

CAREER THIEF

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AND

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A Note from the authors. We wrote and published this book in a new style of writing. We dare to be bold. Who says we have to follow the conventional norms of writing and publishing a book? Enjoy!

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PROLOGUE

BOOM! A jolt. A thud.

I felt my heart stop. Lying on the floor was a man, face down. Blood was starting to pool on the floor around his head. I had just blown his face off. His brains were splattered all over the wall.

I looked down at my hands, not believing what had just happened, what I'd done. The gun, a Desert Eagle .50 caliber with a flat black barrel and custom rubberized grip, looked like some alien piece of technology, something poisonous. I had carried it for years. It was big and had felt good in my hands. I had practiced firing it at the abandoned quarry outside of town hundreds of times, but in all that time, I'd never imagined actually killing someone. Thoughts flashed into my brain like machine gunfire. Now what? It was him or me....what else could I have done?....Now what do I do?

Ooh, man, I just pissed the rest of my life away. My eyes turned to the body, and my thoughts turned to my past, the really big question. How did I get here?

CHAPTER ONE

My name is Malefic. I was born in Little Rock, Arkansas. I am of Russian descent; first generation American. My family moved here shortly before I was born.

My grandfather hated Americans. He harbored bitter feelings from when they abandoned his people and left them to fend for themselves during the great war. If not for their thick skin and resilience to the bitter cold, the Germans would have defeated them. If the Germans would have kept coming though, I'm sure that my people would have fought to the last person—man, woman, or child.

We Russians are not a timid people.

My grandfather beat this into my father, and my father made it a point to try to beat it into me.

I was a small child, so I was picked on a lot. I would get beat on by the kids at school, and then when I got home, I'd be beaten again by my father for allowing those kids to beat me.

I hated going to school. I hated going home. I had no friends. Even the girls picked on me.

When it was discovered that I was Russian, kids started calling me Ruskie, and Commie, and other names I won't mention.

For some reason, Americans hated Russians, just as much as my grandfather hated them. How could two countries that were allies in a war hate each other so much? It just didn't make any sense to me.

Either way, I was the poor little innocent kid, caught in the middle of it all.

As I said before, I didn't have any friends. What I did have was a dog. He was better than any kid could have had.

Old man Jones, who lived down the street from us, had some puppies, and he was giving them away. When I got there, there was only one left, the runt of the litter, the one no one else wanted. But I wanted him. I did.

I loved that dog the instant I saw him.

I named him Tiny.

My dad hated Tiny. He called him a worthless mutt. He even kicked him a few times. Only a few times though, because Tiny was smart. He learned quickly to stay away from my dad.

Man, my dad was such a mean and miserable man. How could he be so cruel to such a precious little dog? It didn't make any sense.

Sure, he beat on me, but I just figured it was my own dumb fault for being so small. I wasn't the big strong boy that my dad should have had. Plus, I was so uncoordinated. I was always bumping into things and breaking things. I never watched where I was going.

It was hard for me to concentrate. Even in school, I had a difficult time. I had problems understanding things. The teachers always thought that I was clowning. They were always sending me home with notes, telling my parents that I wasn't working up to my potential. Of course, this was just another reason for dad to beat me. After a while, I started forging dad's signature to return the notes to the teachers.

As I said, the teachers thought I was clowning, but I wasn't. My grades were just one more thing for the kids to pick on me about. That was alright though, because I didn't need any of them. I had Tiny.

I loved Tiny, and Tiny loved me. Tiny was my best friend. We were inseparable.

Our house bordered the woods, and Tiny and I would spend hours traipsing through them. I would pretend to be a warrior king, and Tiny was one of my many loyal subjects.

I fancied myself a good king, and that my subjects served me out of their love and admiration for me, a great escape

from reality. Tiny and I had a lot of fun.

Unfortunately for Tiny, he had to sleep outside. My father refused to let him in the house. As I mentioned before, he thought the dog to be of even lesser value than me. That lesson was pounded into me when we moved from Little Rock to Dumas, Arkansas, and my dad made me leave Tiny behind.

When we had everything packed and ready to go, I was carrying Tiny to the car when dad stopped me, picked Tiny out of my hands and tied him to the tree in our front yard. When I started to protest, my dad looked at me with that look he got in his eyes, the look I knew meant trouble was coming, and told me that if I said one word about that stupid mutt, if he heard one sound coming from my mouth, he would really let me have it. I believed him.

As we made our final descent down the long gravel drive toward the street and to a new city, I watched out the back window as Tiny tried to follow us. He was nearly choking himself, jumping and tugging for dear life trying to break free from the rope. I could hear him calling to me, "Where are you going? Don't leave me! Hey, my friend, why are you leaving me?" I answered him in my mind, screaming back to him, "I'm sorry....I am soooo sorry my friend." The tears poured down my cheeks and blurred my vision until I couldn't see him anymore.

Something happened to me that August morning. I felt something move and shift inside me. A part of me was left there on the driveway. A part of me died that morning.

CHAPTER TWO

So, the next chapter of my life began in Dumas. Things were a little bit different there. I learned a few things from my old school. I didn't speak much.

The teachers just assumed I was slow. The kids, for the most part, thought I was unsocial and just left me alone. Of course, this time, I didn't tell anyone that I was Russian.

That year, fifth grade, was pretty much a blur. I was still trying to get over the loss of my friend. I made no attempts to make any new friends.

At the beginning of my sixth grade year, we had to write an essay about our summer vacation, and also tell a little bit about our family. As I was reading my paper in front of the class, the teacher picked up on my accent. She asked where my people were from. I sure as hell wasn't going to tell her they were from Russia, so I picked a country that was close by. I told her that they were from Poland.

That started a few chuckles and sneers. The next thing I know, I'm the school idiot. Out came all the Polish jokes and I became the butt of them all. Once again, I was pushed further away from my peers and deeper into a world of my own.

There was a wooded area close to our home where I had

many new adventures. Tiny was with me there, not physically but in spirit, and together we would storm places, conquer villains, and some days, we even saved the world.

In school, I am called a retard, a Pollock, but in my world, I am the emperor supreme. My world is a better place.

The moment school is over I race home to do my chores. I try to finish them quickly, then eat dinner and leave before my dad gets home. If he gets home and I am there, it's pretty certain that he will find a reason to hit me, so I do my best to leave before he gets there.

He hits my mom, too, so she understands why I hurry to get out of there. She always covers for me by telling him that I am studying over at a friend's house. Of course, if he knew I had friends, he'd beat me just on principle, saying that it was to encourage me to try harder. How ironic life can be!

I do my homework in the woods. I do pretty much everything in the woods. It has become my home away from home.

The interesting thing about the woods is that they bordered up to the backs of many different houses. One of my favorite past times was to go to the edge of tree lines and to watch other families as they went about their lives. I would find a good vantage point where I could get

comfortable and not worry about being seen, usually a patch of Ivy or some thick bushes. Sometimes, I get up into a tree.

I became an excellent tree climber. I got to where I could scurry up a tree almost as fast as a squirrel. I even started jumping from tree to tree, and when I built up my confidence, from trees onto roofs of houses.

From the tops of houses, I would sneak in through an upstairs window while an entire family was downstairs having dinner or watching television.

On school nights, I had to be home before the street lights came on, but on Friday and Saturday nights, I had no curfew. Sometimes, I would ask my mom if I could spend the night at a friend's and then I would go exploring. When I was tired, I would sleep in the woods. When it rained, I would end up sleeping in someone's tool shed. There were plenty to choose from.

I never had any problems with any of the dogs in the neighborhood. They got so used to me that they would get happy when they saw me. Of course, I made it a point to always have some treats on me.

I ended up spending most of my weekend that way, prowling the woods and sneaking into homes in my neighborhood.

I came close to being seen a few times. There were a few nights where I had to spend the whole evening under a bed or crouched down in the back of a closet, my heart pounding in my bony little chest and my body shivering in fear.

Because of these incidents, I soon developed a keen sense of awareness of my surroundings and learned to be very patient.

As time passed, I ventured out from my little neighborhood into the surrounding suburbs and eventually into the city of Dumas itself.

Late at night, I would climb on buildings; department stores, office buildings, apartment complexes, any type of building that I could find. I figured out all kinds of ways to get in and out of those buildings. It made me feel like a big shot.

I imagined myself to be the owner or manager of the place, coming and going as I pleased. I felt pretty special.

I failed to mention this earlier, but my father was an alcoholic and had trouble keeping a job, so we were really poor, and so, having access to all these buildings and homes, it just seemed to reason that in no time, things would stick to my hands.

At first, I would play jokes on people. I would just move things around so they would they would think they were losing their minds. You know, moving keys that was hanging on hooks in their kitchen and then laying them on the roof of their cars. Or, leaving a freezer door open so that by morning, everything inside was melted.

Soon however, the pranks stopped. I graduated to stealing things.

I started out taking small things: video games and DVD's. It only took me a little while after that cash and other items were of more value: Jewelry, video games, cell phones, etc...

If, while I was prowling around inside a house at night and came upon a safe, I would rig a window so I could get back in, leave everything in the house alone, then come back later when the house was empty.

Through trial and error, I figured out that I could pry the cover plate off of an electric safe and short it out. When the safe shorts out, it automatically pops open to keep from being permanently closed and locking the person's valuables in there forever. It just pops right open. Nice!

The video games and DVD's were pretty easy to get rid of—if they were new, I'd take them to the store and get store credit or sometimes cash, and if they were used I would take them to a guy who sold stuff at a flea market in

the next town over. I had met him when mom and I had gone there one weekend to get me some clothes. Dad had kept his job for three months (a record!) and mom was making a little extra money working as a part-time maid three days a week for some rich people across town.

As for the jewelry, I didn't really know where to sell it. I had gone to a pawnshop once, but they wouldn't accept anything from a kid my age. The guy at the flea market turned me down too. He didn't want to deal with jewelry at all.

So, needless to say, I began to accumulate quite a bit of it. Since I couldn't sell it, I ended up stashing it in a hiding place in the woods.

Still, I had a steady flow of cash and goods coming in and as important as I had become in my delusional mind, I was getting picked on and made fun of in school on a regular basis.

My dad's constant insults and beatings didn't help either. My self-esteem was very low. But that was soon to change.

One night, while I was out prowling I came upon a business. It had been there the whole time, but I had overlooked it because I had not thought it had anything of value inside. How wrong I was!

It was a martial arts school.

The sign in the window read, "Are you tired of being bullied? Do you lack confidence? We can help you!" Wow. That sounded like exactly what I needed.

Now, I knew my dad would never pay for something like that. I could afford it, but then I could never explain to him how I'd paid for it. What a dilemma!

I decided I would talk to the teacher/instructor.

He was an old Asian guy, maybe forty or forty-five. Not really old, but since I was twelve, anything over thirty was pretty much almost in the grave. He was very short, maybe a few inches over five feet; about six inches taller than I was at the time. I almost walked out when I first saw him, but I sensed something in him, a confidence and inner strength that I'd never encountered before.

I told him that my mother could pay for the class, but that my father could never know about it. I said that I could tell my dad that I was getting lessons in exchange for cleaning the gym.

Well, the instructor, Mr. Tanaka, immediately saw my need, and it turned out that he did need someone to help clean up the place. He offered to give me a discount: half off the regular price.

Of course, I jumped at the offer and again told him that he could never mention our arrangement to my father, that it would get my mother in a lot of trouble. He agreed. When he shook my hand my confidence went up a little. His hand felt as hard as a rock. I went home feeling pretty happy that afternoon. I couldn't wait to tell my dad that I had worked out a deal to clean the dojo in exchange for lessons. I was sure he would think that I had done well.

His response wasn't what I had expected.

"Who would give a job to a twelve year old," he asked me. I told him I wasn't getting paid, that I was working in exchange for lessons. Then he asked me why I couldn't find a job that paid real money so that I could help around the house. Then he upended his beer into his mouth, crushed the can and dropped it at my feet. He belched real loud and cracked open another beer from the case sitting in the cooler by the side of his chair and proceeded to ignore me.

The thoughts that flooded my head at the moment! I would have loved to have told him that I was just a kid you drunken idiot. I couldn't work legally, and he could have had enough money to give us a more stable life if he didn't drink it all up.

But of course, I didn't say all that, for fear he might not only beat me up, but also forbid me from going to the dojo.

That night I stayed inside and tried to get as much rest as I could for my first day of class. But wouldn't you know it, I was so excited I couldn't sleep a wink. It was a long, tiresome night, but morning finally came.

CHAPTER THREE

School was its' usual boring self, and seemed to take forever. When it was over, I still had to race home to do my chores and eat. I wolfed down a small meal without chewing much and rushed out the door, yelling good bye to mom as the door was closing.

I got to the dojo before anyone else had arrived. Mr. Tanaka showed me what he wanted me to do as regarded to my cleaning duties. It was a lot more than I expected.

I paid him the half of the money that I owed and I started cleaning as the students started coming in. They were all around my age, and I didn't recognize anyone from my school, for which I was extremely grateful.

Mr. Tanaka had already given me my new uniform and I was already wearing it while cleaning. When all of the students had arrived and Mr. Tanaka indicated the class was going to start, I joined them.'

I was nervous to start with, but calmed down as we stretched, then moved into the calisthenics; push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks and so forth.

When we were done with all of those, Mr. Tanaka got one of the students, gave him a large, thick, foam pad to hold then started to kick it. I could imagine the damage that his

foot could do to someone's body.

He called the kick a round-house kick, and each time he struck the pad, his foot made a loud popping sound and man, he really moved the kid holding the pad.

After a few minutes of demonstrating the kick, he paired each of us off and had us taking turns to practice the kick. So far I thought the class was pretty cool. I struggled with the kick, but no one seemed to care. There was no berating or ridicule. I was starting to feel pretty good.

After practicing the kick and about a half dozen other techniques, Mr. Tanaka announced that it was time for sparring. He said that since this school was teaching a fighting style and not for competitions, that the main emphasis would be on actual fighting.

He went on to say that everything we learned could be used to defend ourselves, and that a good defense included a strong offense.

Staying with our same partners, we were told to begin sparring and to be careful to watch the face and groin shots.

Well, I had no clue as to what he was talking about. I had never really been in a fight before. I had always run away from the bullies at school, and of course my dad was too big and strong for me to fight against.

So, for the next hour, one classmate or another

proceeded to beat the hell out of me. When one of them was done, Mr. Tanaka would yell, 'Time,' and we would switch partners.

There were no gloves, no padding in our uniforms. It was just bare knuckles and feet beating on my bony flesh till I was good and tenderized, till I was black and blue.

I left there that night sure that I was done with that mess. There was no way I was going to pay someone for that abuse! I could pretty much get that at home for free. I was really angry.

As I got closer to home though, my anger cooled and I started to worry. How was I going to tell my dad that I was going to quit after only one day? If I told him it was too hard, he would beat me with his words as well as his hands.

I could try to lie to him, to tell him that the teacher really didn't need me after all, but what if he called Mr. Tanaka? With his drinking he was so unpredictable. And, if I just pretended to go and he tested me and found out, he might just kill me after agreeing to let me go to the class, he'd gone into a drunken rant about how the class might make me more of a man instead of such a wimp. I couldn't just quit now. Plus, I was covered in bruises, if I was going to pretend to attend the class, how would I continue to duplicate that? Oh man! And it was only Monday. I had

only four more days to endure the class until the weekend.

Well, I kept getting beat on and I continued to hate the class until one day, it stopped hurting. The beatings actually started to feel good. I even started to inflict a little pain myself. From then on, I loved the training.

I practiced non-stop. I literally ate, slept, and breathed it. I had found something else that I was good at.

Oh, I was still roaming the woods and the city. We were still poor and I still needed things, still needed the cash to pay for my lessons.

When I wasn't at either of my schools or prowling in and out of homes or businesses, I was alone in the woods. During the day-light hours, I didn't dare make my rounds for fear of being seen or getting caught.

So, as strange as this might seem, I took up reading. On one of my outings, I had picked up a few boxes of comic books, hoping that I could trade or exchange them for cash.

I learned quickly that that was not the greatest idea. The clerk at the comic book store looked them over and then looked back over at me, with a suspicious expression, as if he were trying to put something together in his head. Maybe one of his customers or a nerd buddy had told him about some missing comic books. I had forgotten that those guys hung around in tight knit groups.

After a few moments, he shook his head and told me what they were worth and the price he could give me. Neither was very much. Certainly not worth getting discovered. I kept them and took them back to my hiding place in the woods.

I had accumulated quite a few of them, but rather than throw all of those books away, I decided to try reading them. They turned out to be pretty exciting; heroes chasing villains. Villains going after the big score. Sometimes, it wasn't clear which side was better.

I found myself drifting farther and farther, into my own world of fantastic adventures. To myself, I became Ghost Man, or the Silent Shadow, able to walk through walls, to become invisible and enter or exit any place undetected.

As my martial arts skills improved, so did my stealth abilities. I dressed now all in black clothing, with a mask that left only my eyes visible. I wore special shoes made of fabric and soft soled, much like that of an acrobat or the tabi of the ninja.

I was taught how to fall without getting hurt; how to jump, leap, even how to dive from an elevated point. I would gracefully distribute my weight by slowly collapsing my arms, tucking and rolling through it, then winding up on my feet without making a sound.

I practiced these moves continuously. I eventually got to

the point where I could effortlessly dive from a single story roof hands and head first.

My martial arts skills continued to improve. I read through the small library of books my instructor kept, then, went in search of more. I read all of the martial arts, oriental philosophy, and strategy books that our small public library held. I was fascinated by the mystical origins of the Asian traditions: The drunken master, the praying mantis, the iron fist....

One particular tale I remember well described a master who left all of his worldly life and possessions behind in search for a stronger, more powerful style. He went to the jungles of Asia and lived alone for several years, training, working on the techniques he knew, trying to simplify them. He made them more powerful, more deadly.

