

IS THAT A GUN IN YOUR POCKET

BY CAROL MULLEN

CHARACTERS

JAMES (30s) is a collection agent of sorts; ADAM (30s) is a down-on-his-luck inventor with a \$150,000 debt he cannot afford to pay.

SCENE

The living room of ADAM's apartment

TIME

10:00 PM

(ADAM is sitting at a desk writing a letter. On the desk are three sealed, stamped envelopes. Several crumpled pieces of paper are in and near a wastebasket next to the desk. ADAM is dressed well, as if going out for a special occasion. HE is anxious and checks his watch repeatedly as he writes.)

ADAM: (Reading aloud from the page.) Dear Mom. By the time you read this, I will be dead and, quite possibly, rotting in my apartment. (Crumples up letter in frustration, tosses it on the floor.) Way to soften the blow, Adam. She'll be reaching for the nitro tablets before she even gets to the second sentence. (Reaches for a second sheet of paper, begins writing furiously.) Okay. Let's try this again. More compassion. Less Joan Crawford. (Reads aloud again.) Dearest Mother. I hope you're doing well and that the sciatica hasn't been bothering you too much. I'm writing to tell you that I won't be home for Thanksgiving this year. Or ever again. (Looks up, seems more satisfied.) Now we're getting somewhere. (Begins writing again, reading aloud as HE works.) I've made some bad financial decisions and I'm afraid that the consequences will be dire. (Scans the paper. Disgusted.) Dire. Who says dire? People in Merchant Ivory films. (Scratches out word, writes another one.) Significant. The consequences will be significant. That sounds like I'm being audited. (Scratches out words, writes another one.) Fatal.

(A knock at the door startles ADAM out of his reverie.)

(Sets down paper and pen, stands up slowly, straightens his clothes, and waits at the door.) H...hello.

JAMES: (Through the closed door.) Adam Walker?

JAMES: Yes.

JAMES: I work for Mr. Hampton. I believe you're expecting me.

JAMES: You're early.

JAMES: It's ten o'clock.

JAMES: It's nine fifty-eight.

JAMES: Arriving two minutes early for a scheduled appointment is certainly within the standards of socially acceptable behavior.

JAMES: I'd were a fruit fly, two minutes would be a big chunk of my childhood. Maybe even cut into my early adolescence.

JAMES: Are you?

JAMES: Am I what?

JAMES: A fruit fly.

JAMES: No, but—

JAMES: Then I would strongly suggest that you open the door.

JAMES: But—

JAMES: Adam. I realize this is a difficult situation. But I would urge you not to make it any worse than it already is. I would hate for things to get unnecessarily...messy.

ADAM considers, then opens door reluctantly. Enter JAMES, who is well dressed, wearing tan leather gloves, and carries a small case the size of a laptop computer. The two men check each other out with appreciation.)

JAMES: Points to his watch.) Ten on the dot.

JAMES: Do you want a punctuality prize?

JAMES: Let's get down to business.

JAMES: How about a cup of coffee? Or maybe a drink. I know I could use one. I'm a little hungry. I can whip up some gazpacho.

JAMES: Sets his case on the desk.) You know why I'm here.

JAMES: You're here for the hundred and fifty thousand dollars I owe Mr. Hampton.

JAMES: That's correct.

ADAM: I . . . I don't have it.

JAMES: You don't have all of it?

ADAM: I don't have any of it.

JAMES: I see.

ADAM: Look, I know you're going to kill me. Mr. Hampton was clear that this extension was my last one. So just . . . you know. Go ahead and do it.

JAMES: (*Shrugs, begins opening the case.*) All right.

ADAM: (*Incredulous.*) That's it?

JAMES: (*Stops what he's doing.*) Excuse me?

ADAM: You're going to take my word for it? Isn't there some kind of paperwork to sign? Don't you need to call in and double check with someone? I mean, what if Mr. Hampton has decided to let things slide?

JAMES: (*Continues opening the case.*) He's not the governor. There are no reprieves.

ADAM: What . . . what's in that case?

JAMES: (*Removes a gun from the case, begins attaching a silencer.*) This is my colleague.

ADAM: You're going to shoot me with that? What are you, a Size Queen? You could kill a charging bull with that thing! Don't you have something . . . smaller?

JAMES: This is a one-size-fits-all type of tool.

ADAM: (*Sinks into the couch, stricken.*) There won't be anything left to identify. Thank God the dry cleaner writes my name on the inside of my collars.

JAMES: (*Turns to ADAM, gun in hand.*) Should we do this here, or would you prefer another room?

ADAM: I can't believe it. I'm going to die. I'm really going to die. And all because of fucking Paula Abdul.

JAMES: What are you talking about?

ADAM: I lost a twenty-five-thousand-dollar bet on *American Idol*.

JAMES: You bet on *American Idol*?

ADAM: I was desperate. I hoped I could pull together some of the money I owed Mr. Hampton, so maybe he'd break my legs and we'd call it even.

JAMES: (*Amused.*) Don't tell me. You thought that Mariah Carey wannabe was going all the way.

ADAM: She should have won! I can't believe she was eliminated so early. That bitch Paula. She'll cut you. I wouldn't have figured you for an (*Meaningful pause.*) *American Idol* fan.

JAMES: (*Resigned.*) I've been addicted since day one. I wouldn't have figured you for a gambler.

ADAM: Oh. I'm not. Clearly.

JAMES: But I thought . . .

ADAM: I'm an inventor. I borrowed the money to build prototypes. I thought that once I sold my patents, I'd pay Mr. Hampton back. Unfortunately, the market isn't ready for my waterproof cell phone.

JAMES: A waterproof cell phone?

ADAM: Cell phones are completely portable, right? You can take them anywhere. Except in the water. You're showering or taking a dip in the pool and you hear the phone. You know you're missing a call, but you can't do anything about it. My Wet Chat 1000 would have changed that forever.

JAMES: Why didn't it sell?

ADAM: There was a small glitch, an electric shock kind of thing, but I was working through it. Another few weeks, a little tinkering, and I would have been a millionaire.

JAMES: You said prototypes. Plural.

ADAM: I've also got a great line of glow-in-the-dark items. Toothpaste. Chewing gum. Margarita salt. But as it turns out, there are low-grade traces—and I'm making miniscule, barely measurable amounts—of highly toxic chemicals involved in the phospho-luminescence process.

JAMES: You're still . . . tinkering with those, too?

ADAM: I am. Or . . . I was.