

AN INSTRUMENT OF DECEIT

by

Kristin Steinmetz

ksteinmetz@hotmail.com 917-837-9114

I'm from Brooklyn, NY but have lived in Mountainside, New Jersey for the last decade or so. I went to school for film studies & production and sociology, but I make my living at my second career, American Sign Language Interpreting. I have never written a script for the stage, but I love taking pictures and staying creative. I have two daughters, the actress and artist Scarlet, 10, & and the equestrian Liv, 12, and I've been married to my husband for almost 17 years.

What's keeping me positive during this pandemic is focusing on my health - taking yoga and going on trail runs. I also work as a CASA volunteer and keeping myself focused on what I have and what I can give to others not as fortunate helps my mindset.

You may publish this.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Kal: serious and practical, the street smart partner that works with their hands

Jess: yin to their yang, whimsical and emotional, book smart but slightly ditzy

A newlywed couple in their late-twenties.

(Open to interpretation, they can be cast as a same sex couple and them/they pronouns have been used)

SETTING:

A recently purchased home in Brooklyn. A beautiful old brick house, a little dated but in solid condition, attached on both sides. Not quite a brownstone, but a neat 2 story home on a quiet, tree lined street.

Present Day. The first week of their marriage as they move in and renovate their new home and adjust to their new arrangement.

SCENE 1

EXT HOUSE, EVENING

We are on the makeshift porch of the house our couple recently bought and moved into. They happily sit side by side on the top step next to an open champagne bottle and toast with their solo cups.

JESS

We did it. All that hard work.

KAL

(chuckles) Hard work? Oh man, you've got no idea what we've got in store for us. You think dealing with that realtor was hell? Wait until we have to peel off that 40 year old wall paper.

JESS

I know, I know. It'll be fun though! I'm bummed we don't have the money for a proper honeymoon, but I'm excited to be your assistant for the next couple weeks!

KAL

Are you sure about that? Do you even know the difference between a Phillips and a flathead?

JESS

(sarcastic) Like, are those retro hairstyles?

KAL reacts in mock triumph. They both chuckle.

JESS

I know I'm not as handy as you, but you know I'm a fast learner. And I'm definitely the better driver so I can make quick runs to Home Depot and Starbucks for all our tool and/or caffeine needs.

KAL

Deal!

JESS

I just can't believe it's OURS! After spending a year in different states, we can finally live in the same city, the same house! I'm so excited. (sarcastic) And not at all nervous.

KAL

Ha! Nervous? Why? We've lived together before.

JESS

I know, but that was over a year ago. And that didn't count. We were kids then.

KAL

Kids? A year ago? And now?

JESS

Adults! Like full-on people. With bills, and a mortgage! And health insurance. We're "offish".

KAL

Offish? You're "offish"-ially nuts. We'll be fine.

JESS

(smiling while trying to convince themselves) We'll be fine! Yes. No. We'll be great!!

KAL

(nodding, but straight-faced) We'll be great.

The couple kisses on their new porch as the sun sets on their first day as homeowners.

SCENE 2

NEXT DAY - BEDROOM, MORNING

Dressed in overalls and an uncharacteristic baseball hat, JESS is fully caffeinated and ready to be the world's best, and most clueless, handyman's assistant. What JESS lacks in experience, they make up for in enthusiasm. KAL, more practically dressed, is also ready to attack the first project.

KAL

Ok, easy first day. Demo! Let's start by pulling up this nasty rug.

JESS doesn't hear the first simple instructions of the day and is standing by the bed opening a dusty, old, black instrument case.

KAL

Babe! I need your help.

KAL starts struggling with the corner of the carpet by the closet.

JESS

Did you play this trombone?

KAL

What? (turns around to see their distracted spouse) Trumpet. Yes.

JESS

I can't believe I didn't know you played an instrument.

JESS picks up the instrument and blows in the mouthpiece, producing nothing but a raspberry with their mouth.

KAL

I also played french horn. And mellophone.

JESS

What?! I can't believe I didn't know this. I mean, I've never even heard of a mellophone. Like how long?

KAL is struggling with the carpet with their head half way in the closet.

KAL

What?

JESS

How long did you play those instruments?

KAL

(partly amused and partly frustrated by the line of questioning) I don't know. It was in high school, like a million years ago.

JESS

(interested but slightly hurt realizing they didn't have this piece of the puzzle before the wedding) Were you in a band? Like a ska band?!

JESS mimics the up and down movement of the horn section of the ska bands of the early 2000s.

KAL

No, but I was in THE band. The marching band. I even went to band camp.

JESS

(slightly panicked) What?! I feel like I don't even know you! How can we be married and own a house and, like, I don't even know you play 3 instruments. And that you were probably a giant geek, by the way. (genuinely hurt) Why didn't you ever tell me?