The master used the trees of that jungle as his striking and kicking posts. Over time, his feet, shins, hips, shoulders, wrists and hands became conditioned. Rock hard.

He could kick or strike a tree with all his strength and do no damage to himself. No damage!

He did however, leave his mark on the trees.

All of the time he spent alone in the jungle helped him. The solitude allowed him to clear his mind of useless things and to focus and appreciate the things of God. Living off

the land and out in the elements helped to toughen up his body as well.

The story said that after living this life for years, he finally returned to his village. He tried to explain all that he had gained from his time in the wild, but none of the villagers wanted to listen.

Frustrated, he told them that he had developed more powerful strikes....Iron Fists, and could prove what he was saying.

He pointed over to a bull in the corral and told the villagers that he could knock it unconscious with one punch but, when he got into the corral to prove himself, the bull charged and he jumped out of the corral and ran in fear. The villagers shamed him with their jeers and laughter.

But, he refused to be defeated. The next day, he came back and once again entered the corral. This time when the bull charged, the master stood his ground. When the bull came close, he leapt toward the bull and struck a mighty blow right on the skull, between its' eyes.

The bull stopped, shuddered for a moment, then, fell to the ground, unconscious.

Wow! It was exciting adventures like that that really fueled my love for reading. The more books I read, the more I wanted to read. Although I didn't start out with a goal of learning anything of real value, I still did.

I learned to think and do things differently. I developed a lot more calculation in my thought processes.

For instance, when I wanted to improve my fighting speed and reaction time, I turned to books to learn how the body functioned. I wanted to understand exactly what made it tick.

Several books mentioned that our body's movements were directed by electrical impulses; our muscles being told what to do by electrical energy, which strangely enough, is similar to how electricity tells a garage door to open or a light bulb to turn on.

So, how could I use this information to increase my kicking and striking speed?

Well, I needed to find a way to make my body's electrical signals travel faster through my nerves and muscles. But could it be done?

Surprisingly, the image that came to my mind while I was thinking about this was of a water flowing through a hose, and I wondered what I could do to make the water flow faster.

Two things immediately came to me: increase the water pressure or increase the size of the hose.

Now, I know we can't increase our blood pressure or enlarge the size of our blood vessels, but I kept getting this image of making a hose larger, and reducing some of the

back pressure of the water, which would then resist/restrict/slow the water's flow. Ok, and that resistance is what was really at fault for slowing down and holding back the water's free flow. Likewise, in a similar way, electricity's flow, or speed, is also determined by what it is flowing through or traveling along.

A flash came to my mind. A divine inspiration if you will. I had it!

CHAPTER FOUR

Many different metals are used in the making of electrical wires, and electricity travels slower or faster through these wires, depending on the metal they are made of.

Now, hang with me here, because I'm going to make a leap, ok?

There are two different types of metal in our blood.

Do you see where I'm going with this? No?

Ok—here it is: What if the metals in our blood act as, and assist as conductors for our body's electrical signals? And furthermore, what if the strength and flow of speed of these electrical signals, electrical energies, is based on the amounts of certain metals in our blood?

Wow! Think about that!

While you're digesting that, I'll tell you the next thing that came to me.

I had read about an explorer. Now this explorer, he discovered the underwater channels that flow beneath the seas. He discovered them, he said, after reading about them in the Bible, second Samuel, chapter twenty-two, verse sixteen. I looked it up to see for myself, It said, "And the channels of the sea appeared, the fountains of the world were discovered."

At first, I wasn't sure how this thought was linked to my trying to understand how our body's electrical impulses worked, and my endeavor to increase my own body's reaction time, but I unwittingly just let my thoughts continue to flow.

So, the explorer, having read a passage in the Bible that referenced some imaginary channels under the sea, believed that they might actually exist, so he set out on a quest to find them. Well, to make a long story short, after many trials and tribulations, he found them.

Ok, so that thought led me to something else I had read in the Bible. It was in the book of Isaiah, chapter forty, verse twenty-two. It said, "It is He (God) that sitteth upon the circle of the Earth."

Whoa. Get that? Men had believed that the Earth was flat up until a few hundred years ago, and here was a passage from over two thousand years earlier that said that God told us the Earth was round.

In reading all of these things, my mind was learning. The Bible had a lot of wisdom if you just took the time to think about it. For instance, in Genesis, chapter one, God said that He made the stars, with a purpose. They are a guide for us, that we might know the times of the year as well as our way.

So, after remembering these passages, my mind led me

to the earliest stages of mankind's existence, to a time when our bodies were in their purest form.

Back then, a person was able to live for over a thousand years, and I remembered that man had originally eaten from a garden that was created by God. (Genesis 2:8)

But it was Genesis two, verse twelve that really caught my attention. In it, God made the point to say, "and all the gold of the land is good." This led me to the fact that gold is one of the best conductors of electricity known to man.

Putting all of that together, I asked myself, what if gold is an essential and necessary part of our diets? What if it was originally transferred through the soil into the plants to purposely be eaten by us?

What if this is gold's true value to mankind?

Scientists are finding gold everywhere now. It's even in human waste. (Hmm!) How very interesting.

So, could the lack of gold in our diets be the reason for our body's rapid decay; it's decline in strength and speed? Well, the information that I had put together thus far, it seemed worthwhile to test the theory.

I took some of the jewelry that I had stashed from my burglaries and decided to try turning them into gold dust.

The first thing I had to figure out was how to separate the other metals from the gold jewelry because I've learned over the years that jewelers mixed those different metals

with the gold to make the gold harder and more durable.

So, I found books that explained the process of melting and separating those metals. A process called smelting. I learned that gold, unlike other metals, required much higher temperatures and last a lot longer than other metals.

That right there was a very interesting tidbit of information.

Ok, so after gathering the equipment I would need together and melting the gold, I put it into molds and made it into several five pound bricks. Once I was all done making the pure gold bricks, I used some really fine grit sandpaper to rub on the bars and make a micro fine dust. I took that dust and started adding it to my diet; sprinkling it in my drinks and onto my foods.

After only a few weeks, I started noticing differences; things began to change inside me. Small things at first: I would smell scents that I hadn't recognized before, my hearing became better, all of my senses became intensified, elevated, heightened to new levels.

One night, on one of my adventures, I noticed that I could see much better in the dark than I had ever before. As the weeks went by and I continued putting the gold dust on my food, I could feel and sense things that others couldn't. It was a very exciting time for me.

So having unlocked these newfound powers, I sought ways to understand and harness them. I read books about human energy; about man's aura, spirit, or life force; about chakras, centering, meditation.

I soon learned how to control my 'extra' energies. I learned how to channel/direct it to different points in my body. For instance, one of the first successes I had was when I learned how to send energy down my right arm, into my hand, then, jump it across my left hand.

After that, I was able to stand close to someone and draw some of their energy, their life force, from the body. If I came across a person who looked sad or depressed, I would send them some of my own energy. When I did this, I would always feel good. I enjoyed watching their expressions change, their faces light up. I felt I was keeping the balance.

With these new abilities, heightened senses, I could easily feel when people were in my proximity. At times, if I concentrated, I could even pick up their moods!

And yes, I achieved the goal that I had set out to accomplish from the very beginning: My physical reaction time did increase. In fact, it increased exponentially. I was now lightning fast.

You know, prior to all this, I was blessed with a sixth sense. Something inside me always let me know someone

was nearby.

Burglarizing homes and businesses was the beginning of my life as a thief.

As I had mentioned before, my family was really poor. For more nights than I care to remember, I went to sleep cold and hungry.

At one point in my life, I think it was when I was six or seven years old, we lived right behind a super store in Little Rock called Vast-Mart. Now, sometimes, my mother would send me over there to buy an item or two, usually something related to a meal she was preparing. It was always something cheap.

Since it was so close to our house, I spent a lot of time there and became very familiar with the store. It had food, sporting goods, clothing, toys, electronics, automotive supplies, tools; it had just about everything.

Now, seeing that my family had nothing, I eventually developed sticky fingers. I would pick up two of one item, act like I was looking at it, then, set one back down while I kept the other item hidden in the palm of my hand. By necessity, I only took small items because my hands were small. I got really good at it and after a while, graduated to bigger things.

My first real big score involved a DVD player.

After watching several people taking merchandise to the

return desk without receipts, then getting cash for them, I had to try myself.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ok. If I was going to be successful, the first thing I had to do was to get my story together and make sure no one was watching me. From my previous observations, I knew exactly where to go and what to do.

I went to the aisle with the DVD players and took one from near the end that was closest to the return desk. This made my trip as short as possible.

I'm sure it would have looked odd to the store clerks to see a young boy in the return line, so I waited until the store was very busy to try this. I figured I'd be less noticeable that way. I also made sure to get in line near some adults. That way, it would look like I was with them.

So, everything went smoothly. I walked up to the counter and gave the clerk my story, about how my mom was at work and couldn't bring the player back herself. The clerk was very nice and fortunately for me, she bought my story. I can imagine what she must have thought, "Surely this little angel would never steal a thing."

Little did she know the direction that my life was going to take that was already in motion.

I was great at shoplifting, but I realized that there was too much risk and not enough reward. I almost got caught

several times, but my sixth sense always warned me just in time. So I pretty much limited my lifting to things I needed—mainly food and clothes. I would usually bring the food back to the house and pack it away in the cupboards and refrigerator so that my mother would not have to do without so much.

Now, back to my martial arts training.

I was about fourteen, a freshman in high school and had been training for about two, two and a half years. My instructor wanted me to test for my black belt.

He doesn't ask me this because he knows I'm ready. I've been fighting at a black belt level for the past year, but what convinced him was when he learned about a fight I was involved in at my new high school.

The fight was against two guys, one a freshman like me and the other was a junior who played on the football team.

It was all started by the freshman, a guy who I remembered from my old middle school. I vaguely remembered him as someone who had picked on me back then. I guess he thought he'd try to impress some of his new friends by picking on me during lunch that day.

Unfortunately for him, I was not the same weak kid I'd been back then. Before he could get his mouth going too much or stir up too much attention, I stood up and popped

him.

I connected perfectly on his jaw. My arm snapped, his jaw cracked, and down he went like a sack of potatoes. I didn't have much time to admire my work because as soon as he hit the floor, one of his new buddies, the football player jumped up and came at me. I guess he thought he was coming to the guy's rescue.

My size was still not very large or intimidating, so I guess the football player was pretty confident that he was going to hurt me. He had this stupid grin on his face and look in his eyes. I could tell immediately that he was a bully.

A lot of things went through my head in the second or two it took for him to get close enough for me to engage him. Pictures of all the children who'd tormented me in the past flashed in my head; the laughing, leering, jokes that made fun of me, my family, my heritage. Everything boiled up inside me, and when the football player got close enough, I let that anger overflow and hit him with everything I had right on the chin.

Man, you should have seen it! He fell backwards, tripped over a chair, and landed on the table. Food flew everywhere; a lot of it landed on the group of friends of the guy and the football player.

When I saw the mess, I laughed in my head, but kept a stern look on my face, daring anyone else to step up. No

one did, and from that moment forward, I never had any more problems at school.

I'm pretty sure that that incident is what made my instructor feel I was ready to move up to black belt rank, which would then mean that I would have my hands registered as lethal weapons with the F.B.I.

Well, I wasn't ready for that. I wasn't going to voluntarily put my face or my fingerprints on the F.B.I.'s National Database. That was not going to happen!

So, the time had come for me to leave that martial arts school, time for me to find a new style and a dojo to workout in. I gave my instructor of nearly two and a half years a made up excuse as to why I had to leave, which he believed, and I moved on.

The students from my old school knew me either by my nickname, Malefic, or my given name, Michael. My full name is Michael Lee Putin, and with a name like Putin, you become a target for every fart joke imaginable.

Kids would say things like, 'are you Putin?' Then they would wait for me to say yes and respond with, 'I thought it smelled in here!'

Man, kids can clown and hurt you without really knowing the depths of those wounds.

So, the kids at my new martial arts school, those that I

talked to, came to know me as Malefic. I told them it was a family nickname, but it was really the name of a powerful sorcerer from Russian folklore.

It was said that this sorcerer was one of the most powerful practitioners of magic and that he was also immortal. It was also said that he was able to stop time and that he could defeat entire armies singlehandedly.

Legend has it that Malefic still roams the Earth, in search of someone he deems worthy, to pass on his abilities and immortality.

I personally thought the story and name were really cool. So, when my new martial arts instructor told me to pick a cool nickname, I didn't go with the usual names like little dragon, or tiger, or others that came from the oriental world, but instead chose that which came from mine.

So, from day one, everyone at my new martial arts school came to know me as Malefic, and the name, Michael Putin, would eventually become nothing more than a distant memory.

CHAPTER SIX

Now, at my new school, the whole black belt ranking system meant nothing. My instructor believed that the martial arts meant much more than fighting or self-defense. He saw it as a way of life, that it was beneficial for both the body and mind.

In his class, if a student wanted to test and move up in rank, he wouldn't stop them, but he would say that the belt was a marker representing nothing more than newly memorized techniques. He also said that it takes a lifetime to master just one technique.

He was deep.

At the time, I really didn't understand what he was talking about, but I did listen and remember. Later on with my life's experiences, I came to understand a lot of the intellectual lessons he spoke of.

We spent a lot less time fighting and competing, and focused more on the mechanics; the rhyme and reason of each technique. He stressed the mental aspects of the martial arts a lot more than my previous teacher.

I still worked out five nights a week, until I was able to get a part time job. Up to that point I had only one real problem. I had all the money from my burglaries building

up, but it did me no good because I couldn't spend it. I had no way to explain where it came from. That's why I needed the job.

Unfortunately, I couldn't get one legally till I was sixteen, but I talked to a lawyer and found out a loophole.

It turns out that there was a law that would allow me to get a job at an earlier age if I could show evidence of hardship, like being poor and needing the income to help my family survive.

Well, I filled out all the papers and a judge signed them, which allowed me to get a job at fifteen years.

Of course, shortly after getting the job, I convinced my dad that I had two jobs. One of them was in the martial arts dojo, cleaning up and instructing the younger students, and the other was at the mall. I didn't tell him exactly which store I was at; I didn't want him to drop in on me or call and ask about me.

I enjoyed my life at the time. I had a ten-speed bike I would ride all the time, to school, work and the dojo. I'd ride it all over town. In addition to getting me around, it really strengthened my legs.

In no time at all though, I turned sixteen and it was time to give up the bike. It was time to get a car.

Now, of course I couldn't get anything new, or extravagant. I didn't want to attract attention.

I settled on a 1966 Chevy Nova SS with a 350 small block that I had seen in a guy's yard about a mile from my house. The body was straight, with no rust but was painted with primer, and the interior was a mess. The driver's seat had holes in it and padding and springs were showing. The carpeting was threadbare and the headliner was hanging down, unattached from the roof. It smelled pretty bad, and I'm pretty sure that an animal or two had made a temporary home out of the car. I also noticed it had no radio or speakers, and the dashboard was cracked and brittle from years of exposure to the sun and elements.

The engine had cobwebs and leaves all over it. I was surprised when the owner said it ran. The tires were bald and cracked, and I was worried they wouldn't hold up long enough for me to drive it to the local car wash, then to the garage to get new tires.

I gave the guy fifteen hundred dollars and asked him to put down five hundred on the bill of sale. I told him it was for tax purposes, but in reality, it was because of my dad. I didn't want him asking me where I came up with that much money.

By this time, I was only going to the dojo two days a week and to my 'other' job, selling cell phones at the mall, on the weekends. I worked eight hours per day there, getting minimum wage plus commission. It was perfect for

me. I used the extra time I had after my classes at the high school to do other things; I would go to the school's weight room and work out with the weights and machines there.

After going there for a while, I noticed that most of the guys who were working out there were aspiring to be bodybuilders, lifting for bulk. I tailored my workouts for strength. A big man is an easier target to spot.

I also practiced yoga for flexibility and mental control. I had read that Navy Seals did this also. An interesting fact I found was that the average size of a Navy Seal is five feet-eight inches tall and around one hundred-fifty pounds. They were light, agile and definitely strong.

While my school mates were making plans for their futures: college, military, jobs, etc..., I was already making a killing as a burglar. I had a lot of disposable income to spend.

So, after having my car cleaned and tuned up, I decided to let a few weeks go by before I started making visible improvements to it. I didn't want anyone wondering about me.

I asked my shop class teacher if he would allow the class to make my car one of the projects for the semester. He told me that he didn't have a problem with it as long as I paid for the parts the car needed.

So, the engine was rebuilt, I added a few little 'extras' to increase the horsepower and had a body shop and upholstery shop in town clean up the body with a couple coats of black primer. They also redid the entire interior, replacing the threadbare factory carpeting with thick grey carpet and custom floor mats. The seats were replaced with reccaro racing seats that were black and gray. The driver's seat was snug and fit me perfectly, like a driving glove.

I left the primer like it was for a few months and got some factory rims for the tires. The old ones were too rusty to keep.

Although I was keeping a low-profile so as not to draw attention to myself by making the car all suped up and flashy, I did get a state of the art sound system. I figured that was the one thing that I could splurge on and no one would really notice it.

Well, a few people noticed it, only one in particular I really cared about.

Joy Purdy.

Joy Purdy.

Wow. Just speaking her name brings back a flood of memories.

Joy was my one and only friend in high school; the only person I could really talk to; someone who didn't judge me or treat me as an outcast.

Of course, I didn't tell her about my extracurricular activities.

That's not something you share with anyone.

I met Joy the first day of Senior year. I had seen her around the school, but have never really 'noticed' her, you know what I mean?

I sure noticed her that year though! We had three classes together: Biology, Home Economics, and English. She sat right in front of me or beside me in all of them. The teachers in those classes seated us alphabetically, and her name came right before mine.

