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Twelve Weeks of Ice Cubes: A Short Story

*Rhys Evans*

Lucien worked from home. Just like all good business men. Except, this wasn't a family enterprise run for centuries in a roaming place such as Wyoming, nor a palatial waste treatment plant in New Jersey. No. Lucien ran a photocopier business. Nothing wrong with this, many successful entrepreneurs had to start somewhere. Though, to contact Lucien, for diligent expert advice on photocopiers, meant you had to ring Token Springs Motel, Highway 11, in Virginia. And ask for room number 12.

Lucien ran his enterprise from room number 12. He had been doing so for twelve weeks. Twelve weeks of ice cubes, tooth picks and late night television. A recent sitcom that had spun Lucien out of control was 'Dog.' 'Dog' was a show about cats that alluded to a growing undercurrent beneath Uganda that would be detrimental to the state of cows on the Shetland Islands. No, 'Dog' was about...Dogs. Show dogs, working dogs, dogs that saved those trapped in mines, every ilk of reverie with dogs that could be imagined.

Late at night, Lucien would lie on top of the made up bed (he never slept under blankets) and whistled. Whistling allowed him to fashion a form of company that had evaded him for some time. The evasion was caused by photocopiers.

Lucien ran a photocopier firm, yet didn't really. Sure he had the brochures, the knowledge (abundant sheets of paper printed from the computer at the local internet café). Enquiries had been made by a number of people. The thing was Lucien didn't have any photocopiers: simple as that. In week three of his residency at Token Springs, he had attempted, unsuccessfully, to coerce a partnership with a major photocopier company in Washington. Lucien plodded on, loosely, dishing

out advice over the phone to owners of broken photocopiers, direct from his downloaded research.

Yesterday, a call came through from New York. That was a first for Lucien. He sat up to take the call (another first), kicking away an empty bottle of Jack Daniels with his foot that had a sock on. The caller from New York was a young woman, going by the name of Kate Jackson. She said she was a business student at college and needed to research a small business as a project.

For effect, Lucien feigned uncertainty and then agreed to let her follow him around wholesale. This delivery was straight from the amateur dramatics society of yore. She informed him that she would be with him in three days. At this point, Lucien was enraptured nay enchanted to the thought that someone would want to follow him around for a week. Goodly, thought he, and he scratched his back and moved to his work space, a makeshift desk on top of his drawers.

Kate Jackson was not a business student. She did, however, have a project on her mind when she contacted Lucien. Kate studied English in NYU. Due to a poor eighteen months, Kate had been given one more chance to scavenge a future at the university. A professor of Kate's had noted her ability early on and nurtured her roving literary eye. But, due to a wandering mind in a city of fortune, Kate had drifted. This project had a working title of 'Why Who We Are Is What We Do.' Professors knew this was a straight forward exercise - one fairly rudimentary for Kate's prodigious writing skills.

Though, as usual, Kate wasn't going to carry out a task, or essay, or project in a simple medium. After a dare from a friend, she was going to try and gain access to her subject's bank card for one night.

The subject had not taken too long to locate. After a few, frank phone calls to relatives in Virginia they pointed her in the direction of a new character in town selling photocopiers, Lucien Twellmen. Arrangements were made to stay with Aunt Rose. Oh, Aunt Rose. The poor dear was 98 and lived in a trailer park. So three days after their talk, Kate departed New York on Grey Hound bus for the haul to Virginia.

At roughly the same moment, Lucien was busy tidying his motel room up. This action slowly diminished as a re-run of 'Dog' appeared on the muted television set. Like the whistling, the television, be it on, off or muted provided a constant hum that was like a wife to Lucien. He now settled down on his bed and drifted into a stupor that lasted until the knock of a door.

Standing there in the autumn dusk was Kate. An odd silence flitted through the air. The required pleasantries were exchanged. Kate slinked in. Lucien bumbled something about coffee and retreated to his en suite bathroom. Kate did not dare place her bag on the floor.

Over the next few days, the pair met at the same place, Shenandoah National Park. Lucien liked the fresh air, Kate felt uncertain in his company in a wild forest like Shenandoah. Notes were taken. Lucien became the consummate professional. He dictated as to how the National Park was so similar to the photocopying industry and the like. This spouted nonsense furthered Kate's sad and longing depiction of a man clearly lost in a maze that was simply too complicated.

Lucien feared his rhetoric would be ruined if he remained in room number 12, hence the sojourns to the Park. He was amazed that he had managed to fool Kate through the majority of the week. In truth, Kate figured out the business pursuit was a sham the minute she walked in to the motel room.