



JURY RIG: “OFFICE” EXCERPT

BY KOREY KAUL

Ron Tittleton held his breath as he pressed his ear up against the door leading out of his office. Exhaling slowly, he heard nothing and walked back to his desk. Three stacks of papers sat on the old mahogany partners’ desk he’d inherited with the office. Cora Cole, whom he’d also inherited with the office, lurked somewhere on the other side of the door.

The mantle clock on the credenza chimed half past the hour. Four-thirty. On Saturdays Cora usually left by four. Before she left, she always came in and, under the pretense of asking if he needed her to stay late, give him excruciatingly detailed updates of her hillbilly clan’s soap opera lives. He had not seen her since two.

Ron had lost track of time prepping for the Stiltson case and panicked when the clock chimed four o’clock, his own personal midnight. Turning to the window, he eyeballed the small ledge just outside. His office sat twenty-six floors above downtown Kansas City. Although he thought of himself as slender, he probably was still too big to inch his way over to Rosenbaum’s office. He stood up to open the window and get a better look when the door opened. Cora walked in, carrying a stack of papers.

“Mr. Tonetti had the Stiltson depositions copied.” She smiled at him and made a fourth pile on the desk. He smiled back at her and sat down, concentrating intently on the printout of a case that happened to be lying on his desk.

Do not look up, he thought. Cora would sit and talk for hours if he was not busy, but she respected his time when he was working. If he kept staring at this case, she would leave. If he looked up, he would have to talk to her.

Cora bore a situational and physical resemblance to his mother back in Montana. Both in their mid-fifties. Both short and frumpy. Both left alone and pregnant thirty-some years ago.

“Mr. Tittleton?” Cora asked. Ron kept his head down. It would only be for a few more minutes. “I’m afraid I’m going to have to take the next couple days off. I’ve lined up a temp.”

He continued to stare down at the case and said, “That will be fine.” If he did

not say another word, she would walk out and not come back for two glorious days. Must. Not. Look. Up.

He looked up. He saw it in her eyes. She wanted him to ask. He had to ask.

“Is everything all right?” he asked, hoping against all odds she would say, “Oh, yes, I just need a couple of days.”

“Oh, no,” she said. “You know my brother Herman, the butcher?”

“Herman, sure,” Ron said, perking up a bit. Herman the Butcher’s annual hunting/drinking/stripper excursions into western Kansas were the few interesting, if most disturbing, stories Cora shared about her family. He always liked a good Herman story.

“He’s got the finger cancer.” Cora’s shoulders slumped as her head listed over to the left.

“You mean skin cancer?” Ron asked, immediately regretting it.

“No, it’s the finger cancer. It runs in our family.”

This was the way it always happened. He tried not to get sucked into Cora’s world. Then, he would hear a little and the stories became so bizarre he had to hear the whole thing. “Finger cancer runs in your family?”

“Oh, yeah. My daddy had it and my Uncle Mike.” Her face brightened a little. “They caught it early with Herman, though. He’s probably just going to lose the two middle fingers on his right hand. It hasn’t spread to the thumb yet. That’s the real fear with the finger cancer.”

Ron, at a loss for words, muttered, “That’s great.”

“Yeah, but Herman’s real upset. Thirty-six years as a butcher and he never lost a finger. He was always real proud of that. He used to say, ‘A butcher with all his fingers is a butcher who pays attention to details.’ Then he would wiggle all his fingers to show he was a detail person.” Cora wiggled the fingers on her right hand. “Now, he thinks everyone will think he’s just another butcher who got careless and cut off his fingers.” She pulled her middle and ring fingers down to her palm and wiggled the other two.

“We’d even talked about, when he retires in a couple of years, getting a couple of cakes shaped like hands. You know, with all the fingers.” Up popped the middle and ring fingers. “But, I guess that’s out now.”

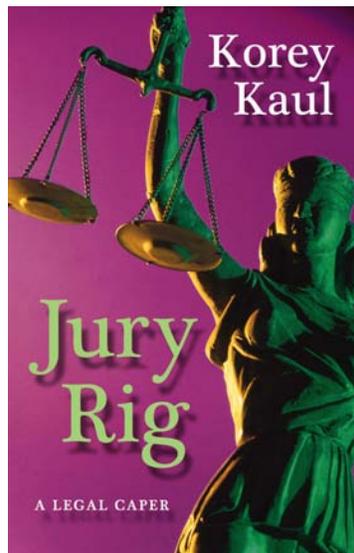
Ron let the image waft through his mind of Cora’s family ceremoniously lopping off Herman’s cake fingers. “You just take as much time as you need.”

“Oh, I’ll be back on Wednesday. I know we’ve got the Stiltson trial coming up.

But I think Herman needs the family there after the surgery. He's going in tomorrow."

"Wish him good luck for me."

"That'll mean a lot to him." Cora nodded her head and closed the door as she walked out.



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