Hmm. I still remember the perfume she wore. Every time I smell it, I think of her.

Joy was beautiful. She was of mixed heritage—Asian and Spanish, she had long dark hair that was smooth and shined like silk, light brown eyes that tilted up a little on the outer edges, a petite nose and full, pouty lips.

And her smile. Wow! I don't mean to sound like a cliché, but her smile lit up the room. When I look back, I under-

stand now that it was my perception that made it seem that way. But at the time, that was the way I saw it.

So anyway, I met Joy on the first day of school, in Biology class, when the teacher, Mr. Pilkey, asked us to pick a lab partner.

As soon as he was done saying it, Joy turned around in her seat, looked at me for a few seconds, and said, "You're my partner!"

I was so stunned, I couldn't speak. She turned back in her seat before my brain re-engaged and I lost the opportunity to turn her down.

That was my first experience with Joy's confidence of her overwhelming personality.

During the year, I learned a lot about Joy. I liked talking to her. Well, actually, I liked listening to her speak. Her voice was sweet and sounded like music.

She would tell me about all of her hopes and plans. She had a boyfriend/fiancé that she was going to marry right after graduation. They were both planning on going to the same college, then starting a family after they received their degrees.

I would sit and watch her speak. I was entranced by her beauty. I would watch her lips move and see her eyes bounce and sparkle as she moved from one sentence to the next.

Her face, her smile, were so full of life. She was like a breath of fresh air. A freshness that I enjoyed breathing in.

And she was inquisitive; always asking questions.

Nothing bad. No, just questions about things I had not given much thought to.

She made me think about my future. About life.

Up to that point, the only thoughts I had of my future were what I would be doing that night and maybe the next. I was happy the way things were going. I was making a lot of money, and I couldn't see going to college and then trying to find a job where I could make more than I already was. I mean, how could I?

Living my way, life was much more exciting. I'd let the rest of the world kill themselves trying to make it rich. And while these schlubbs were struggling to bring it in the front door, I would just effortlessly continue to take it out the back.

Joy was always doing something: one day she'd be telling me about a trip she'd be getting ready to go on with her church, to help disaster victims in Central America, then the next day she would say something, a concert or a movie, that she would be looking forward to going to or that she had already been to.

I liked hearing her stories. She told them with such energy. She was very animated.

As I mentioned before, I was very attuned to the auras/life force of people, and Joy's was amazing. She was so full of life.

Besides being very involved in her church, Joy was also really active in our school. She was in several clubs, and the captain of the debate team. She helped out with food drives. Heck, she even convinced me to donate a bag of canned goods for the poor.

How ironic! My family was one of those that the school gave a care box to!

In addition to all of her other activities, Joy was the secretary for our student council and after January, she ran track.

From all of those activities, she had plenty of material to draw, but I'll tell you, even if she didn't, I was hers.

She had extra energy to expel, and I was there to gladly take it in.

She didn't ask too much about my family or my home life, and I didn't volunteer any information. She was good like that.

You know, that year seemed to fly by. It began, and then in no time at all, it was gone. And with it, my Joy Purdy.

Looking back, I would have to say that Joy was my first love.

It feels strange to say that though, we really didn't have

anything together. In fact, I'm sure she saw me as just a friend, yet unbeknownst to her, she not only had my full attention, she had my heart.

My memories of her, her beautiful face; her vibrant life, kept me hopeful. They helped me to hang on during some very low and trying times in my life.

On more than one occasion, she told me that God loved her, and that He also loved me. And, if there was ever any doubt that there was a God in Heaven, Joy Purdy helped me to see the light. She was a beaming light sent down from Heaven, a gift to this world. She was God's way of telling me that there is good in this life and that He does exist.

CHAPTER EIGHT

So, school came to an end. Everyone moved on to whatever life beckoned them.

My life moved on too.

I had made good money up to that point, but it was time for me to step it up a notch. I knew some guys who were making good money by stealing cars and 'chopping' them, selling the parts. I figured if they could do it, so could I.

Of course, I had no interest in starting up a chop-shop or even selling the stolen parts myself. I knew that the best way to keep from being caught was to always keep a low profile, but I also knew from reading true-crime books and mystery novels that it was only a matter of time before a person got caught. They said everyone made mistakes that you couldn't prepare for every possibility.

Now, whether I believed that or not, I made it a point to research things before I took any risks, and minimize the amount of people I dealt with.

So, before I could start stealing cars, I had to learn a little something about them. I had learned how to formulate strategies from some military manuals, so I attacked this with that kind of mindset: Proper previous planning prevents poor performance, or the six P's.

I was eighteen years old, with very little job experience, but I knew from my job selling phones that I was a natural salesman.

You know, it's really strange about that, I never really spent much time talking to people on a personal level, but I had no problems discussing the details of a service contract, or the benefits of different phones. I would just ask the customer questions to find out what their needs were. For some, it was business and reliability, and for others, it was simply to impress their friends; shallow but still a need.

And, if I could match their needs to the right phone, nine times out of ten I would close the sale.

Well, it was now time to use these skills on myself.

The first thing I needed to do was to put my foot in the door by getting a job with a small business that dealt with cars, and the question that came to mind first was how am I going to convince the owner of a car electronics shop that I would make a great addition to his business.

I knew nothing about the business. In fact, the only connection I had to it was that this shop was the one that had installed my car's alarm system and stereo. The owner, a guy named Tony, was a short older, Italian man. A nice enough guy, but real busy. His office was full.

Well, it really wasn't an office, per say. It was the lobby,

sales area, waiting area, etc. The phones were constantly ringing.

His secretary, a 30-35 year old attractive lady with red hair, as well as The man himself was answering them. I could hear her telling customers that their cars were ready, giving price quotes and estimates to them while writing down the information on a large pad on her desk. Tony was doing pretty much the same thing.

The service technicians were in and out, sometimes with questions for Tony, other times with questions for the customers or just delivering a set of car keys to those who were waiting.

The place was really chaotic. If this was how a successful man made a living, he could have it.

So, how was I going to talk with this guy about a job, let alone sell him on the idea that I would be a benefit, an asset, to his company?

Well, I did as I had always done when I wasn't quite sure how to handle a situation. I watched, and I waited several times as I sat there, Tony glanced at me, and each time we made eye contact, I would offer him a friendly smile.

I made sure to never look anxious or impatient. I didn't want to give him the impression that I was in a hurry or waiting on something.

When the craziness finally settled down, I approached

him.

The first thing I let him know after introducing myself was that I'd had my car worked on there before. I then told him about my car knowledge, about the little bit I'd learned in shop class while working on my car.

I told him about my time and dedication to the martial arts and how I had worked at the dojo for years.

I finished with my two years experience of selling cell phones.

Immediately, he said he wasn't looking for anyone to do sales, that all of his sales were handled by either him or his assistant/daughter, Judy. I glanced over at the attractive woman on the phone and she gave me brief, sympathetic smile before resuming her conversation with a caller.

As I looked back at Tony, I noticed that the office area, and both of the desks, was very messy from the day's activities, so I know which direction I could approach him from.

I started talking to him.

I explained that I was interested in electronics, that that was what had first led me to cell phones. I wanted to be a technician, but had no experience. How when I did so well on the sales end, my boss refused to let me move to the service department.

I tried to put on a face of empathy and told Tony that I

understood why my boss chose not to move me. Then I added that that was why I was quitting that job and searching for a technician job.

I then explained that I couldn't afford an expensive technical school and that I believed that O.J.T., or on the job training, would be my best bet.

As I spoke my next words, I used my hands to direct his eyes to his work area. "If you would let me clean up around your office and the garage bays at minimum wage for a few hours a day, it would allow me to watch and learn, and if the technicians needed an extra hand with their work, I could get in there and help.

I would keep the areas clean, pick up any messes, keep all of the work areas safe from accidents.

The part about the accidents got him to thinking. I could see the wheels turning in his head, thinking that maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea to hire me.

You see, it just so happens that during my research, I'd found that Tony's business was in the middle of a Workman's Compensation lawsuit. One of the technicians had slipped on an oil spot and had injured his back.

Now, the oil spot had been created by the same technician, but nevertheless, he had been on the clock for Tony and Tony knew the state would side with the employee. He would end up having to pay for the

employee's loss of time at work and his pain and suffering.

Tony was old school. By that, I mean he came up with old world beliefs, you know what I mean. The old ways. I'm sure that he would have been just fine with taking that employee out back of the shop and putting both him and Tony out their misery. But he couldn't. People have rights now.

Blah, blah, blah.

I'm pretty sure that's what Tony would say, and you know, so would I.

So, Tony warmed up to me. I could tell we were connecting, but I also noticed from my earlier observations that Tony was the type of guy that liked to be the boss. He liked to hear himself talk. He liked to hear himself give directions. So, I shifted gears.

In the two-plus years I spent selling phones, I had learned two important things: That there was a time to speak, and there was a time to listen; a time to inform, educate, and sell; and a time to learn your customer, to understand their needs; to sometimes let them talk just to hear themselves.

So, I let Tony talk while I played the role of an interested and curious listener. Every now and then, I would ask him a question, carefully probing him for information, showing him that I was really hearing what he was saying.

By the time we were done, you'd have thought a father had just gotten through speaking to his son about the meaning of life. A connection, a bond, was made. Tony liked me. He gave me the job on the spot. I started the next day.

CHAPTER NINE

I gave up my old job selling phones. It had only been a cover for me anyway, to explain my income and to justify my spending.

So now, I could watch and learn. I could pick the service techs brains and learn all that I needed to know about stealing cars and getting around any security systems that they might have.

As I expected, Tony started me out at the minimum wage. I wasn't sure if he was testing me to see if I meant what I had told him or if he was just a cheap bastard.

As I later found out, it was the latter. Tony was a cheap bastard, but I understand why. You don't get rich, and stay rich, by giving it all away. The good thing for me was that I didn't care about the pay. The knowledge was what I was after, and that would pay me much more dividends down the road.

So, "Tony's Auto Electronics," got a new 'do-boy,' and school was in session for me.

I was real eager, and everyone could see it. Most of the guys liked me, but some didn't, but that was ok. I'd learned a valuable lesson as a salesman, that you can't please everyone a hundred percent of the time. You can't

know everyone's thoughts, nor can you know everyone's motives or agendas, so you do the best that you can and chalk up the ones you don't sell as experience. You try to learn something if you can, and then move on.

So, the two jitts that didn't like me probably saw me as soft; a yes man. And for all intents and purposes, I was.

I was there to do whatever anyone needed, anytime. Of course, technically I was Tony's gopher, or do-boy, but I was always on loan and available to whoever needed me. I was pretty busy.

My work wasn't limited to the shop. I picked up parts and supplies from all over town. Sometimes, I would go to pick up lunch for Tony or Judy if that's what they wanted.

I kept the place clean and helped any technician that would let me get my hands dirty.

It was Julio that seemed to like me the most. He was probably the best technician Tony had. He was a second generation American, like me. His family was from Columbia, South America. He claimed his family was part of the Columbian drug cartel, but I kind of doubt it. A person usually doesn't brag about something like that, because if they are really involved, they pretty much know to keep their mouths shut.

But it didn't matter. He was my open door. When there was nothing to do, or I was in between jobs, Julio would

explain things to me. Some really cool stuff and some really stupid. I had to sit and listen through so many useless stories just to build a rapport, and to fully earn his trust.

He had taken a tool home with him and acted like he had stolen it. He told me about it to test my loyalty and to see if I was a snitch, if I would tell Tony.

What I didn't know though, was that he had already asked Tony if he could borrow the tool. Poor Julio. If he only knew how little stealing a tool from Tony meant to me.

Anyway, I passed his little test, and a few more after that. Soon after the last test, he started inviting me to his house to help him with a few of his side jobs. These jobs would come from people, some who had already gone to Tony's and found it too expensive, or those that heard by word of mouth that Julio could do the work for a better price.

In addition to those people, Julio would steal customers from Tony. He would wait until Tony or Judy went to lunch or took a break and he would watch the counter for them when the customer would come for an estimate. Julio would then tell them the price that Tony would charge, then he would tell them how much he, Julio, would charge for the same procedure, undercutting Tony's estimate by 20-30 percent.

He never went after the basic installs though. There was

no real profit in them. No, it was always the more extensive and involved jobs that he took. The ones where he could save the customers a lot of money and make himself a nice check too.

So, now that I knew more about his shady dealings, it made more sense to him to train me and get me more involved. I had a little bit of dirt on him, and he knew from his tests that I was trustworthy. He thought I was his boy and that he was my mentor. He had it half right.

I picked his brain, prying for every little detail I could get. I have to tell you, when it came to cars, that guy was the real deal. He knew his stuff cold. With everything he knew, I was surprised he wasn't stealing cars himself.

So, I learned, and in time, Tony raised my pay to a more respectable level and let me perform some of the basic alarm and stereo installations.

The money that the technicians were getting compared to the money Tony was making for their work was sickening. It was clear to me why Julio, and I'm sure some of the other techs, was doing side work.

Well, to make a long story short, it only took me about four months to acquire all the information and confidence I needed in order to steal my first car.

It wasn't that I couldn't steal a car all the time. No, the whole point of my learning all of this knowledge was to

help me to do it without getting caught.

If I was going to steal a car, I was going to do it with the lowest risk and highest rewards. Of course, I wasn't averse to taking a bigger risk, but at this point I wanted to learn first.

So, my first action was to get license plates. If I was driving a stolen car, I definitely did not want to have the original plates, or a blank spot back there for the police to see as plain as a birthmark on a baby's butt.

Now, I came up with a really great idea to get some license plates. Really, I came up with two ideas.

The first was to find what is called dealer's tags. These tags were used on demonstration cars at new car dealerships. Those cars were used to give customers test drives, because of course they were not going to drive a brand new car off the lot unless the customer was ready to buy that specific car. The dealer's tag on the car also covered insurance in case of an accident. It was also used on the demo cars when the salesman decided to drive it home or use it as their own transportation. The good thing about the tag was that if the car was pulled over, they did not have to show a registration at all. All they had to do was show a business card that said they worked at the dealership and their license. The police knew that the dealerships had insurance so there would be no problem

there either.

Now, you might be thinking that I would have to steal one or more of those tags and someone might report them stolen, which would put me in jeopardy.

Wrong. See, this is where my idea really came in. I would clone the plates, then put the original plates back on the original cars. See, a few years back I had gone to a surplus auction, just for the heck of it, and seen a license plate stamp machine. Well, I ended up buying it for a couple hundred dollars and put it in a storage room I was paying for. It came with a few hundred blank aluminum plates, and if I ended up using all of them, I could always buy more somewhere.

Anyway, that would take care of the problem of driving the stolen car anywhere.

My other idea was that I could put a temporary plate on the car, a cardboard plate with a temporary number on it that was used for new cars purchased from dealers. It was good for up to thirty days and could easily be made with a home computer with an inkjet printer. The only paperwork a driver with that kind of tag had to have if pulled over was the dealer's copy of the bill of sale. I could make of those easily on my computer.

So, now I was set to take another step up the career ladder as a thief, and also with that step, I would get

greater rewards. With the rewards though, there were greater consequences.

I was ready....at least I thought I was.

I started venturing out, looking for my first car. I figured that I would stay away from my own neighborhood, so I started checking out the surrounding cities.

My first step to do that was to pick up Cindy, a friend of mine who had worked with me at the mall. She was a saleswoman at the store across the aisle from my store.

Cindy was only a few years older than me and already had a few kids. Cute kids—Zach and Gina, three and two years old. She was cute too, but we were just friends. She was looking for a daddy for her kids, and I made sure that she understood that I had absolutely no interest in being strapped down like that.

Now Cindy and I kept in touch after I quit my phone sales job. I would call her or she would call me, and we would go out to see a movie or grab a bite to eat. It wasn't something we did all the time, but at least once or twice a week.

So how things worked was when I wanted to venture out and scope out a neighborhood, I would call her and make plans to take her and the kids out for a nice drive, usually on the weekend. We'd drive around, looking at nice homes in nice neighborhoods. I would pretend to be envying the

rich people's lives, while making small talk with Cindy.

Of course, I would feed her some baloney story of me dreaming of one day living like those people, and she would say the same stuff back to me while we were talking, I would be taking note of the number of homes with alarms, those with pets, those with garage doors partially open. I would look for yards with kids toys spread on them too. Houses with kids usually mean that the parents were in their late twenties to early forties and liked having expensive toys—boats, jet skies, 4-wheeler, expensive cars, etc....

The neighborhoods that I targeted had wooded areas close by that I could use for reconnaissance purposes. I would approach the homes from the back side completely unobserved.

I also looked for adjoining sub-divisions so that I could park whatever car I was using far enough away from the homes I was burglarizing and stealing cars from as to be unnoticed.

Another security measure I took was to do all of my work at night or during rainstorms. Rainstorms were nice because for the most part, people did not go out in the weather, nor did they go looking around outside their homes. Alarms were constantly being set off by electrical surges, and because of that, those alarms were less likely

to be responded to by the police. So, I did all of my homework and now I was ready to start stealing cars.

CHAPTER TEN

A few days after my surveillance rounds, I started hitting homes. I was still taking jewelry and cash from the homes, but now one out of every ten I was also stealing a car from them.

My vehicles of choice were those that were the easiest to sell; pickup trucks, foreign cars, and SUV's, all newer models less than a year old. Some of them I got directly off of the new car lot and had less than ten miles on the odometer.

Some of the higher end vehicles had GPS trackers on them, which I would disable. One of my many new talents learned from my job at Tony's.

Most of the vehicles I took from the houses were easy. The keys were usually hanging on some kind of hook or in a container like a bowl close to the door leading into the garage. My routine was quick and to the point: I would go into the garage first, change the plates, then go in the house and get what I could find, bring it all into the garage, load it into the vehicle, start it up, open the garage door, turn on the headlights, then drive out, closing the garage door behind me, as if I was leaving my own home.