KAL

(feeling like they have to defend themselves even though their only crime is being a band geek) Because it's not really my thing anymore. Obviously. I don't even know if I can even still read music. I mean, I'm not even sure why we have that. I think my mom brought it over when she was cleaning out her basement.

JESS

(starting to tear up) I mean, ok. I'm sure you don't know all my deep, dark secrets. I mean, that's ok, right. Like, it's good to have some mystery. Like it's ok that I didn't know you played not one, but three, instruments and wore, like, a cute little costume, and...

KAL

Uniform. Not costume. Blue with gold lapels. And very itchy pants that were hot as hell in the summer and that I washed maybe once a year. (smirks as they walk over to their adorably fragile partner) Sweetie, I can show you pictures next time we go to Long Island?

JESS walks over and gives KAL a hug.

JESS

I'm sorry, I don't know why I'm getting so upset. I just don't like the idea of us having secrets.

KAL

No, sweetie. No secrets. But we do have pasts. And we've only known each other for, what, a fifth of our lives. We'll learn everything there is to know. We've got plenty of time.

JESS

Ok. (pausing to collect themselves) I know. Sorry. I was being silly.

KAL

I know what you need.

JESS

Sparkling rosé?

KAL

It's 9 in the morning.

JESS

(nodding and smirking in their adorable way, mood swinging completely the other way)
Mm-hmm.

KAL

Later. After lunch. But first...

KAL walks over to grab their phone. They adjust the bluetooth speaker on the dresser amidst the boxes and other evidence of their recent move. Music starts to play. They smile at each other as JESS recognizes the tune. "Life is Better with You" by Michael Franti plays. Their wedding song that they danced to, in quite the untraditional way, only 4 days ago. They bop around a bit, then throw in some choreography.

When the song finishes, they look at each other holding hands. JESS takes a breath signaling that they feel better and are ready to get to work. KAL kisses JESS on the nose.

KAL

Wanna get me a box cutter?

JESS

Yes!! I can do that, I know what that is. And that would be in the...

KAL

Box downstairs labeled “small tools”.

JESS

Got it!

JESS runs out of the room, finger in the air and excited to be of assistance.

KAL goes back towards the closet and starts to pull up a loose corner of the carpet. We hear the staples start to pop and KAL exerts effort pulling up the old, dirty carpet on their own. Something is uncovered. KAL takes a closer look, then looks at the door, then quickly back to the newly exposed treasure. KAL picks up a tight pile of bills secured with a rubber band, which promptly snaps with age, causing KAL to jump slightly with surprise. KAL starts to count the old bills.

JESS (OS)

(shouting from downstairs) In the living room?

KAL

(startled and slightly flustered) Um, yeah. I mean, no. In the kitchen, by the garage door.

JESS (OS)

How do I get the box open if I don't have the box cutter?

KAL is distracted and bumbles deciding what to do with the newfound treasure. KAL hurriedly puts the wad in the back of their pants just as JESS reenters the room.

JESS

I don't know, babe. I can't get it open.

KAL

It's ok, sweetie. It's so old it's coming up real easy, look.

JESS

Oh good!

JESS crouches down and starts to help KAL pull up the carpet cheerfully.

SCENE 3

EVENING, EXT HOUSE

The couple sits exhausted, but satisfied, after a long day of demo in their new love nest. A bottle of rosé sits between them.

KAL

So sushi or pizza?

JESS

Depends. Am I back to eating carbs after the wedding?

KAL

(confused) You've been DRINKING carbs.

JESS

(sipping their drink, unaware of the connection) Yeah.

KAL

Then yes?

JESS

Then pepperoni/jalapeño AND garlic knots, please. (standing up) You pay and I'll call to order?

KAL

Deal!

JESS

That's another thing on our list before we go back to work, by the way. We have to go to the bank and close our individual accounts.

KAL

Ugh, I hate the bank.

JESS

I know! But we'll never have time once I start my new schedule at the hospital and I think it's important that we start sharing our expenses ASAP. (gesturing to the house) Exhibit A. The

mortgage is in both our names, so we should get used to sharing EVERYthing. (teasing and poking KAL with their fingers)

KAL

(unamused and reluctant) Yup. I know you're right.

JESS

(disheartened) Is this about the bank? Cause it's so archaic, I know. I'm sure there are ways we can do everything online now.

KAL

Yeah. I mean, it's fine. We can go to the bank or do it online. Whatever.

JESS

Babe...

KAL

(snapping out of it) So, pizza! And garlic knots. I'm starving.

JESS

I feel like you're deflecting. Is this about...(tearing up and obviously out of tune with the real issue at hand) the tiles for the backsplash again?

KAL

(taken aback by their lack of awareness) No, babe. I'm hungry. You know how I get...

JESS

(interrupts)...when you're hungry and tired. I know, of course I know. Because I KNOW you (satisfied). I'm ordering!! (skips inside to get their phone)

(OS) (yells) Card or cash?

KAL

(takes a beat) Cash.