten percent meant Jerry could take some time and relax. He could take lots of time and relax.

Jerry parked across the street from the club and surveyed the place before getting out of the vehicle. The line of people was already in mid form and stretched almost half way down the building. In big neon letters, "Club 9" read in blue. There was a white banner with the evenings comedians on it, but Jerry didn't recognize any of the names. At the front door, there were two big, dark security guards standing with their arms crossed while two smaller men checked I.D's.

Jerry took one last breathe, grabbed the briefcase and got out of the car. Within the next hour, he would be walking back to the car with one million dollars in cash. Jerry had to admit

that the thought about running off with the money crossed his mind more than once. That much money would be great, but he wasn't dumb. Cullen Anderson wasn't dumb either. He would track Jerry down anyway possible and torture him. Plus, Jerry had worked faithfully for a long time with Cullen, and had made great money at it. One hundred thousand dollars in cash would be his biggest payoff in one shot, and Jerry wasn't going to mess that up. And the best part of the whole situation was that it was hands down the easiest heist he'd ever attempted.

4.

Billy Cub hated his job. He hated taking lip from the rich folk that ate at the restaurant he worked. He hated taking their orders, watching them hold their glasses up and tap them as a reminder for a refill, and he hated cleaning up their tables. Dirty rich people. Even more than the people at the restaurant, he hated the Italian who ran the place. He never yelled, never fought, never did anything but sit in a booth with his hands crossed, talking. Always talking. Billy never actually saw him do any real work, but constantly saw different people come in and out of the restaurant. Billy had enough of everything, and while his rich Italian boss talked, Billy listened. Billy listened well, and had an amazing memory. He knew that there was going to be an empty briefcase underneath the Italian's table tonight, and he especially knew about the big, secret plan that was about to happen.

Along with his hate for anything to do with the restaurant and his skillful hearing ability, Billy understood what it took to survive. Billy knew the names involved with any of the Italian's heists. Making a few phone calls didn't take much effort either. Plus, he understood who VanBerg was, and knew of his nasty reputation. Helping VanBerg can only in return help himself. Survival and protection was a need for Billy. He knew nothing about running a business or dealing drugs. He wasn't educated; he didn't even finish high school. He was in his early twenties, close to being overweight, and had nothing but the hope of not waking up the next day. For him, he had nothing to lose, but everything to gain. With that realization, he became aware of how free he was. He wasn't some guy sitting at a table with the Italian listing to his nonsense, and heisting people over. He could do whatever he wanted. Completely free he was, and maybe it was time to start controlling his destiny. He would no longer be the passenger, for he would be in the drivers seat, shifting gears.

"Oh yes, there will be heist a tonight, oh yes," Billy said out loud while walking over to Italian's table.

Fake a smile, do what he says, and wait for the fireworks to begin, Billy thought as he served the Italian a drink.

5.

"Williams," Jerry said to the bouncers at the door.

The man verified the name with someone inside the club and then let Jerry in. Inside, the club was littered with people and noise. A middle aged man showed Jerry to his table.

"Would you like anything Mr. Williams?"

Jerry nodded his head and the man left. At the center of each table, there was a small lit candle. For the most part, there were four people at each table and all of them had a drink. Peering around the club, Jerry heard an announcement for the next comedian that was scheduled. The audience clapped and became quiet. The comedian opened with a usual story about an experience at an airport. Jerry's mind soon began to block out the noise around him and focus

on the man seated directly in front of him. There was a single person at the table, and a briefcase next to him.

That's him, Jerry thought.

VanBerg looked bigger than he imagined. He had a full head of black hair, and had to be at least six foot four. Equipped with broad shoulders and an expensive suit, VanBerg's appearance lived up to his reputation. Jerry touched the tips of his fingers to the briefcase next to him as he was preparing to make the switch. He realized he was beginning to sweat. Jerry had heisted many people in his life, and he had shot a few of the people also, but tonight he grew very nervous. In the back of his mind, he kept hearing the tone of Cullen's voice when speaking of VanBerg. Jerry had wished he'd ordered a drink. He swallowed hard, trying to attract saliva to his dry mouth. Maybe Cullen didn't think Jerry would make it back. Maybe Cullen didn't want him back.

No, Jerry thought. He was a professional. A professional heist-man and tonight was no different than all the other times. This was supposed to be the easiest one.