Through the years of my thievery, I had met some people who were helpful in getting rid of my stolen merchandise.

They were called fences.

One of those fences was a guy named Steve-O. If I remember correctly, the 'O' stood for Olvedo. He was a Latino, and it turns out that he knew Julio. Small world, huh?

So, Steve-O told me what kinds of vehicles he wanted and how much money he would pay. Surprisingly, it was much more than what I had heard.

Payment was made upon delivery and he started me out with just one car per week, which was just fine with me. I needed to get my feet wet, so to speak, and get comfortable with my new vocation.

Vocation? How could something so fun be a job? Ah man, I loved it, but you know, it almost came to a halt before it even got started.

It was the night I got my first car. It was raining fairly hard and visibility was low, just like I liked it. The car was a black Lexus Sedan, worth about 50K off the lot. I would be getting about five thousand for it.

I got the car out of the garage with no problem, drove down the driveway and followed the streets to get out of the neighborhood. As I made a left turn to go to the highway that led to town, I glanced in the mirror and saw a cop car coming up behind me, lights flashing and moving fast.

I believe if I would have had time to panic, to respond, I probably would have punched the gas pedal, but before I could do anything at all, the car moved over into the lane to my right and passed me. I looked at it and shook my head. It wasn't a cop. It was a security company car. A rent-a-cop. They were paid to patrol specific sub-divisions and businesses, supplementing the overworked police force. The guy in the car that passed me was probably some fat slob who had just realized it was time for his break. Man, did he have me spooked for a few seconds. I thought I was caught for sure.

That was the closest I ever came to having an encounter with the law the entire time I was a thief.

And speaking of encounters with the law, that reminds me of the first encounter I'd ever had with the police.

It happened only a few months before I'd stolen the Lexus.

I was helping my mom and dad clean out their garage. I say their garage because there was absolutely nothing in it that belonged to me.

It was trash day that day; our trash pickup was in the evening, and were a little bit late because of all the work we'd been doing in the garage. We were trying to hurry to get everything to the curb because the trash truck was at the end of the street.

As I made my last trip back to the garage to get the last load, the trash truck passed our house and the driver turned the truck around when he got to the end of the street. Apparently, they started on that end, then, picked the trash up on the way out of our neighborhood.

The truck pulled up in front of our house as I was dragging the load toward the curb. I passed one of the trash men who was sliding a box of half broken fluorescent bulbs back to the side of our house. I noticed that he had a nervous look on his face and he said sorry as he put the box down. I shrugged and looked toward the curb. A cop had just driven up to the entrance of our driveway and gotten out of the car. He was standing by the front door and speaking to my father.

When I got within hearing range, the cop asked if the house belonged to my dad. Dad answered yes, then, the cop pulled out a notepad and started writing in it.

After about a minute, he finished writing, tore a ticket out of the notepad and handed it to dad. He then said that he was writing him a citation for not properly securing the broken light bulbs. He explained that an animal or child could have been seriously hurt due to his negligence and that in the future my dad needed to be more responsible when disposing of any dangerous or hazardous materials. He also said the one-hundred dollar fine was nothing

compared to the lawsuit that could have been filed against him if a child or someone's pet had gotten hurt.

During the whole explanation, my father said absolutely nothing. I watched the whole thing, then as the cop started to leave, I spoke, asking the cop to hold up. When he stopped and looked at me, I went into an explanation about how the trash guy had picked up the box of broken bulbs from the side of our house, that we had not placed them on the side of the curb. I also told the cop that our gate to the side of the house had been closed and that the city employee had no right to open our gate and trespass onto our property. My voice had gotten louder as I spoke. By the time I was done, I was almost shouting.

As I was saying this, I saw my mother approach me from the front of the house. She tried to gently persuade me to quiet down, but I didn't pay her any attention. In fact, I kind of moved her aside with my body as I moved closer to the cop and to point out the sign on our gate that said no trespassing, and that there were dogs in the yard.

I told him that if anyone had a right to sue, it would be us, because the city employee's carelessness and trespassing could have let our dogs out of the yard and they might have bitten someone, or gone out into the street in front of a car and caused an accident.

Man, the cop was pissed, and you know the whole time,

my dad said nothing. He just kept looking down with an angry expression on his face. I guess he was afraid to say anything to the cop.

The cop turned to my father then and told him that he needed to get control of me. I then told the cop that no, he didn't need to get control of me, that I was over eighteen and accountable for my own actions.

I also told him that I would be suing him and the city if he didn't take his bogus ticket back.

His face turned red and I could tell he was furious, but then again so was I. I glanced over the cop's shoulder and could see that the trash guys were nervous. I could see to my side that my mother looked worried too. She was probably worried that the cop was going to do something to me, maybe even arrest me or maybe she was worried about my dad, or what the neighbors would think of all the commotion.

Either way, I wasn't backing down. The cop must have seen this and realized that he was wrong, so he backed down. Of course he was reluctant to do so, and he made a weak attempt to save face by getting onto the trash guys for entering our property. He also tried to tell me how lucky I was not to be going to jail. I stood there for a moment, then, when he was done speaking I asked him if he was through. His face got red again and he started to say

something then thought the better of it. He turned away, walked to his car and drove off in a hurry, spinning his back tires a little as he exited our driveway.

After the cop made it to the end of the street and turned and was out of sight, my dad looked at me, shook his head, then, walked into the house.

My mother and I watched him go, then she turned to me and tried to tell me why arguing with the police was dangerous and senseless.

I was angry and young, and I was not going to be persuaded about anything at that moment. I believed that truth was worth fighting for, even dying for. She kept pleading with me, holding my face in her hands and trying to calm me down. She told me that she was only telling me this because she loved me.

Of course, I didn't listen to her. I shook my head and pushed her aside, then walked to my car and drove away.

I didn't realize that two months later, she would be gone forever.

She died two weeks before my nineteenth birthday. Lung cancer. We didn't have a clue. Mom kept it to herself. Never visited a doctor or anything. The pain she must have endured. It just amazed me that she could have gone through that and never showed us a sign of it at all. I shake my head in wonder every time I think about it.

I also think about my dad. He smoked as much or more than my mother and had no health problems at all. A few weeks before she died, he went to the doctor for a check-up, to find out if he had cancer or any other diseases, (apparently she told him to go to the doctor) but the doctor told him he was fine. That's what verified to me that there was really no justice in the world.

I kept thinking about how I could have helped her, if only she had said anything to me. The gold dust would have probably enhanced her immune system. It tears me up every time I think of it.

It was June and raining heavily the day of her funeral. Why does it always rain at funerals? I thought it was strange, because I don't ever remember seeing it rain in June before then. It was appropriate though, because I was gloomy too.

Not very many people came to the funeral or the wake; her sister; her uncle Bunkie, who I'd only met a few times before; her cousins, who I never really knew at all. Dad didn't come. Some of his family members were there and they said words to me. I'm sure they were words of condolence, but didn't really hear them.

It's strange the things we remember, especially during trying times.

When the priest was talking over mom's grave, I

remember mother telling me something she'd thought when we were at grandma Rose's funeral. This was about a year before mom died.

I was working that morning and was late. I had missed the service and everyone was at the cemetery when I got there.

Mom told me later that when she saw me at the top of the hill, dressed all in black and making my way down to the burial site that she thought for a moment or two that I was Death, the Grim Reaper, coming to collect Rose's soul.

At that time, when she told me that, I thought wow, I must have looked really cool.

I thought about how idiotic and self-centered that thought had been as they lowered mom into the ground.

After the funeral, I stayed after everyone left. I walked from under the temporary awning that was set up to protect everyone from the rain and kneeled by the hole in the ground. The drops of water soon drenched me, but I ignored them. My heart was completely broken.

I cursed and cried. I sobbed so hard and thought my lungs were going to collapse. I cried until there was nothing left, then walked to my car and sat there. All I felt was emptiness. I sat there for hours. The day darkened to night and the tears and rainwater dried from my face and clothes. By the time I looked up and realized my

surroundings, my heart had turned to stone. I was now dead inside—all of the joy and happiness I'd ever experienced was gone, turned now to anger and rage.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

So, I packed my things that day and moved out of the house before dad returned from wherever he was. I know I would have killed him if I saw him.

That day, my life took a turn; I started to drink heavily. I was angry at God and angry at the world. I made a vow to do damage to both. Of course, I couldn't harm God, but I could harm others and myself.

The first step I took after leaving the house was to go buy a small parcel of land with a used trailer on it. I paid around eight thousand for it.

The next thing I did was buy a fake I.D. so that I could get into bars. Every night after I got that, I made it a point to get completely trashed so that it would slow my reflexes and disrupt my balance.

You see, I was leveling the playing field.

When I was drunk enough, I'd go find the biggest guy in the bar and start a fight with him. Sometimes I'd win, sometimes I'd get beat. I didn't really care if I lost. I just enjoyed the pain; inflicting it and actually feeling it.

Somehow, I thought that giving or receiving pain might actually bring me back to life, maybe grow me a heart and start caring again. I laugh now and think how ridiculous

that sounds, but it somehow made sense at the time.

So, for the next three years, I partied hard. I got involved with drugs, and it wasn't long before I ran out of money, and when the money ran out, I figured that it was time to go back to work.

Those days were really dark, just a blur of images, flashes of stuff I really don't want to remember. I still drank heavily, but I slowed down a lot on the coke and completely stopped all the pills. On the practical side, I wasn't making enough money to do all of them.

Around that time, I was messing around with a woman named Heather. She would use her body to make some money, then, go buy us cocaine. I would also break into change machines at laundry mats and car washes to supply us with the money for liquor. Needless to say, the relationship was pretty messed up. If we weren't high or scoring cash, we were fighting. We were strung out most of the time, paranoid and looking for our next fix.

From there, it wasn't long before things went from bad to worse, and then from worse to really screwed up.

I lost everything. I was disgusted with my life and everything else in the world. I lived in an abandoned building, with only a few pairs of clothes. Heather and I slept on an old mattress I stole from a camping store one day. I was so high, I don't even remember how I stole it

and got out of the store.

Anyway, I woke up one morning and I was cold. I moved around a little, trying to get closer to Heather to share our body heat, but it didn't work. Then I smelled something strange. I sat and looked around as the haze of drug and alcohol induced slumber started to lift from my brain. I struggled to focus my eyes, then, reach out to Heather.

Her body is ice cold; she was dead.

Let me tell you, in the state I was in, I didn't have any sympathy for her at all; about her family or any friends who may have missed her.

No, my first thought were that the dirty whore had scored enough coke to O.D., and that she had held out on me. We had been together for about a year and that's all I thought of her.

I took everything out of the room we'd been living in, making sure to erase any and all signs that I'd even been there. The only thing I left was her body.

As I left, I looked back at her, lying there in her own waste, I felt nothing but disdain and contempt for her.

I also felt rage—I hated her. When I had time to wonder, I asked myself why I hated Heather so much. The answer came to me fairly easily....it was because she was a mirror; a reminder of who I had become. Looking back, I wish I had called someone, anyone, and told them where to find

her. She was once someone's baby girl. Someone had loved her.

But I didn't. I just left her there, like an old piece of furniture.

What had I become? I was so ashamed. God, you should have killed me then, but you didn't. You had mercy on me.

I realized I needed help. My thoughts were muddled and my muscular physique had deteriorated until I was nothing but skin and bones. I was sick most of the time and I found myself wishing for the days prior to mom's death. The days when I was doing well and was sober.

Not knowing what to do, I made my way to the local 'Bargain-Save' store. I was sick and hurting and I needed something. I didn't want any coke, and as long as I wasn't drinking I was ok.

I walked into the store and the clerks looked at me like I was glowing or something. I'm sure I looked a mess, but I didn't care.

I made a beeline for the medicine aisle, where I grabbed four boxes of Bromo-Seltzer, stuffed them under my shirt, then, walked quickly to the restrooms at the back of the store.

When I got into the men's room, I went to a stall, sat down on a toilet and tried to tear open a box. My hands were so sweaty and shaky, it took me about a few minutes

to get it opened.

I finally got the packs out of the boxes and stuffed everything into my pants except two packs. I grabbed an empty plastic soda bottle from the trash can and poured the powder into the bottle and added water. I shook it up, then drank it and immediately puked it all back up, luckily into the toilet.

I did this two more times before I was able to keep anything down. Not much, but some.

I tore up the Bromo-Seltzer boxes and flushed them, then headed out. Luckily, no one stopped me.

From the store, I headed to a homeless shelter in town. It was in an old church that had seen better days. The stone walls were slowly crumbling and were dirty from decades of pollution coating them.

I walked inside the building and asked someone, an old woman, where I could find some clothes. She pointed down the hallway. I walked that way until I found an entry way with one of those half-doors; the kind with a shelf on it. A young guy was sitting behind the door, hands on the shelf, reading a book. I glanced at the title. Farenhite 451 by Kurt Vonnegut. Hmm, a very good book. A classic. I had read it for my Senior English class. Did a ten-page essay on it. That started to bring back memories of Joy Purdy but I shut them down with a shake of my head.

I knocked on the counter to get the guy's attention. He looked up and smiled warmly at me, then asked how he could help me. I asked him if he could give me four or five changes of clothes, and a jacket. It was going to be getting pretty cold outside and I wanted to be prepared.

When the guy got the clothes, he brought me a thick mesh laundry bag and a plastic garbage bag without my even having to ask. Apparently, he was used to dealing with people who lived on the streets.

I went to the back of the building and someone else showed me where I could change. They also offered me a hot shower and a hot meal. I gratefully accepted both of them.

Unfortunately, my stomach rejected the meal, even though it was just a bowl of chicken soup. As soon as I got it, I drank it out of the bowl and promptly vomited it up, right there in the middle of the dining hall, while everyone was still eating.

As the upchucked soup dripped from my beard to the table, I looked around me at society's destitute. They all had expressions of repulsion on their faces.

I wanted to care, but I couldn't. I couldn't concentrate. I was just trying to make it from one moment to the next.

A volunteer came over and cleaned up my mess from the table and floor. It didn't really smell like vomit does, but

I'm sure it still made it difficult for those who were eating to keep their food down.

The volunteer's name was Albert. When he was through cleaning up my mess, he helped me to the bathroom where I washed my face and shaved. I changed my clothes again, then, came out of the bathroom, feeling a little bit better.

As I exited the bathroom, Albert was standing there waiting for me. He asked me if I liked sports drinks and peanut butter crackers. I said sure, hoping that if I tried some, I'd keep it down.

He told me to take a seat a seat then he left for about twenty minutes. When he came back, he had a large sack full of beverages and snacks. He then sat down and talked to me. He didn't say much, just small talk. He was on his second marriage, with two grown kids. He worked in a factory, on the night shift. He volunteered at the shelter three days a week.

I just sat there, listening and sipping the lemon-lime drink; I wasn't ready to try a cracker yet.

He didn't talk very long. After a few minutes, he was done and he just sat there gazing down at the floor. Not waiting for me to respond, but far away, deep in thought.

He seemed too nice; too friendly, too eager to help. I figured he probably liked helping out at the shelter so that he would look good to his family and friends. Maybe trying

to make himself feel good by helping those 'less fortunate' than himself and his crowd. Whatever the reasons were, I wasn't going to feed into them and stroke his ego.

Finally, after a long period of silence, I angrily told him that I couldn't pay him back for any of the stuff he'd given me. He told me he didn't want anything in return, that, he was glad to help. I then said something smug-like I was sure the church would reimburse him. He gave me a friendly smile and said that he would be repaid sometime. I didn't understand the full meaning of what he'd said at that time.

It had already been hours since I had thrown up in the dining room and I was ready for Albert to go away and leave me alone, so I asked him what he wanted from me. He looked at me with an expression of surprise and said he didn't want anything.

Then, in a real serious and genuine tone, he asked me if there was anything he could do to help me.

I looked at him a moment. He looked sincere. I was a little bit shocked. I wanted to tell him to look at me and what did he think? Before I could formulate an answer for him, he said he could tell that I was in bad shape; strung out. Then he asked me where I was with all of it, if I was in need of a fix, or if I was willing to try giving it up.

I hung my head and told him that I was tired of my life

and that I was ready for it to change or ready for it to end. I told him a little bit about my life, how hard it had been since losing mom, and how the drugs and alcohol made everything feel more distant, far away. I didn't tell him anything about Heather. I don't think that would have ended up well at all.

After I was through with my story, Albert said he understood. He told me that he had been where I was. That he had lost his third child to leukemia, and how that had devastated him. He told me how it had taken him several years to accept that his child was gone and to how he had learned to trust God, and not just with his own life, but with the lives of his family too.

I asked him how he came to that conclusion, how he could trust someone he couldn't see, or hear, or anything.

He then told me about how, after his child's death, he had turned to drugs and how one night, he'd been so high that he let someone shoot him up with heroine.

It turned out that the heroine, combined with the other drugs in his system, had caused him to overdose and end up in the emergency room at the hospital. When he had woken up and regained his senses, he lay there, in the thin hospital bed with the thin foam mattress and thin sheets, surrounded by monitors and the smell of death and disinfectant clogging his nostrils, he finally realized that

something had to change. His first wife and his two kids had left, and he'd lost his home, his job, his car; even his friends had given up on him. He had absolutely nothing.

That's when he cried out to God and asked Him for help. And then Albert said that God answered him! That He told him that everything would be alright.

A week later, Albert left the hospital. He had refused any treatments for drug withdrawal, instead going 'cold-turkey' and depending totally on God.

He didn't have a single withdrawal symptom, and didn't experience any kind of cravings whatsoever.

When he left the hospital, he walked three miles to the homeless shelter, the same shelter I was sitting in, and started to rebuild his life.

But there was a problem.

