

The Till

Short story by Allison Fine

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Vivienne, not a raving slut but the wife of a man who ran the numbers, kept the till. His run was up and the shop she owned in Edinburgh was in her name. She'd been planning to divorce the sot for some time now anyway, and he'd been playing with girls on the side. Beautiful red-haired Liverpool girl though she was, Vivienne lost her parents young and had to fend for herself at fifteen. With six older brothers and sisters who didn't give a rat's ass for her well being, Vivienne was determined to use her beauty, her guts and her smarts not to end up a broken woman. The guts and beauty wouldn't last, but the smarts got her through some things. That was later on.

Horace, looking like an East-end pimp in an excrement-colored polyester suit with some garish flowered shirt he'd picked up at the flea market came into the shop all burnished with the sun and some new tart he'd found on Moncur Street.

-Whatsup up you old goat?

-Come oan, get affa—you aff your heid! he said and reached his arm round the counter to the till. She slammed the door shut.

-Git your fucking hands outta me till, she told him. She stood five foot nine--as tall as him. He planned to round the counter to her side but she blocked his way.

-I bought you penny and pound, you bitch.

-Go back to your sluts on Moncur and fucking shut it.

He swung his arm across her face to backhand her but she caught the arm in mid air and shoved him halfway across the floor.

The shop was a beautiful little place with feather boas, original and fake art in gilded frames and other things: glass bowls, china, woolens from Ireland. Vivienne was an art dealer, but she sold the other knick-knacks to keep the customers happy. She been to Slade Art School in London but deserted the place when Horace came round and courted her and she hated the art classes anyway. All that classical stuff left her cold and she didn't want to do Life Painting to save your life. All she wanted was money.

-You're like a fucking circus animal, she told him. Now git! You arse bandit!

-I want what's mine.

-None o' this is yers you know that.

-My money put up the shop.

-Fuck. Yer brother's.

Horace shook his spindly spider legs. He looked ragged like a turkey on the way to being slaughtered. Maybe he was a monkey on a chain, but he'd be damned if he was her money. He began to whistle a filthy tune he picked up on the street.

-Yer all fur coat and no knickers, he told her. Argy bargy! Argy bargy! he sang it like song.

-And yer all mouth and no trousers.

-Argy bargy! Argy bargy!

-Arse-lick! she shouted to get him to stop. The bell over the door rang and two young schoolgirls came into the shop.

-Halloo! Vivienne called in her best Liverpool sing-song over-the-fence voice.

-Hello, the girls said in unison, She'd have to come out from behind and keep an eye out because the schoolgirls were the worst for stealing, the scouffers.

When Vivienne came out from behind, Horace ran back, pulled the key for the till, grabbed a wad of bills, stuck them in his pants, smiled a self-satisfied grin full of sweet music and pennies—the grin that got her into bed in the first place, and then swaggered with his shit-colored clothes out the door.

The little bell rang its sweet diminutive sound, but it was not the sound of money coming in, it was the sound of Horace robbing the till blind and leaving her with Mary Palm and her five sisters—meaning nought but her own hand to make herself sweet with. All she had now was what was in her purse and the fiver she stuck behind the toilet tank.

-Bloody hell, she thought, I shall have to sell the shop.

The young girls pocketed some lovely glass bead necklaces while Vivienne tried to close the door of the broken till. She couldn't talk for the tearing up in her eyes, and the feeling that a stone sat inside of her stomach right at the bottom of it all. If only she could stretch out on the green grass and let the tears come down like water, like rain! If only!