Jerry finally composed himself. He gripped his briefcase and began to slowly slide it forward. VanBerg appeared to be sitting calmly, without a care in the world. Jerry still remembered Cullen and his warnings. Once Jerry had his briefcase next to his, he slowly loosened his grip on one and then grasped the handle of VanBerg's. Jerry slowly leaned back in his seat, bringing VanBerg's million dollar paycheck with him. The audience quickly up roared in laughter and Jerry jumped. He hadn't heard the neither the joke nor the punch line. He faked a smile and a soft chuckle. Once he was fully relaxed in his chair, with the briefcase secured next to him, Jerry patiently waited for a few moments to see what VanBerg would do.

VanBerg sat quietly, with his hands folded on the table. His head slowly moved left to right, scoping out the club. Jerry debated on how long to wait. He figured he had been in the club for a little over twenty minutes. If he moved quietly, or waited for the audience to laugh loudly again, Jerry could sneak out. Then, VanBerg reached down and grabbed that handle on the briefcase. He hesitated for a moment, causing Jerry to panic.

The fake money probably feels lighter than the real stuff, Jerry thought.

Waiting for VanBerg to spin around and shoot him, Jerry wiped the small beads of water dripping down his forehead. Instead, VanBerg stood up, looked around one last time, and walked out the front door with a briefcase full of fake money. Jerry now possessed one million dollars. Jerry waited a few more minutes and then made his way to the Mercedes.

"Mr. Anderson," Jerry said into the cell phone.

"Have you switched the cases?"

"Yes."

"Meet at the restaurant. In the back."

6.

The short five minute ride to the restaurant felt like a cross country trip. Next to Jerry on the front seat of the car was one million dollars. One hundred thousand of it was guaranteed for him. The whole heist seemed to go over too quickly, and too easily. Cullen had made it seem like VanBerg was going to know the entire plan was in gear before Jerry stepped foot in the club. Jerry kept checking his mirrors to make sure there weren't any tails on him. As he pulled into the back of the restaurant, he was completely free and clear of everything.

Jerry walked into the backroom of the restaurant with a wide smile on his face. He no longer was sweating, no longer worried, and couldn't wait to receive his portion of the money. Upon entering the room, he found Cullen Anderson sitting at the end of long black table with his hands folded. Jerry swore he could see a smile trying to form in the corner of the man's mouth. Jerry placed the briefcase on the table.

"It was as easy as I thought," Jerry said still smiling.

"Did he see you?"

"No. He actually stood up and left a few minutes after I made the switch. I got there just in time I guess."

Cullen nodded and spun the briefcase around. He gently pressed the two gold clamps on the front and they popped up with a clicking sound. Cullen slowly lifted the lid of the case. His face quickly turned somber.

"Is this a joke?"

Jerry shrugged his shoulders. He gazed at Cullen's face and knew something was terribly wrong. Cullen took a deep breathe and spun the briefcase around. Jerry's eyes grew wide as he saw the tiny piece of paper in the otherwise empty briefcase.

Empty? he asked himself.

"But I switched them."

Jerry picked up the note.

TRY AGAIN ANDERSON – V

"But how?" Jerry asked.

"You tell me," Cullen said in a quiet voice.

"I don't know."

"STOP IT!" Cullen yelled.

Jerry had never heard Cullen yell before. He quickly jumped back.

"He knows my name, and some how knew this whole heist. I know I didn't screw myself over. How much did he offer you?" Cullen's hands began to shake and his eyes looked as if they were growing evil. His top lip curled and he took heavy, deep breaths.

"Me?"

"How much?" Cullen asked again. "Because no amount of money is worth your life."

Jerry became confused and wished he could stop time and step out of the situation for a moment. It got much worse as Cullen stood up and drew his gun. He pointed directly at Jerry.

"Mr. Anderson, please," Jerry said. He was now sweating again. This wasn't supposed to happen like this, he thought. It was going to be such an easy heist.

"Relax Anderson, it wasn't him," a voice echoed from the doorway.

Cullen abruptly turned and saw one of his waiters standing in the doorway.

"Billy? What do you want?"

"It wasn't him. You filthy scum."

"Who do you think. . ."

"Goodbye," Billy whispered as he slid a pistol out from behind him. He shot Cullen Anderson in the chest two times. Cullen fell back a couple steps, tried to grab his chest, but fell over. He yelled once and it was followed by a terrible silence. Jerry stared at his dead boss, lying on the floor with blood seeping out of his white shirt. Jerry then glanced at the empty briefcase again.

“How?” he muttered out loud.

Jerry looked to the waiter, and Billy pulled the trigger two more times. Jerry felt two hot stings and fell to the ground. He thought of the hundred grand that he was supposed to be walking away with. It was going to be such an easy heist. Those thoughts quickly faded away because Jerry died a few seconds later.