When he got to the shelter, he got some food, some clothes, a place to sleep, but there was no one there to talk to about his experience, his next step. The putting back together of his life and his walk with God.

That day, when he realized that there was still something missing, he made a promise to God, a promise that if God helped him, one day he would help others who were trying to find their way also.

One of those others turned out to be me.

CHAPTER TWELVE

It's funny....Albert's timing, God's timing. It couldn't have been any better. I was done with the drugs, the alcohol, the fights, the sex, all of it, and I knew I needed help if I wanted it all to change.

I told him I was ready.

That same night, Albert helped me check into a rehab center. During the initial interview, I poured out my story to the doctor: I was unhappy from the loss of my mother, that I was self-medicating, using other things to try to fill the empty space inside me. I really didn't want to die, but just wanted the pain to end so that I could be happy again.

So, they admitted me. They cleaned me up, inside and out. I learned that I was not alone when it came to suffering; that we all carry some type of burden. Mine was the abuse my dad inflicted on me and mom and my losing her. Albert's was the loss of his daughter.

Albert gave me some really good advice that I took to heart. He said that when he thought of his daughter, Carrie, he only saw her laughing and smiling, and he imagined that she watched over him, like a guardian angel. Cheering for him. Wanting him to do well and to be happy. He said that everything he does was to make her proud

and to please God.

During my time in rehab, I thought about that a lot.

It took some time, but I started to heal. My desire during that time was to make my mother proud. During group discussions, I admitted to womanizing and drug and alcohol abuse, to the pain I liked to inflict and receive. In all of those discussions though, I never mentioned stealing. I didn't feel that it was wrong. It was my profession.

Albert and his current wife, Christina, visited me every week while I was in rehab and I got to know both of them pretty well. When I was through with the program, they helped me to get a job. Passing out flyers door-to-door for an alarm company. A brother of Albert's from his church, Manny Ruiz, owned the security alarm company and was glad to give me the job.

So, I knocked on doors, handed out flyers, and spoke to people about the benefits of having a home security system. If any of those people were interested, I would write down their information and give it to Mr. Ruiz's secretary. From there, a salesman would follow up and go to those people to make a sales pitch.

At first, things were slow. I think I was too eager to sell. I'm sure they felt the pressure and desperation on my part, so after realizing that I was moving too fast, I told myself to slow down, to relax, to go back to what I did when I was

selling cell phones at the mall. Talking and listening. Letting the customers come to me.

I also decided to increase my odds. How? Well, I had the supply, so to speak, but the demand was kind of low, so in order to sell more, there needed to be more demand, more need. In order for there to be more need, People had to have a reason, a reason to buy security alarms.

A reason like, protecting homes from burglars because their neighborhoods were being targeted by thieves.

So, during the days I went quickly through sub-divisions, putting flyers on doors. As I did this, I made mental notes. I would jiggle the door knobs and listen for dogs. I looked for tree lines, wooded areas, access and cover and entry and exit points of the neighborhoods. This was really tedious because I rode a bike and by the end of the day, I would be exhausted.

Now, I didn't ride the bike just for the exercise, although it certainly got me into pretty good shape. I rode it out of necessity. I had no money. I'd sold my car many months before for drugs, so, I was completely broke.

But things were about to turn around for me.

I had already moved from the shelter to a half-way house and then to living in a spare room at Albert and Christina's house. This was all within a few months of meeting Albert. He and Christina wanted me to open up and share more

about myself. They wanted to get know me better, but I wasn't going to let that happen.

Don't get me wrong, I really appreciate their help, but their ways weren't my ways. They preached love, and they really believed it because they also showed it.

My father and mother hated church and religion. They said it was full of phonies and hypocrites. I'd never gone to church, but I had noticed the people I had come across down through the years that claimed to be God-fearing Christians were actually no different than anyone else. They went to church on Sunday, and maybe Wednesday, then went back to their normal activities. I thought this was the case with all Christians until I met Albert and Christina.

They didn't try to make me go to church, but they invited me each time they went. They didn't try to force their beliefs on me, but they did tell me their stories and how they had come to know Christ and how he had changed them. Albert also tried to get me to help out at the shelter with him. Each time, I would politely decline his invitation, that I didn't feel comfortable with that.

And you know, that was enough for him. He never tried to pressure me or guilt me into going. Even though I didn't go to church with him, Albert still continued to be kind to me.

He took his own money and got me a motorcycle a few

days after I had told him I could ride. It really shocked me when he showed it to me in the driveway one morning before I was to leave for work and handed me the keys. I'd never had anyone be that generous to me before.

So now, I had a nice quiet cruiser to get around on. It was a five year old Honda Rebel that was used and a little beat up, but beggars can't be choosers, as the saying goes. I was really grateful for it.

With my transportation problem solved, it was time to get back to making some real money. It only took me a month after I got the motorcycle to get everything lined up. I moved out of Albert's house and got my own place, a beat up old trailer on a couple acres of land out in the middle of nowhere. I paid a flat monthly fee and it covered everything: water, electricity, etc....

Albert and Christina felt it might have been too soon for me to move out, that I still needed their love and support, but I convinced them I was ok. I knew that I couldn't do what I was about to do while I was living with them. They would slow me down, and it would have just been a matter of time before they started questioning my income.

After I moved, I visited them often, then after a few months, I whittled that down to once or twice a week. I explained to them that I was much better, thanks to them. I constantly reassured them that I was coping with the loss

of my mother and would never relapse. They were happy for me, but sorry to see me go. Before I left, I showed the new membership I had at the gym, showing them I was committed to rebuilding my body from the mess that the drugs had left it in.

I worked out like a fiend and stole a lot too. Soon, I was able to add the gold dust back into my diet, and Malefic was back. I was new and improved. I vowed to never let anyone into my heart again. Never. My heart was stone now. The pain was finally gone and I felt like a beast. Unstoppable.

Between my alarm job during the day, the gym, and the burglaries at night, I had no free time. Like I expected, my alarm referrals went through the roof. It's amazing what a few burglarized homes could do to boost sales. And you know, I made a commission for each sale.

After a while, Manny the owner of the company decided to give me a chance at actually selling the systems and I accepted the opportunity. I did things a little differently than most however; instead sharing my commission with a door knocker/referral finder, like my old work, I passed out the flyer, knocked on doors, and installed systems myself.

In no time at all, the money was rolling in. I was getting into a flow. At least a third of my sales were to people whose homes I had already burglarized. As part of my

sales pitch, I would question them about details of their break-ins, finding out if they had heard anything of value to me. In all of the homes, I got variations of the same answer, the police were running down leads and canvassing the area for witnesses. Basically, they had no clues.

Before I had gotten started, I had also reconnected with Julio and he got together the connections for me to sell the goods I would be picking up.

Of course, I still held onto all the gold I collected. I would take out the diamonds and other gems and put them into a storage container, then, I would melt the gold down and separate it and purify it for my later ingestion.

Another thing I did was familiarize myself with antiques and art. I learned to distinguish the real stuff from fakes. That knowledge could come in handy, I figured.

Shortly after I got back into the business, I was getting two, sometimes three cars per week. The vehicles of choice were still pickup trucks, Hondas, and Toyotas, so I didn't have to learn any new skills on that front.

Occasionally, I would get a request for a specific kind of car; Mercedes, BMW, SAAB, etc.... My buyer would have a wrecked car, listed as totaled or completely damaged. If I could find them a similar car, he would repair the damaged car with all of the stolen car's parts then turn around and

sell it legally, making a pretty decent profit.

Julio told me about a cousin of his named Caesar who was into buying and selling guns. I'd come across guns all the time during my burglaries, but had always left them alone, not having anywhere to sell them quickly.

After talking with Caesar about the details (on the phone of course, to limit my exposure to others who could possibly identify me.) I found that he wasn't a joke like Julio. In fact, while we were talking, Caesar told me how much of a joke his cousin was. We had quite a laugh over some of the stupid things Julio had done in the past.

He also told me that he had heard about some of the jobs I had done and how impressed he was by the way I handled my business. He then asked me about why I had gone 'off the deep end.' I guess he wanted to find out whether he could count on me or not. After I told him the reason and assured him nothing like that would happen again, he said he understood, and I got the distinct impression that he really did. I'd learned that the Latinos don't play around when it comes to family, especially their mothers. He said he liked me and would like to do business with me.

Caesar told me to keep Julio out of the loop on any of our dealings and not to tell him we were doing any business at all. He said that he loved his cousin, but that he was an

idiot with a big mouth. Not a rat, but that he just had a runaway mouth.

The plan was that when I amassed enough guns to fill a car trunk, I would drive the car to a parking garage and leave it there, then bring Caesar an inventory list and the parking garage ticket. I would wait with him until one of his guys got to the garage and verified the inventory, then he would pay me. Of course, this made it necessary that we meet, but I was ok with that.

For my protection, I made sure to always place the guns in a stolen vehicle, and that the vehicle was always from a distant city, with clean plates on them. I found my old license plate maker in the same pawn shop I had sold it to the previous year, so that was easy.

The guns that I was taking from homes were usually there for home protection, and the money I made from a trunk-load was around fifteen to twenty thousand dollars. Occasionally, I would come upon a special weapon and receive a nice little bonus.

By my twenty-third birthday, I was taking in a little over one-hundred thousand dollars a month. My alarm sales alone were netting me about ten thousand. I was making as much money as most Fortune 500 CEO's.

I continued to educate myself. My knowledge of antiques, art, and weapons continued to grow. At one point, I

realized that Caesar had gotten over on me several times on our gun deals. I found in my researches that some of the weapons I'd gotten for him were worth a lot more than he'd claimed.

I didn't complain about these past deals, but after I found out the values of those weapons, I made sure to give explicit details about how much money I expected for certain types of weapons.

When I started over with my work, everyone I dealt with in that capacity knew me only as Malefic. No one knew my real name or where I lived. Even my land-lady only knew me by an assumed name, and I had all of the fake credentials to back it up.

My land-lady, Mrs. Johnson, who was elderly and took care of her disabled husband, came by once a month to collect from me. I made sure that my trailer and the property were always clean in order to prevent any problems or unexpected visits.

I offered to install an alarm system in the trailer and in her house for free and pay for the monitoring, and Mrs. Johnson graciously accepted. She also allowed me to build a shed on the property and put up a fence. I told her that I wanted to keep my motorcycle out of the rain and also get a dog.

She was hesitant at first, but the thing that clinched the

deal for me was when I told her I would pay for the shed and fence and would leave them on the property whenever I moved. She looked at me suspiciously at first, but in the end, her greed won out. I had a two-year lease at a fixed rate, but I'm sure she figured out that she could increase the rent after I left.

I offered to pay her a pet deposit, but she declined it. She probably wanted to give me the impression that she was doing me a favor. I played it up, telling her how much I really appreciated her hospitality and generosity. I laid it on thick.

When I built the fence, I put a double gate on the part that intersected with the road and also in the back. I wanted a wide enough opening to drive a car through.

Once everything was finished, I went out and found two dogs. One was a German Shepherd, the other a Pit Bull.

Both dogs were black. The German Shepherd, who I named Samson, had streaks of tan and white on his front legs. The Pit Bull I called Hungry, because he was always looking at people as if he were going to eat them.

They were both very loving and good to me. I had them trained as watch/guard dogs and they were always very good at their jobs. As I look back, I really regret not spending more time with them, caring for them better. I gave them shelter and food, and not much more.

My problem was that I was focused on one thing, and that was making, then protecting, my money. That's why I got the dogs. I had placed a large lockbox in the concrete foundation I had poured for the shed, then built the shed over and around it.

A large, thick stainless steel plate with special locks secured the box. I put paver stones on top of it to hide its' presence, and on top of those, I built a large shelf attached to two of the shed walls so that it could not be moved. It took me fifteen minutes to get to the box every time I needed to. I figured the harder it was to get to, the harder it would be for anyone looking for it to find.

I filled the shed with yard tools and various other things in addition to my motorcycle. The shed was made of filled concrete blocks, with a thick steel door on it, and I used a thick pad lock to secure it. I also had small closed circuit video cameras set up, watching and recording any activity outside the trailer and around the shed.

All these precautions, including the dogs, were designed to deter common thieves and keep neighborhood kids out. I knew that if someone ever discovered what I was doing and tracked me back to the trailer, they would eventually find my stash, but it would take them quite a bit of time and effort.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Things continued to go well for me. I was constantly on the go. Two years had flown by. By then, along with my Honda Rebel, I had purchased a mid-sized car and a work van. It turned out that I needed it on some of my jobs, to pick up larger items, like gun safes.

If a person's home was a safe distance from their neighbors, I would come back with my van and try my best to fill it with as many valuables as possible. I became comfortable and confident in my work.

People are creatures of habit. If they think their homes are secure, they leave a lot of their valuables just lying out in plain view, in open jewelry boxes on top of dressers, on top of makeup shelves basically, completely unsecured. Those habits made my job that much easier.

If people left their house at night to go to dinner or a movie, I knew that I had at least two hours before they would return. Now, even though I knew how to defeat even the best security alarms, I made it a point to break into homes without any security systems. I like to leave those with alarms alone in order to give them a sense of security. Many of them were my customers.

There I was, roaming the neighborhoods during the day,

putting up flyers and scouting homes, and no one ever suspected me.

I did have one close call however. Well, close call is not a strong enough word to describe what happened.

I almost got shot. Well, that's a little bit of an exaggeration.

Before I tell you about that, let's bring you back for a minute. Back to when I was a Senior in high school. Bear with me now, I'll get to the point.

You see, there was this strange group of kids, sort of outcasts. They were anti-military, anti-government, pretty much anti-everything. I remember one of them causing a big uproar in the school when he called the American flag a piece of rag that was only good for wiping his butt with.

Now these guys weren't hippies or tree-huggers or activists. They were part of a Christian sect (or cult) called the Jehovah's Witnesses. All I know is they were a very religious group.

They didn't participate in any of the school activities or celebrate any holidays. I remember this one guy always sitting alone at the back of the class whenever we celebrated anything.

They were an odd bunch, and a lot of the kids liked to ridicule them for their beliefs. I never heard anyone accuse any of them of anything bad or dishonest. I respected that.

I spoke with a few of them and learned that every Saturday a group of them would go around to local neighborhoods, passing out their literature, watch tower magazines and tracts. That got my gears turning.

Up to that point, I had done all of my surveillance work at night, under a cloak of darkness. It had become routine, and I was ready for something new and exciting. Of course I was a dumb seventeen year old kid.

My thoughts were that if I went along with these guys, or at least dressed like them and passed out their literature, it would give me the opportunity to scope out potential targets during the day; that is, on Saturdays and Sundays.

So, I went to their church to learn everything I could about them. Well, they didn't call it a church. They called it a Kingdom Hall, they called their services meetings. I attended them for a few months.

I understand why they were called a cult; they had their own way of talking to each other. Members knew who other members were, just by his words and phrases they used. For instance, while everyone might say, "the world," they would say, "this system of things."

Their methods of teaching are textbook—brainwashing 101. They even went so far as to call all of their teachings, 'The Truth.'

Regardless of their beliefs and eccentricities, though, the

group was thought of as trustworthy. They would be the perfect cover for me during the day.

So, I learned their lingo. I put on their mandatory uniforms; a suit and tie, and loaded up a briefcase with a couple of their books and a lot of their literature.

Two months of preparation was all I needed. I started hitting the neighborhoods in the early morning. I figured that most people were still in bed from partying the previous night or, that, they were going to some kind of church services on Sunday mornings.

Whenever I approached a house, I would act as if I owned the place, not looking side-to-side or sneaky in any way. I would always give a firm knock on the door and then wait for a minute or two while listening for any type of activity from inside: a dog, children, television, anything. If I didn't hear anything, I would try the door, rattle the knob first, then knocking again.

Sometimes the door would be unlocked. If it wasn't I would pull out my pocket knife and jimmy the lock. If I couldn't get it open in about ten seconds, I would walk away.

When I did get it open, I would quickly access everything and make a decision whether to go in or not. I would listen for sounds, breathing in the home's air, testing for any smells, opening my senses to the vibrations all homes had.

Once I was sure that the house was unoccupied, I went in, got what I wanted, then exited, always trying to take less than five minutes. My goal was to get in and out in around two minutes.

Sometimes, I had to deal with stairs, and sometimes I would find myself in a home that did not follow a standard floor plan and it would be like a maze.

If I stumbled upon a locked bedroom door in the house, I always assumed there were people in there, perhaps sleeping. If that happened, I would leave immediately.

Now, in some cases when the front door was dead bolted, I would get a feeling that the house was worth looking into and I would go around to the side or back, depending on the amount of cover that was available and what the neighbor's sightlines were. In every one of those instances, I would pick up a very good amount of valuables. In one of those homes, I found seventy-five thousand dollars cash hidden in a shoe box in a closet.

I didn't bother to try homes with alarm systems. At that time, I didn't know very much about them, so I left them alone. But, once I decided to break into a home, I was getting in, no matter what.

My pocket knife was all I needed to get past a lock, but I also carried a nine inch pry bar to lift up on a sliding glass door or pry loose the door to insert the knife blade easier.

If there was no other way to get in, I would use a rubber welcome mat from the house of one that I kept in my briefcase for those types of situations, and break the glass on the door or a window by placing the mat over it and striking it with the pry bar. The mat would muffle the sound of breaking glass both in the inside and outside.

So, my day escapades were pretty exciting. Breaking into a home in broad daylight always gave me a huge adrenaline rush. I was gambling. Yeah, I was careful, but still, I felt as though it was only a matter of time before my luck ran out and I was caught. And it did almost.

I was making my rounds one morning. I'd already hit a few homes and was getting ready to call it quits for the rest of the day. I walked up to the last house on the block, the last house of the day. I knocked on the door and waited.

Looking back, I think I was probably in too much of a hurry and let my guard slip, what with my day being almost over and such.

