

Press Me Later

By Hunter Ellis

It rains a lot in Miami. The pulsating ring of my desk phone grabs my attention.

The sound of the newspaper's receptionist enters my ear, "Curtis, there is a woman asking to speak to you. I'll connect you."

"Hello," I say, "This is Curtis Redding of the Miami Herald."

"I am aware of that fact, Mr. Redding," the female voice says, "I have some information pertaining to the Harper Group that might interest you. I can't say anymore over the phone. Can we meet?"

"Lupe's Café on West Bircher Street in thirty minutes. I will be wearing a 'Canes hat," I quickly say.

"Alright."

I move to my coat rack. I'm bored enough to see where this leads. I pull out of the parking deck with ten minutes to spare.

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"You have to believe me, Mr. Redding," the red haired female who looks around thirty-years-old says, "I've been with the Harper Group in public relations since I graduated from college. They were running a legitimate operation until the last few years.

The board has invested lots of money overseas in Dubai real estate. Those markets are too volatile. Harper has lost millions as a result and has been cooking the books since.”

“You didn’t tell me your name,” I say.

“It’s not that easy. There is a lot at stake here for me. I have been receiving your calls for the past few days and I couldn’t ignore your persistence any longer.”

“Kathleen Prescott?” I could hardly keep from spilling my coffee. This woman before me appeared much differently from the perky personality I imagined her to be after leaving a message on her voicemail just hours before. My finger instinctively slips to the large worn button labeled “record” on the tape recorder in my pocket. She hears this.

“I thought you were supposed to inform a source when you wanted to record them,” Kathleen quips.

I pull the tape recorder out of my pocket and explain how I have caught several inaccuracies in Harper’s financial reportings. She listens intently as I slowly compile the evidence I have against the firm.

“You have done your homework. It’s all true,” she says, “I want to help bring this story to fruition.”

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The rain beats down on my kitchen window. Kathleen is helping me make a dinner of Cubano paninis. It isn’t much, but I have grown fond of this meal since taking the

paper job here in Florida. She has brought over new Harper documents this evening. They lie on the countertop.

“They’re almost ready,” I state.

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A cup of freshly poured coffee sits on top of my desk. Inside my cup lies the swirl from the creamer – visibly contrasting with the cloud of smoke curling from my almost finished cigarette. I was told that employees are forbidden from smoking in here. Presently, my feet are propped up on my desk in a manner that my mother would not approve.

It is Tuesday evening. I haven’t been out to a bar for a drink in weeks and even more time has transpired since going to see any film.

Here’s my predicament: I have been stressing for the last thirty-five minutes over a source. Take that back – Kathleen is the source of many feelings for me at the moment. The article displayed on the screen before me is the result of three months of exhaustive research into a national private equity firm, known as The Harper Group. Posting record earnings for Q3 despite the country’s grim economic outlook I had been assigned to uncover their secret.

I find myself lost in thought as I stare across the room at my diploma I earned from the University of Chicago some twenty years ago. The words “Exercise and Sport Science” hold my attention. How did I arrive here?

“How close are you, Curt?” says Rebecca Swank, one of my editors. “You really should stop smoking. My sister says the gum works.”

Snubbing out my cigarette I reply, “I don’t think I can continue writing this story.”

“What makes you feel that way?”

“I think I am in love with one of the sources,” I say.

“How long has this been going on, Curt?”

I explain the dinner meetings with Kathleen that have been occurring with regular frequency. Rebecca seems let down.

“Three months, Curtis?” Rebecca barks, “Yeah, I’d say there is an ethical dilemma here.”

I have nothing to say. I merely stare at the article on my computer monitor. The blinking dash beckoning me to continue.

“How far has your relationship gone?” says Rebecca, “I suppose I could cut you some slack if you haven’t slept with her.”

“Can I get some fresh air?” I say.

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Outside I open a copy of the Herald. Looking over the movie times I decide on one and call Kathleen.

“I need a break from work,” I say, “Want to catch a movie?”

“Sure, but wouldn’t that go against the terms of our relationship?” says Kathleen.

“I’ve saved some money and decided it is time for me to move. Journalism has never excited me.”

“What about the Harper story?” Kathleen says, “You have to publish it.”

“Are you coming to the movie with me or not?”

“No.”

I close the phone and head towards the movie theater.

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Turning the key to my apartment door I notice a slip of paper on the floor. Picking it up I read its contents.

“You were right to give it up for me. They’ve handed your story off to another reporter –much less talented. It is time for a career change for the both of us. Meet me at Lupe’s Café at 11 tonight – we can celebrate the three months since we first met. – Kathleen”

I exhale loudly. I am mentally preparing myself for the move back to the cold and cheering on the Bears. I pour myself a beer and prop my feet on my dining room table in a manner my mother would not approve.