

From Father to Son

By Eli Jacqueline

Joe unlocked the remote, wooden employee-entrance door to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and motioned for Gio to go inside. He followed him in and locked the door behind him. “I don’t wanna go back to the Boston PD to bail you out ever again, you got that?”

“Go ahead, yell at me, ground me, hit me, do whatever. But don’t act like you’re better than me. Your criminal past ain’t no fuckin’ secret,” Gio said.

Joe slapped Gio across his face and caused his head to turn sharply. There was a loud, echoing crack that sounded like the bones in Gio’s neck had snapped. Gio’s eyes watered. He clenched his jaw.

“I *am* better than you. That was a long time ago and I’ve changed. You should do the same. Because no one is gonna be around forever to put up with your shit.”

“Not this stupid speech again.” Gio rolled his eyes.

Joe grabbed Gio by the collar of his t-shirt and pulled him so close that Gio could see the gold molars in Joe’s mouth as he spoke.

“Listen, ya little shit. When I was your age, I pulled off jobs you wouldn’t even dare. I can’t believe you were dumb enough to rob a pharmacy with a cop in the customer line,” Joe said. He laughed to himself, a mean laugh of condescension that hurt Gio more than the hitting and collar grabbing. He let Gio go with a force and Gio stumbled backwards.

“I didn’t know he was a cop!” Gio said. “What jobs did you do that were so fuckin’ great, huh? You’re tellin’ me I should straighten up but you’re still proud of what you did. You’re a hypocrite.”

Joe crossed his arms over his broad chest. A vein in his forehead throbbed. He had half a mind to smack the shit out of the kid again. Instead, he looked around the museum and sighed.

“Come and take a walk with me.”

Joe motioned for Gio to follow him around the museum. Gio dragged his feet along as Joe enthusiastically explained to him the story behind the several blank frames on the walls throughout the museum. “I should have told you this story when I started working here, but you were too young.”

“What story?” Gio asked.

“One night in the nineties, two men pulled off the biggest art heist in history. You think you’re a badass for your petty crimes, but you ain’t got nothin’ on these guys. Over half a billion dollars’ worth of art was stolen and it still hasn’t been found,” Joe said. He told the story with a sort of pride, like he admired the thieves.

“What about the guys?” Gio asked.

Joe smiled. “Never been caught.”

“Who would want to steal art like this? Who would want to steal someone’s joy of looking at a painting?” Gio said.

Joe was certain Gio didn't mean for him to hear that. So, for once, he stayed quiet and let Gio enjoy himself.

The father-son duo continued their unofficial tour of famous stolen artwork until they reached a room known as The Blue Room. That was where the infamous Chez Tortoni by Manet had hung until that fateful night. Gio remembered studying this painting in his advanced art class back in high school, before he stopped going.

"Dad?" Gio asked. He spoke quietly, as if the paintings were asleep and he didn't want to disturb them.

"Yeah?" Joe answered, momentarily distracted. Neither of them took their eyes off the empty frame while they spoke.

"Do you think. . .could you maybe get me a job here?" Gio shuffled his feet and looked down at the floor bashfully.

"Are you serious?"

Gio smiled sheepishly and looked at his untied shoe strings. "I'm thinkin' it could be good." Gio cleared his throat. "As long as I don't have to work with you."

"I'll talk to the boss first thing in the morning." Joe smiled and winked at Gio, who left to go admire more paintings. Before he moved, however, he said one more thing.

"The guys who pulled off that heist. . . I wonder what they're doing now?" Gio left before Joe could answer him.

Joe stared at the empty frame where Chez Tortoni had once resided. His eyes glossed over as if he were going to a faraway place in his mind.

"I know at least one of them is doing just fine."