Well, I listened at the door and didn't hear anything, so I proceeded to jimmy the lock. When I opened it, the homeowner, a woman who looked to be in her forties or fifties, was standing inside, about fifteen feet from the door.

I don't know who was more shocked, me or her. My jaw hit the floor. As my eyes met with hers, I saw that she was

looking down at my hands and that the blood drained from her face, leaving it very pale and sickly looking.

My eyes followed hers down to my hands and I realized that she was staring at my pocket knife. In an instant, without even thinking, I calmly said, "I think I've got the wrong house," then stepped slowly backwards through the doorway. As I started to close the door, I looked behind the woman and saw a gun cabinet standing a few feet from the fireplace in the living room. My heartbeat sped up considerably at the sight.

After I closed the door, I turned and quickly walked down the driveway, turned left onto the street and headed away from the house, not going in front of it and getting away from the woman's line of sight.

I moved as quickly as I could, walking briskly, then breaking into a swift jog with my body erect so I would appear to moving toward something and to avoid looking as if I were running away.

Still in flight, I tried to appear calm as I looked for police or security patrols while I was heading to my car. After a few long minutes, and several turns up streets and down avenues, I made it to my car.

I continued to jog right up to the driver's side door and slid gracefully into the car. I had already glanced around to make sure no one was following me or watching from any

nearby windows.

Once I got in, I quickly took off my coat and tie, throwing them under the passenger's seat, and placing my briefcase under my seat. I started the car and drove out of the subdivision, trying to stay calm and look like a normal person out for a drive. It took a lot of discipline not to push the gas pedal to the floor and rush out of the area, leaving a cloud of dust and burnt rubber behind me. My heart felt like it was about to explode out of my chest.

It only took me a minute or two to get out of the area. Ten minutes later, I was back home and safe.

A few days later, I drove back to that neighborhood and picked up the loot that I had stashed in a wooded area behind some houses in the western section of the subdivision.

Man, I'll tell you. Talk about a wake-up call! I thought I was being brave and daring, and all the time, I was just being plain stupid; just wanting to be caught; tempting fate.

When I broke into that house that morning, that woman could have surprised me with one of those guns, or maybe there had been someone else in the house, in the living room, who could have grabbed a gun and come after me, shot me, maybe even killed me. I could be dead, or worse. I could have been shot and injured, then gotten caught and

taken to jail. Not good. Not good at all!

It was a good time to rethink and reassess my risk versus my reward. My daytime 'jobs' were just not worth getting killed or going to jail over.

No, I would just stick to what was working so far. If I got bored on Saturdays or Sundays again, I figured I could always learn to cross-stitch or basket weave down at the local YMCA. (Haha!)

Now, the reason I mentioned all of that stuff was to show that I'm not perfect, but also that I learned from my mistakes.

Ok, so I got over being bored pretty quickly, and even with my screw-ups, I still managed to steer clear of the law. But, that snake was about to rear its' ugly head and bite me on the butt.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I had it together now; I had no desire for drugs or alcohol at all, had my own place, and was completely comfortable financially. I even had a girlfriend that I saw from time-to-time. Wouldn't you know that she would be my downfall and I didn't even see it coming?

Amy was a really cute brunette. She worked as a waitress at a diner called, Twisters. I went there every week or so because they had some really good pasta meals. I didn't really notice her at first; sometimes she served me, sometimes someone else did.

She was friendly enough I guess and she flirted with me. I never gave her much thought though, figuring that she was just looking for a nicer tip. But, one night I ran into Amy. I was standing at the counter in the gas station, paying for some gas and some snacks, and I glanced over and there she was, standing next to me.

She smiled at me and said hello. She was still in her uniform and it was late, so I guessed she'd just gotten off from work.

I said hello back to her and we made some small talk as we walked out of the station's store area. She still flirted with me and smiled a lot. I remember thinking that she had

a really nice smile that lit up her whole face. I hadn't noticed it before.

After a few minutes, I could tell that she was interested in me. I liked her too, but I wasn't looking for anything serious, NO relationships to distract me from my work.

Amy got around to asking me if I was seeing anyone. When I told her I wasn't, I saw her eyes widen a little and her pupils dilate; a sign of pleasure.

She then tried to act shy, and after a few more minutes of talking, she worked up the courage to ask me why I had never asked her out. I told her that I was too busy, and didn't have the time for a relationship. Too busy to make any commitments.

Amy smiled, then chuckled before saying that surely I couldn't be so busy that I couldn't hang out every once in a while with a friend.

I couldn't think of anything to say to that, so we went out, had sex after the first date. Amy was cool. She turned into what you would call a friend with benefits; someone who I could call to go to a movie with me, or to dinner, or just to hang out with for no reason. She was also someone I could call anytime when I felt like getting laid.

So, we had an understanding. We were friends. At times good friends, but still just friends. No strings attached.

But of course, like an idiot, I got too comfortable with her.

I trusted her. She didn't know much about my life, especially about my thievery, and never asked.

I had Amy over to my trailer many nights. On a typical night we might grill some food on my back deck, then, watch a DVD. Sometimes we would end up messing around, sometimes not. Sometimes, she would spend the night, sometimes not.

One night, when we were sitting on the back deck, Amy noticed a SUV I had covered in the yard. Even though it was covered, part of the cloth had been blown aside by the wind and she could see that it was a newer model champagne colored Cadillac Escalade. It had custom rims that kind of made it stand out a little more than a normal one.

You know, I realize now that it was all my fault; that I got careless. I should not have had her on my back deck with that stolen vehicle there, so visible.

Amy asked me if the Escalade was mine. Her question caught me off guard. I told her no, but I could tell she could see that I was a little nervous.

Of course I was nervous. A description of that vehicle had just been broadcast on every local news station earlier that evening. I knew it, and she knew it. I could see it in her eyes.

That really messed up the evening. Even though she

didn't mention it, I knew I had screwed up. I was hot! I was so angry at myself for being such an idiot that I could have kicked my own butt.

But, the deed was already done. I just needed to figure out how I was going to salvage the rest of the evening. I sure didn't feel like having sex.

We both continued on with the evening as if nothing was wrong. I had a few beers that night. The first I'd had since going to rehab. They helped me to relax, get rid of most of the tension. Then, I screwed Amy like there was no tomorrow. She left later that night around midnight.

A few months went by and neither one of us said anything about the SUV. After that day, I made sure to never bring any vehicles back to my property, never to expose myself like that again. But the damage had already been done, as they say.

From what I understand, Amy was not the person that gave me up to the police; it was a co-worker of hers from the diner. A girl named Tina.

What I heard was that Amy and Tina went out for a few beers one night after work and after swapping a few stories about guys they had dated in the past, and who they were currently seeing, Amy told Tina about me. Well, one thing led to another, and Tina asked what I did for a living.

Amy, who had a few beers in her by that time, told her

that I was in sales, but then let it slip that she'd seen the stolen Escalade covered up in my back yard.

I know Amy didn't intend to get me in trouble. In fact, she told me later that she had not meant for it to slip out. She also told me that she never imagined Tina was a rat.

But then, she didn't know that her friend had a problem with taking and selling pills. Amy didn't even know that the girl was on probation. You see, Tina tried to keep that part of her life hidden from the boss and her co-workers.

So, what happened was that Tina got busted again, but this time, she was looking at some time in prison. It was her third arrest and she had served about nine months of a five year probation sentence. Because of that, she was going to get at least eight years.

The bad thing was that she had two young kids and her public defender told her that eight years was the best deal he could get. To try to mitigate the harshness of the news, he told her that with good time, she would probably only end up spending five and a half years locked up. A long time for a mother to be away from her kids.

Prior to the offer, Tina had been in jail for six months while awaiting trial, because she could not afford to pay a bond. She had pretty much given up any hope of getting a better deal when her P.D. mentioned that if she happened to have any information of any unsolved crimes that she

could give to the District Attorney, he might be able to work out a better deal for her, depending on the seriousness of the crime.

That's when Tina remembered what Amy had told her about the stolen Escalade in my backyard. She sang like a bird. The D.A. had me arrested and charged with twelve counts of felony burglary and twelve counts of felony theft. I guess he was trying to make a name for himself by clearing out a bunch of 'cold cases.' In any case, I was in deep doo-doo. Each felony carried a maximum of four years, and if all of them were ran consecutively (a very real possibility in Arkansas), I would end up receiving 96 years.

But first they had to find me guilty.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

It took me two weeks to bond out of jail, and it only took that long because the judge kept putting off the hearing. By the time I got home, I discovered that someone had ripped me off. They had found my hiding spot under my shed. I went around for weeks, months trying to figure out who it could have been and what I should do about it.

I still had some money in other places, but the bulk of it was gone. I had taken the advice of Caesar Molina, my gun contact. He had always told me to be ready to be caught, to lose everything. He had said that he made sure to have contingency plans for when the crap hit the fan. Because of that, he gave me his attorney's number.

His attorney, Robert Justice III, was a very powerful and influential man. He lived in the state capital and was childhood friends with the current Governor. He rubbed elbows with all of the movers and shakers all the time.

He also didn't care if his clients were innocent or guilty. He just cared about being paid.

My initial investment was one-hundred thousand dollars. His retainer was twenty-five thousand. That was what was in his account books. Another thirty-thousand, a miscellaneous fee, went directly into his pocket. He put the

remaining fifty-thousand in an escrow account, in case I was ever arrested, in order to pay bond.

Well, when that day came, I was sure glad to have listened to Caesar's advice, but I didn't like that I had to sit in jail for so long.

Obviously, someone knew that I had all of that cash stashed away. My thoughts swirled as I tried to figure out who? Was it my attorney? Was he in cahoots with a crooked judge, or maybe a bad cop? Or, was it someone else?

There was really no way to figure it out, unless someone made a mistake and ran their mouth about it. Besides, at that moment, I had to change gears and make staying out of prison my main concern.

With that in mind, I sat back and hoped that my attorney was as good as everyone said he was.

Turns out he was worth every penny I paid him. Six months after my arrest, I was signing a plea deal; eight years in prison at thirty percent, which worked out to about two and a half years with 'good-time.' My attorney got the D.A. to recommend that all of the charges be run concurrently.

Of course, I was pretty angry. I'd expected him to get everything dropped, or at least, a few years of probation. I sure never thought I would be going to prison.

The judge who sentenced me didn't like the deal I got. She said in my sentencing hearing that I got off too easy. Wow, if only she knew the truth! She also said that she knew that I had been committing break-ins for quite a while and that with my burglary skills, she would see to it that the prison would be notified that I was an extreme escape risk. That's why I was heading to a maximum security facility.

It was a cold, blustery day in January when the bus pulled up to the prison. Ice and snow were everywhere. After we passed through the gates, about fifty of us walked from the bus to a small building that had a sign over the door that read, 'Intake.' We were all wearing cheap, slip-on canvas shoes and thin cotton jumpsuits. My body was shivering the whole two to three minutes we were outside. The bus had not had any heating at all, but it's been at least five to ten degrees warmer inside if only because of body heat, and the wind had not been blowing in there.

When we got into the building, we all moved to some benches and were told to strip off our clothes. Four guards came down the line, looking at us front and back and asking us to squat and cough. I'm glad they didn't perform a cavity search. I had some money hidden.

Once we were through with that bit of unpleasantness, we were led in our undershorts, to a counter and issued our

state prison uniforms, an ugly set of orange and white shirt and pants.

After we were dressed, a guard passed out large envelopes to everyone containing booklets and papers that had all of the prison's rules and regulations in them. He gave us a brief overview, pretty much telling us to be careful, that your life wasn't worth more than a Ramen soup or a candy bar. He also said that we should all try to stay away from tobacco, drugs, and alcohol, and not to get into debt, that all of those could easily get you killed.

That pretty much marked the beginning of my next phase of life.

It didn't take me much time to adjust to the prison life. When most guys first got to prison, they were scared. Prior to getting there, they heard all sorts of horror stories about it, getting robbed, stabbed, raped. Those things caused considerable fear.

Not in me. My fears, or should I say concerns, were having to be around queers and all of the idiocy and games that came with them.

I never paid them much attention on the street, but I hated the thought of having that type of person in my face, so to speak, everyday.

My only other concern was being put in a situation where I might have to kill someone. I only had a few years to do,

then, I was free. I didn't want an eight year sentence to turn into a life sentence.

Prison was bad, but it was tolerable. Like anything else, it had its' good points and bad points. I knew it could always be worse.

I was told by some of the 'old-heads,' older prisoners, not to trust anyone, that no one was your friend in prison.

Well, that information meant nothing to me. I came to prison with no friends, and I had no plans on making any while I was there.

And yet, despite my feelings, I did.

My days consisted of studying, eating at chow hall, working out and showering, then locking down for the evening. Every morning, I woke up to the sound of my cell door being opened by the guard, followed shortly by someone shouting, "Chow, chow!"

I ate whatever they passed out, half the time not even knowing what it was. It was usually some type of flavorless slop that most people wouldn't even feed their dogs. The Governor had made some kind contract with a company called, Quick Chill, to supply all of the food for the state's prisons. I heard he had stock in it. All I know is that it was really bad. I had seen some of the wild animals that lived on the compound; skunks, squirrels, even crows, sniff at the garbage and turned and walked away from it. I guess

we were lower than them.

But then, you know, society as a whole has already viewed prison inmates as nothing more than animals.

I witnessed cruel treatment, indifference, and plain old neglect. And as far as I could tell, no one outside of the walls, not the state, not the churches, not even many family members seemed to care. It was a damned shame.

As far as meeting decent people in prison, I met quite a few. Although a lot of the men in there had less than average IQ's and some were just plain insane, a lot of them were very intelligent. They had just been brought down by addictions to drugs, alcohol, even money. Many of those addictions had caused other tragic events and had cascaded like dominoes, spilling them into the prison system.

For example, a man, a good man, law-abiding, loses his job and can't find another one. He then loses his home. That leads to his family abandoning him. Then he turns to drugs or alcohol. These serve as a band-aid, covering up the wound. A temporary fix to help make from one day to the next. This causes you to be selfish, caring for nothing but yourself. You neglect your kids, treat your friends and extended family like trash. Under the influence, you stop caring. You grow more unhappy as you watch everything that ever meant anything to you slip away and

vanish.

Then, you do something stupid; careless; self-destructive. Of course, you don't realize it at the time because you're still under the influence of whatever substance has enslaved you.

Then, you get caught doing something. Maybe someone gets hurt, maybe even killed. Now, it's too late.

That's when reality sets in.

From the confines of an 8x12 prison cell, the old man emerges. The man you used to be. The one that is sickened by what he has become and is wishing for another chance. A chance to go back in time and try to work out life's troubles differently. This happens more often than you think.

I met truck drivers, mechanics, lawyers, preachers. Men from all walks of life. Some were young, some old. The thing they all had in common was they were all trying to make it through one more day.

For me, prison was more of a school than anything else. In the time I spent there, I learned more about the world and life than I had in my entire time on the streets.

The men I spoke to in prison didn't acquire their knowledge solely from books. Much of what they shared with me came from their life experience.

For example, an ex-Navy Seal named Neville Jones taught

me about ghillie suits. These were special clothes that snipers and others in the military would wear to camouflage or disguise their appearance and allowed them to blend into their environment in order to get closer to the enemy.

They could also allow me to get close to homes during my reconnaissance outings before I decided to break into them.

Neville was a master tactician. He used chess, and an oriental game called, Go, to show me how to think, to plan. To control and manipulate my opponents and even my environment. He also showed me how to apply this information in real-world situations because he always told me that knowledge without application is just information.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

So, my days in prison were spent learning, trying to constantly improve my craft. I worked on increasing my knowledge of cars; old as well as new. I studied all of the great painters and sculptors. I knew which furnishings were valuable antiques and which were just garbage. I had all of this 'down-time' from life, and I made sure to take advantage of every second of it. Using it for my benefit.

The prison on the other hand, tried to give the illusion of training and rehabilitation of the inmates. That was a joke! The names of their programs were designed to fool the outside world. To fool people (and the government that gave them money) into believing that the state really gave a crap about its' prisoners.

'Pro-Social Skills' or 'Release for Success.' Nice names for programs that did nothing to change the way a man dealt with his problems. It is just not enough to tell a man not to turn to drugs, or not to resort to violence, without some kind of practical application to back it up. Goes back to what I said before about knowledge.

Men (or women) need to be taught new ways, shown real life examples of those other inmates who went down a different path and became successful. But, the problem

there is that there are not many of those.

Why?

Well, I found out that prison is a racket. A money-making business. Crime does pay. It pays the Judges, the lawyers, the police, and a lot of other people.

Crime justifies state and federal budgets. It helps fund agencies and organizations. It gets leaders elected.

Does that shock you? It should!

Crime and prisons are just business. No one cares about eliminating crime. It's too profitable! Equally, they don't care about the victims of crime, only using them for publicity purposes.

The really sad thing is that many times, the Judges or Lawyers know who the really guilty or innocents are, but they just don't care. They shirk their sworn duty to uphold justice and truth. I really believe that there will be a special place reserved in Hell for these people.

Anyway, things went along smoothly for me for a while, then, I started getting in fights, mostly because of idiots. Most of the men there knew I was into martial arts because I practiced every night and I guess they just felt they just had to try me, to see if they were better.

Now, no one was so stupid as to challenge me to a fight man-to-man in my cell, where there were no cameras or guards to break things up.

No, they always waited until there was a crowd of people around and guards were close enough to save them. They were a bunch of cowards, trying to look good for their buddies or for the gang they were in or wanted to join.

So, I ended up spending a lot of time in the hole; about half of my time altogether which was close to four years because the parole board kept putting me off because of my actions. I ended up serving almost the whole eight years of my sentence day-for-day.

I was twenty-six when I went to prison. I was a thief, but knew almost nothing about life. When I walked out, I was thirty-four years old, but now I was not only wiser but a much more well-versed criminal.

Upon my release, I had nowhere to go. I could have looked up Albert and Christina, my friends from the shelter, but I didn't want their help. I didn't need anyone's help.

The day I left, I found a pry bar in the back of a pickup truck parked at a shopping center, waited till evening fell, then walked to a few laundry mats and car washes, where I broke into the change machines to help get me on my feet, then I bought a gun, some clothes and a ski mask.

I broke into some businesses and homes, looking only for cash. After a week, I had over fifteen-thousand dollars.

I bought a conversion van and fixed it up inside, making it real comfortable to live in. My goal was to get some

travelling money. Once I got enough, I would leave good ole' Arkansas behind me.

While I was in prison, I'd met a guy from Russia, Bruno, one of my brethren, I guess. He told me about a large community in Florida that was teeming with Russian immigrants and wealthy retirees. He said the Russian Mafia had planted a lot of people there and had invested a lot of money in the town.

Because of my family, I knew most of the language and was also Russian myself. I could blend in well, so, my plan was to relocate there and make some real money.

After getting enough money, I took a drive down to Florida to see if it was all Bruno had said it was.

Wow! When I got there, I found out that he sure hadn't exaggerated things. Nice homes. Nice cars. Lots of retired folks who were just rolling in money. I heard them described as blue-hairs, referencing their grey hair, or snow birds because they spent the summers in New York or wherever, and the winters in Florida to keep out of the cold.

I liked what I saw in Florida, so I needed to set up there with a quickness, as my buddy Neville liked to say.

A little while after I got there, I called up Caesar Molina, my gun contact. Caesar had been supplying guns to people all over the world. Well, not really. But he pretty much had

Central and South America sewn up. He had definitely moved up in the world since I'd last seen him.

So, I gave Caesar a call and set up a meeting. He told me he'd heard from Julio that I'd gotten out, and when we met, he kind of embarrassed me by kissing me on the cheek. He then told me that I was a man who had earned his respect and that he thought when I was arrested that he might have to kill me, that he had had people ready too, just in case.

He then said that he had gotten word from his superiors to go ahead and kill me, but he told them he was willing to take a chance on me; that he believed I was an honorable man. A man who could be trusted not to snitch. When I confirmed his belief by serving my time while asking nothing from anyone, he said that he would be proud to do business with me again.

He met me in a night club, using the pounding beat of the music to drown out our conversation. We had a few drinks and talked about nothing for a little while, just getting comfortable with each other again. He didn't ask me anything about my prison time, and I was fine with that. Leave the past in the past.

I told Caesar what I had planned. He asked me if I had any plans to settle down; to maybe start a family. He advised me to make my money and get out. He said to get

married, have some kids, use what I accumulate to start a legitimate business, then go make myself a real life.

He seemed to genuinely care.

But you know, that was all nice maybe, for those who were suited for that type of life, but not for me. I was focused on catching up. I spent eight years in prison thinking about what I was going to do. Not just about recovering my money, but also how I could get even with the person who believed he'd gotten over on me.

I told Caesar about the break-in and theft of my money. I told him who I suspected. He suggested I let it go, to chalk it up as a life experience and to learn from it. He mentioned that there were ways to stash money without anyone finding it. He said that he could get me false I.D.'s, that, everything would look legitimate but the person would never really exist.

He then told me he could help me hide it, invest it using the phantom identities. He would put it into mutual funds, real estate, off-shore accounts and in safe-deposit boxes, keeping it spread around so it would be harder to trace.

It all sounded pretty good to me. When I was ready, Caesar had his people make me a few phony personas. It cost me a little bit of money, but it was money well spent.

However, knowing where and how to hide my future earnings did not make up for the fact that someone had

robbed me and that they were thinking that they had gotten away with it.

Caesar and I moved back into our business of buying and selling guns. Of course, learning from my prison knowledge, I wasn't about to risk driving a load of guns from Florida all the way to Arkansas, so Caesar arranged for one of his other cousins, Marco, to come down and pick up the loads then drive them to where Caesar wanted them. Marco was already making runs from down in Miami and the Keys, so it wouldn't be any big deal for him to come to my city. I was ok with that.

Everything would be pretty much the same as our previous dealings, only now I fax a list of the weapons I compiled to Caesar, then he would fax me back a price. If everything was cool, I would either mail or Fed-Ex the parking garage ticket to a P.O. Box in Orlando and Marco would take things from there.

I always kept a photo copy of the ticket, just in case there was a screw up with the mail, and cash payments were delivered to me by way of a private courier. This allowed me to not only track my money but also keep it out of the hands of government employees.

I purchased a nice gun from Caesar, a .44 Caliber Super Red Hawk capable of taking down an elephant or lion with a single shot. With its' thirteen-inch barrel, it was a really

intimidating piece of hardware.

I had no intentions of really shooting anyone, but in my line of work, I had to be prepared; there was always the chance of stumbling upon a homeowner or worse, some homeowner getting the drop on me. I wanted a weapon that made people think twice about challenging me.

My next step was to find a high end fence in Florida to help me move and sell some of the more difficult items. I already had a guy in Arkansas that I had taken my jewelry to, but I didn't want to use him because he probably couldn't handle the volume I was going to be generating, or the actual value of some of the items. He was strictly a mid-level operator.

Now, I needed someone that could handle rare art, antique jewelry, and antique furnishings. I spoke to Caesar about it. He seemed a little hesitant at first, as if we were about to tread in very dangerous waters.

He thought about it for a couple of minutes, then slowly nodded his head and said yes. He then told me the man to talk to was named Miguel DeFriese. He was an art dealer in Miami who handled hundreds of millions of dollars worth of art every year.

Caesar said that now I would be swimming with sharks, that there was no room for errors, that, any mistake could get me killed. He said that if I really wanted to step in that

direction, he would introduce me to DeFriese. But, before he did that, he would give me a little bit of the man's history, then, let me make a careful, informed decision.

He then told me that DeFriese worked for a man named Tommy Zuuca, who was a big time crime boss from Chicago. He put Miguel DeFriese in charge of the territory for Florida and parts of the Caribbean. If there was anything going on in Florida, you'd better know that DeFriese had his hands in it. He could move all of the expensive art pieces, jewelry, and antiques I picked up by selling them through phantom collectors. He had a very extensive network throughout the Caribbean and other parts of the world, set up to specifically move all of the goods he came into contact with.

That all sounded good to me. We talked about it for about fifteen minutes or so, then, he was through. I asked him if he had any idea who had cleaned me out and gotten away with my money.

His whole demeanor changed. He said he would have some people check into it for me, but he thought I should just let it go; to be a man and just accept the costly lesson. I asked him if he could.

A faint smile came to his face, then he nodded his head and I knew he would take care of it.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

After I got everything set up for my business in Florida, I searched for a place to live. After only a few weeks, I found a great area, between Jacksonville and Daytona Beach. I won't say the name of the town, but it was small and quiet. The neighborhood I moved into was secluded and peaceful. It was a trailer park, on about fifty acres of land with a small lake in the middle and a large wooded area. There weren't many trailers, maybe thirty or thirty-five with a lot of space between units and it had front and back access roads, which made it perfect for my needs.

I rented a large lot with a furnished double wide trailer near the back access road. The less people who saw me coming and going, the better.

It only took me about a week to settle in. Some of the other residents came by during that week to welcome me. I was congenial to them, knowing that it was better to have neighbors who were comfortable with you than angry and watchful.

I took on the role of a native Floridian, taking a break from work to rest and recharge my batteries. I had already familiarized myself with the state while I was in prison, reading several different books about it and a Fodor's

guide. Now, I just had to turn that book knowledge into practical application.

I visited historical places, tourist sites, museums; all of the places that people from Florida might be with. I drove the interstates, roads and rural routes from north of Pensacola to Key West. Familiarizing myself with the whole state; learning as much as I could about my new 'stomping grounds.' I learned a lot of good information, including the fact that there were literally thousands of different retirement communities spread out around the state; something I'd read, but had not internalized, I guess you could say. It was good to discover this though.

Plenty of retirees equaled plenty of money. Money that was just sitting there, ready for someone like me to come and take it.

I was still in great shape from all of the time I spent exercising in prison. I had spent three to four hours a day working out to keep in shape, in case some inmate tried something stupid, and in preparation for my life once I was released.

I also resumed my regimen of ingesting gold dust, starting it within a week of my release. I could feel my strength, stamina, and senses coming back to life, making me feel like I was finally myself again, the person I was supposed to be.

One of the first things I did once I had settled into my new home was get a membership. I went with a small gym in town instead of the other one there, which was a national franchise. If I was put into their database, I could possibly be tracked by the authorities. I always had to think things through when I moved, play out every scenario that could possibly happen. I had been to prison once. I had no plans of ever going back.

Before I had Caesar set up a meeting with Miguel DeFriese, I made absolute sure that I was ready. I worked for about six months, getting into businesses, homes, getting a 'feel' for what things were like in the Sunshine state. When I thought it was time, I made the call.

Miguel had me meet him at the weirdest place: a large hotel in Orlando that was hosting a Real Estate seminar. It was a free seminar that was open to the public. Caesar told me what time to be there and where to sit. 8:45am and on the left side, fourth row from the back, end of the row, near the exit.

I got there early and sat in the seat, sipping a cup of orange juice that I'd gotten from a table in the back. At 8:50am, a man sat down behind me, instructing me not to turn around. He introduced himself as Miguel DeFriese. His English wasn't American, I could tell he had lived in Europe for some time, but really couldn't distinguish exactly from

where. I could smell distinctive cologne that I didn't recognize. It smelled pretty good, without being overwhelming.

Miguel said that he'd gotten a call from T.Z. and that T.Z. had wanted him to meet with me and help me if he could. DeFriese said he was aware of the business I was in and what kind of help I was in need of. He then told me that this meeting would most likely be the only one we would ever have. Then he reached over my shoulder and handed me a small folded piece of paper with two names and phone numbers on them.

The first name was T.O. and the other was Wyatt Broderick. Before I had the chance to ask, DeFriese told me that T.O. was the best man to know when it came to getting rid of any car I could find. He also told me the man had two garages; one in Sarasota, and the other in West Palm Beach.

The other man, Broderick, or Brady for short, was DeFriese's personal liaison, his go-through guy. Anything I picked up, other than cars, would be processed through him. There would be absolutely no contact between me and DeFriese at all. None. He was quite adamant about that.

He also mentioned that Brody would handle all goods, no matter the value as long as it had some resale potential.

That made things fairly easy for me. Whenever I would

find a house with all new furniture and appliances, or full of antiques, and I was sure that the owners would be gone all day or if they were out of town, I would come back with a moving van and a couple of temporary workers I'd picked up down at the local day office, usually Mexicans, and clean out the entire house.

Of course, I would only do this if the house was separated from other homes by a good distance; away from nosy neighbors. And you know, there were plenty of these. Rich old people enjoyed their privacy. They felt safe, putting all of their trust in home security systems that I had extensive knowledge of.

After Miguel said what he had to say, he handed me a note. He said that T.O. and Brody would be in touch. He then said he had my contact info, and that he'd met me to get a feel for who I was, that he liked to know those he did business with. Then, without saying goodbye, DeFriese got up and slipped out the side exit door. I glanced back and caught a brief glimpse of his back as the door slid close.

I was a little puzzled. I had expected him to make a few threats, to tell me what would happen to me if I ever mentioned my business dealings with him or any of his people.

But, I guess when you're dealing with men like Miguel or his boss T.Z. it's understood that if you double-cross them,

you're committing suicide, and also killing your whole family.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A short while after I got all of my contacts set up, I worked on my cover identities. I had to be able to move around the state freely, without the fear that some police officer or Highway Patrol officer would pull me over and run a background check on my real name.

Another activity I continued with was my martial arts training and fighting. As strange as it sounds, I enjoyed being hit. It had stopped hurting years ago. Now, it was just like rough playing with old friends.

I also enjoyed inflicting pain; maybe a little too much, but that's how it was. I found a mixed martial arts studio about twenty miles from my trailer. My old instructor, Lee, had given me a letter of introduction, and the instructor at the new place accepted me without any questions. I went there at least twice a week to help me work off some of my stored up energy. I always made sure to go on the nights when they were having full-contact open fights.

I used my fighting skills to get entered into MMA matches all over the state. I also hooked up with a real pretty girl from my studio. I figured I could use her, like I did my old friend, Cindy, driving around with her to check out neighborhoods in and around the cities where I was

fighting.

Her name was Genie Lopez. Her father was from Puerto Rico and mother from Florida. She had the light skin of her mother and had been born in Boca-Raton, a medium-sized city near Miami. She said she'd moved up to my area to attend college.

She said she'd been doing well in school, but had gotten side-tracked by her martial arts. Thankfully, she wasn't muscularly built, because I don't really like that type. Her looks and personality were great. She had dimples on both cheeks that deepened when she smiled and just made me feel warm.

Now, I consider myself a professional, and by no means did I believe in love at first sight, but I'll tell you, I'd be lying if I told you that she meant nothing to me; that she was nothing more than a toss in the hay and to have along with me for cover when I was doing surveillance on homes.

No, I really liked her. For the life of me, I can't understand what I was really thinking. I didn't have time for a real relationship! My plans were to build up a large sum of money and to go live like a King in some place comfortable and where the cost of living was lower than the U.S.

I had met several men in prison who had lived in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and a few other countries in Central and South

America, and these men had told me stories about their lives there; about how it was so different there than in the U.S: How things were more community-based and there was more unity among people.

I could see myself living out the rest of my days in a world like that, but you know, during all of my fantasies about that, I never once pictured who would be there with me. I had been a loner so long, I guess it just never occurred to me.

But now, after meeting Genie, I began to realize that something deep down inside me was missing. Maybe that something was Genie. There was definitely something about her that was different than other women I had met. I liked her. I enjoyed being around her, and she made me feel alive, more alive than I had ever felt before.

Genie wasn't a shy person, but she was a loner like me. She had no trouble talking to people, but she didn't go out of her way to make new friends.

Shortly after meeting her, she told me that her family had disowned her. They were the overbearing type that had to have control of everything, including their children's lives. They had wanted her to finish college and had already picked out a few men that they thought would be perfect for her to marry. They had her whole life planned out for her, and she pissed them off when she refused to go along.

So, they wrote her off, and she seemed ok with it. She was living her life to the fullest, enjoying every minute of it.

She also told me that she really enjoyed being with me.

She reminded me a little bit of me. She made me remember my younger days when we went to matches a long way from home to compete, instead of staying in a motel, she would want to camp out on the beach, much like I used to camp out in the woods as I was growing up.

Genie was tough, she was adventurous, she was fun to be around. She was so very beautiful, and before I realized it, I fell in love with her.

Now, let me get back to the business. My next step after getting my cover I.D.'s was to do things similar to what I had done in Arkansas, I located a reputable, family-owned alarm company, (not a nationally owned chain) in the Orlando area of central Florida. It was named, Alarm Masters, owned and operated by Wendall Doree and his family. A nice, medium-sized business in a large area filled with retirees.

I went in and sold myself to him. I told him a story about how my father had owned an alarm shop and how I'd worked with him until he passed away when I was nineteen, then, had traveled around the country for a while until finally settling there in central Florida. I never told him

my real name or that I had spent some time in prison.

The good thing was that he never checked. Wendall was a good man, and he was interested in two things—his family and his business. The funny thing was that the order of their importance changed from one day to the next.

Wendall's wife, Laney, took care of all the financial accounts for the company and his daughter Renee answered the phones and set up all the installations. His two sons, Ricky and Manuel oversaw the sales people and installers.

Wendall had started the company seventeen years earlier from the trunk of his car. From those humble beginnings, the business had grown to three large offices that were able to service the entire state of Florida.

Wendall hired me as a salesman and that took care of my appearance of living a normal life. I was also competing in fights, and I had someone that I looked forward to seeing and spending time with. But, all the while, I was living two lives. Living dangerously.

I truly believe that my lifestyle would have been too much, too stressful, for anyone else to handle. But not for me. Not for Malefic.

I had read somewhere that my abilities, to be able to sense when someone was around, was a form of extra-sensory perception, and that my ability to give and take

energy from a person was a psychic blood-letting; that I was a form of Vampire; a Psychic Vampire. When I read that, I thought it was funny that people would classify me as a Vampire. Much of what I did for a living, I did under the cover of darkness, and my sleep was almost always during the daylight hours.

The gold dust that I was ingesting had me back on top of my game. I was back in tune with everyone around me. I could feel if someone were good or evil, and also when they were being truthful or dishonest. What made me feel good was that Genie's aura/energy was always pure and true.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Everything that I needed in Florida was set in place; all the necessary precautions and fail safes were ready. Malefic the thief, the Psychic Vampire, was back in business.

I met with Brody and T.O., and everything went smoothly with them. T.O. and I worked out a good plan: I would drop off the cars I stole at a place he specified, different each time, then he would pay me once one of his people picked them up. His pay was a lot more than I'd made from Steve-O, my guy in Arkansas.

T.O. was clearly a no-nonsense kind of guy. He conducted business a certain way; his way. If you deviated from his instructions, he would gladly break your face and legs. I'm not talking about having someone else do it either. He was definitely a hands on kind of guy. What I perceived about him was not just mannerisms. He was shorter than me, maybe five-eight or nine, weighed about two-hundred pounds, had dark brown skin and was clean shaven on top of his head. His nose was wide and kind of misshapen and I could see small scars on his brows from what he said was a few 'dust-ups' over the years. When he smiled, I could see that most of his teeth were missing. I asked him about it

and he told me he'd been a Ranger in the U.S. Army and had broken his jaw and lost the teeth when he flew through the window of a Hum-V while in Iraq. His eyes were very intelligent and I could see a light in them that I didn't see in many others, but they hardened and got dark when he spoke about the military. I sensed that he felt betrayed somehow, but I didn't probe for more. We were business partners, and I didn't need any friends.

When we parted, we shook hands. Although his hands were small, in keeping with his overall stature, his palms were well-calloused and his knuckles were all scarred. His handshake was like a vise, much like my own. I looked him in the eyes and he nodded his head in respect acknowledging that he understood that I was a warrior too, and was not someone to be toyed with or taken lightly. We left each other with a mutual understanding and respect. I liked him. In another life, I think we could have been friends.

Brody, on the other hand, was a shady fellow. I didn't like him at all. He was a sharp dresser; well refined, but there was something 'off' about him. To the untrained eye, Brody was the perfect image of a confident, successful businessman. He gave me a list of warehouses and safe houses that I would be making drop-offs to. He even offered to purchase any rare coins or jewelry I came up

with, but I told him I was satisfied with the guy I had.

My initial interest in Miguel DeFriese was to have a buyer for all of the high end/expensive art pieces. I was also happy to unload my furnishings and antiques through him as well, but Brody made me hesitate to put all of my eggs in one basket like that.

I don't know what it was about Brody. Maybe he was just a nervous guy. Maybe it was all the cocaine in his system. Either way, the vibe that I got from him was unsettling. He was friendly enough, and he didn't act like someone who thought he was better than me.

It nagged at me, like an itch in the middle of my back that I couldn't reach. I might have been picking up some kind of unconscious tick. It wasn't enough to make me to turn and run, but there was definitely something there. I found that the best thing that I could do in those type of situations was to clear my thoughts and not worry about it. My mind would figure things out in the appropriate time.

I got settled into my trailer, making it more comfortable and fitting for my lifestyle. I took some to get to know my neighbors, to let them get comfortable with me.

On my left was Mr. Drawski, a retired factory worker and widower. He was quiet, didn't get out much, stayed to himself.

On my right were the Luftkins, Bob and Jill. They'd been

married for forty-seven years; high school sweethearts. Both were retired, blue-collar workers, lower middle class.

Directly across from me were Wilbur and Judith Funk. Both of them were pleasant to me, but as far as each other, there wasn't a kind word between them. Wilbur stayed home and collected a disability check, while Judith worked as a cashier at the local 'Gas & Serve;' one waiting to retire, the other waiting to die. They were both miserable, and both perfect for each other.

Each of my neighbors were different from each other, but I could understand all of them.

One of the first things I did once I was comfortable was put up a fence. I told all of my neighbors about my job as an alarm salesman. I offered them a good deal on the systems, but everyone declined, saying for the most part that they had nothing worth stealing, or that their home owner's insurance would take care of anything that was taken.

My landlords however, jumped at my offer of a free system, and I threw in a free fence for them too. They made me sign an agreement stating that when I moved out, I would not take either of them with me. I told them that was fine because the alarm system components were free to me, a perk of my job. I also told them that the materials for the fence were obtained through a friend of

mine who worked at the local Home Depot and that they were practically free to me. Both of those were lies. I paid for everything out of my own pocket.

Also, even though I now had phantom accounts set up to stash my money and an attorney reserved and holding money as well, I still had to have something close to home to keep my gold and spending money in, so I cut a hole in the floor of my laundry closet and installed a floor safe there. A hole big enough for me to drop through and go beneath the trailer. Then, I dug a hole in the sandy Florida soil and placed a plastic tub with a sealable lid in it then put a three by three foot waterproof safe inside of the tub. When I was done, I covered it with the sand.

I kept about forty thousand dollars in cash in the safe at all times, and of course my gold, which I figured was worth about twenty or twenty-five thousand.

I also had some jewelry in the safe, but not for sale. No, I had started to look differently at some of the jewelry I was stealing, not for the money I could get for it, but for Genie, wondering if she would like it.

I was thirty-five, almost thirty-six, and I found myself falling in love for the first time, REALLY falling in love.

I was torn inside. A part of me was okay with just leaving things as they were. There was no need to tell Genie about my late night business dealings, but my heart wouldn't give

it a rest. It kept trying to convince me that telling her about my other life, my other career, was better than her finding out. But how would she find out, I asked myself. I wasn't going to get caught, and no one was going to tell on me. Certainly not the men I was dealing with.

Still, with this new heart that was emerging, so was a conscience. Who would have thought that all of these damned feelings would just all of a sudden pop up in me?

I wasn't ready to tell her, but I just as much didn't want to lose her. How did someone bring up a conversation like that? Oh, by the way honey, I break into people's homes for a living. I take their possessions, the things they work hard for, and I sell them for money. And, I really don't care what they feel about their loss.

Yeah, that would go over really well.

I didn't want Genie to think that I was an insensitive bastard. The sad truth of the matter though, was that I was. I didn't care about the people I stole from. Not one bit. Their possessions were nothing more than a means to my end. Their wedding rings, anniversary gifts, unreplacable things were simply donations toward my happily ever after.

I didn't hate the people I stole from; it wasn't revenge for my poor childhood. I didn't envy them, didn't think they were better than me. No, I was just indifferent. I didn't

care.

So, I continued to live two lives and hoped that an opportunity would arise; something, anything, that would allow me to tell Genie about my real life as a thief.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) was Genie's life. She loved to compete. More than that, she loved to teach others how to fight, especially women. She taught women's classes at the Dojo three nights a week, and competed every other week.

I tried not to compete too often, and even when I did, I held back, pulled my punches. My speed and power were no match for any of those guys, and I knew that it wouldn't be wise for me to do well and get recognized.

Genie was always asking me to compete. I would give her a bunch of lame excuses, hoping she would just realize that I didn't want to fight; I would complain about soreness, bad knees, even that my face needed to be presentable for my job, that I would sell less if my customers saw me with a beat up face.

She tried to be understanding, but I could tell that she really wanted to see her man fight. She knew I was good. Sometimes I think that she could tell that I wasn't giving every fight my all. It was hard to hide it from her. She watched me train. She knew my speed, my timing, and what I was capable of.

When I fought, I fought as a light-heavyweight. Genie told me about an MMA light-heavyweight fighter that she

didn't like. He was starting to make a name for himself, that he was merciless, brutal. She said that he seemed unbeatable. She went on to say that several of her friends had had the misfortune of being placed against him in matches, and that the guy had not only beaten them, he had hurt them so bad that their careers as fighters had come to a halt. He'd put one of those guys in the hospital and the doctors had said he wouldn't walk again.

That caught my attention. She was so sad when she told me all this. It made me angry. Very angry.

Victor Velasquez. He had been a champion Jiu-Jitsu fighter from Brazil and had come to America to try to conquer the MMA circle. Who would have thought this guy would be the beginning, the stepping stone towards telling Genie about my other life.

One evening while Genie and I were laying in bed, not talking much, but just laying there, enjoying a comfortable silence, when she said she wished someone would beat Velasquez; that he had hurt too many people and needed to be taught a lesson.

Then, without really thinking, I told her ok, that I'll beat him and send him back to Brazil in shame.

She got a curious look in her face. Not one of disapproval or of unbelief. She just got this curious look, as if she were trying to figure something out.

Victor Velasquez outweighed me by seventy pounds, so I would need to gain at least thirty pounds to compete in his weight class. When I told Genie I would be gaining that weight, she was curious to know how I would do that. I could also tell she was excited that I would go to such lengths. I could see a gleam in her eyes every time we talked about it. When she asked me how I was going to pack on so much weight, I told her that with money, anything was possible.

So, I had Brody set up a meeting with his boss, DeFriese. At first, Brody didn't want to set it up. He wanted me to relay my request through him like I always did, but I insisted on the personal meeting. What I needed from DeFriese would require some convincing, and I knew I couldn't count on Brody handling it for me. I just didn't trust him that much.

It had been over a year since DeFriese and I had had our meeting in Orlando, I had made a lot of money through him, and he'd made quite a bit through me. I'd had no run-ins with the law and had proved myself a good businessman. All-in-all, our relationship had been prosperous.

He agreed to see me.

Miguel met me in the backroom of a dry cleaner's shop. He was there when I arrived, and had a small table set up

with two plates of food on them, and a bottle of wine in a bucket of ice beside it. I think he was anticipating something special from our meeting.

Miguel waved me over and I sat down. He said the food was from the Italian restaurant next door. Seven-cheese lasagna, garlic rolls, and salad. It tasted great, but I wasn't there for the food. I ate it though and made small talk until we were done.

After a waiter came and took the plates, we discussed business. I knew I had to take my time with him, to lay out my whole plan, to get him interested in it. He had to see the appeal, the chance for profit.

I started out by telling him that I had done some street fighting while I was in Arkansas, and that I was interested in doing the same in Florida. I told him I had made over a hundred thousand dollars the last year I'd been up there and was looking to make more in Florida.

I explained to Miguel that my business, my life, my work, was stealing. But that my outlet, my way of blowing off steam was fighting and that I wasn't merely good, I was the best.

He kind of smirked when I said that. What I told him was a pretty bold statement, but he didn't say anything. He sat there for a minute and thought. I told him that it would be a good way to earn a little money on the side.

I could see in his eyes that the wheels were starting to turn. He was starting to realize the appeal, not just to him, but to others he knew. The entertainment, the gambling, something fresh to break up the boredom of his life and the lives of others like him, because when you're filthy rich and can do anything, everything eventually gets old.

I told Miguel that I had the perfect opponent to go up against. I explained to him about Velasquez; his record, his brutality, everything. I pitched it like a good con man, a carnival barker. Starting small and working my way to the big finish. When I was through, I waited for his decision.

Miguel loved it! He told me he would take care of all of the details, then, get back to me when he had everything set up.

Three weeks later, Brody called me and let me know that everything was ready. Miguel had worked it out for Velasquez and I to fight in an exhibition match at the Miami International Mixed Martial Arts Tournament. No one would know it was a real match until the fight started.

Miguel paid off some people and put a quarter of a million dollars purse to whomever won the match and Velasquez' people had jumped at the opportunity. When they heard that I was seventy pounds lighter than their fighter and an amateur, they just knew they couldn't lose.

The two-hundred-fifty thousand was not for me. It was

put out there to entice Velasquez to agree to the fight. I didn't care anything about the money. I was in it to smash Velasquez.

I showed Genie the flyer. It read: Miami International Mixed Martial Arts presents a heavyweight exhibition match: Brazil's Victor Velasquez VS. Florida's own Malefic.

Genie was shocked, overwhelmed. When she asked how I had gotten the fight, I nonchalantly told her I knew some people and that she'd be surprised at some of the people I'd met from going door-to-door, selling alarm systems.

Of course, I told Genie nothing about the prize money that was put up to entice Victor Velasquez's people. It probably would have made her nervous. She probably would have wondered what would happen if I lost.

My whole thought process was that losing was absolutely not an option, although there was always that possibility. A lucky punch could knock out anyone. Neither of us needed to be worrying about it though. I just would not allow that to happen.

I put on a little weight, mainly so Victor would not look so freakishly big in comparison in the ring next to me. I didn't really need it though. I wanted to put on a good show. Give the people their money's worth.

Genie was never worried for me. She knew that Velasquez was a beast, but she also knew in her heart that he was

still no match for me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Miguel DeFriese turned out to be quite a good promoter. He e-mailed all of his acquaintances the details of the quarter million dollar purse, along with video recorded segments of Velasquez's last six fights.

Velasquez was favored to win, 20-to-one.

So, the day of the fight finally arrived. Per Miguel's instructions, I had to survive one round, and take him out in the middle of the second round.

The bell rang, and we came out fast. He tried to take me down fast, like he had his other opponents. I took some punches from him, but nothing I couldn't absorb. I saw the shocked look in his eyes when I let him connect with a heavy right and I shook it off as if it were nothing. He then tried to take me to the ground since his strikes were having no effects on me.

I kept the fight on our feet instead, not letting him get me in a position where he could put me onto the ground. I used the first round to tenderize his body, hitting him constantly in the ribs and stomach while moving a lot to keep him in an aerobic state. By the end of the round, he was gasping for air.

When he came out for the second round, I could see that

he was sluggish. He was used to beating his opponents bloody in the first few minutes; he'd never gone to the second round in all of his previous fights.

After two minutes of more tenderizing, it was time. Time for Malefic to do his damage. Time to teach this ass a lesson; to send him home in disgrace, never to return to the ring.

Velasquez was exhausted. His arms were heavy. His mouth was open and he was gasping for air. I gave him a solid front-heel kick in the solar plexus that knocked the air out of his lungs. He dropped his hands instinctively to guard his stomach and I came across with an elbow strike to the corner of his eye. The bone there collapsed and destroyed his eye. Before the referee could step in and stop the fight, I put everything I had behind a downward side kick to the inside of his right knee connecting perfectly at the joint and snapping the leg, with a loud crunch that everyone in the arena heard. The knee bent completely backwards and the bottom bone broke the skin. Velasquez fell to the ground screaming and the ref shoved me to the corner and told me to get out of the ring, that I was banned from ever fighting in MMA again. I shrugged and left the ring with my head held high. I had gotten what I wanted. Velasquez would never fight again. Plus, I'd won a pretty good bit of money by my side bets.

Genie wasn't happy about me being banned, but she loved watching me fight and take that guy apart. Later on that night, she told me and showed me how much she appreciated what I had done. Boy that was a fun night!

Miguel DeFriese was on cloud nine. He'd put on a great show for his friends. That night, it was clear that DeFriese was 'the man.'

And Malefic? Man, he just loved me!

Business continued as usual. Every few months or so, Miguel would put together an underground fight for high stakes. Of course, I won every fight easily.

I also used the illegal street fighting to gradually introduce Genie to my secretive life of crime.

Genie was a good person with a huge heart, and I knew I had to be very careful about what I told her. I felt that if she thought that if I was doing harm to the people I was stealing from, she would leave me and never come back.

As our relationship progressed, Genie shared more about her family with me, and I did the same with her, even telling her about some of my childhood thefts to gauge her reaction, let her know how much I trusted her.

What I learned about her family was good—she said that her parents both came from wealthy backgrounds and that they believed that they were better than other people because of their money. She called them snobs and

pretentious fools. Her disgust for them and their ways of thinking were deeply rooted and unlikely to change anytime soon.

That told me that her heart would probably not bleed for the people I was relieving of their over abundance of cash. But still, I was cautious with everything I did. I slowly started revealing glimpses to her of a world that most people were not familiar with.

I placed good-sized bets in my favor and saw that the illegal gambling didn't trouble her. My first bet was five-thousand; my second was twenty thousand. In no time, she was looking at a hundred thousand dollars. All made illegally.

I could see that she was loving the rush, that she was an adrenaline junkie. She was a little bit out there, but you know, so was I. My street fights were all bare-knuckle, with lots of blood, and I enjoyed them.

Genie wasn't squeamish at all. When we talked about the fights afterward, her accounts always sounded bloodier and more gruesome than I remembered them.

Genie was excited for me, she was proud of me. She told me for the first time that she loved me. Man! If she only knew how much she really meant to me. I was head over heels for her, but too afraid to let her know.

I still wasn't sure if she would accept me once she found

out about who I really was, what I was really doing. Would she accept me or reject me? I vowed for it to be the former because I wanted to share everything with her.

My life was a freight train, a juggernaut. The only thing that could stop me was death, and death was the furthest thing from my mind. I was alive. If such a thing were possible, I was too alive.

My success at thievery and fighting gripped the attention of Miguel DeFriese. He was very impressed, fascinated by my skills, by my illusiveness. He had Brody set up a special meeting.

When we met, we went through the usual: a nice meal while having small talk, then to business afterward.

DeFriese told me that a close friend and business associate named Vienguilay Otemrouth was having some serious financial problems and needed some help. He told me that Otemrouth was a citizen of Thailand and was granted resident alien status here in America, and she owned several strip malls and businesses in the Miami-Dade metro area.

DeFriese also told me that this woman also had many business contacts throughout southeast Asia and that she'd made some bad investments over the past year and needed twenty-million dollars in U.S. currency. She'd come to DeFriese with the problem, and he'd devised a plan to

help her. A plan involving me, and my unique skill set.

Vienguilay owned a strip mall in a wealthy area of Boca Raton, and most of the stores in that mall were owned and insured in her name. The plan was to have someone (me!) break into and clean out all of the jewelry from the very upscale jewelry store in the strip mall.

Of course, the jewelry would already be gone from the safe. My job was to empty all of the glass display cases in front, steal the safe and then set the place on fire to make it look like I was covering my tracks.

Everything went off without any problems. I disabled the security alarm, and that also disabled the fire alarms. The entire strip mall ended up being engulfed in flames, burning to the ground. Nothing could be saved.

The newspapers reported the damage and losses at close to thirteen million dollars. Vienguilay put the property up for sale and collected close to five million dollars for it. That, combined with the sale of the stolen jewelry, netted her well over twenty million dollars.

For the work I did, I got half a million cash. Not too bad.

Everything had gone as planned and Miguel was elated. He was able to help one of his long-time friends and he did it with me, his go to guy.

Unbeknown to me, Miguel was raving about me to his associates, his tight-knit circle and all but one saw me as

an asset. You see, I was only interested in making money. I had no plans on making a name for myself or establishing a place for myself with his organization.

Unfortunately, someone thought differently.

The Boca Raton robbery got a lot of media attention. There was speculation that it might have been an inside job, done for insurance. Of course, nothing could be proven.

Genie mentioned the robbery one night during dinner. Something inside me was screaming, "Tell her!" "This is your opportunity!"

She shared with me what she had heard from the local news station on television. She even voiced her approval about it being for the insurance money.

Now was my chance. My window of opportunity.

I asked Genie if I could trust her, and she replied, "With my life."

I looked at her for a few moments, this woman that I'd fallen in love with. I looked into her eyes and read her aura, weighed her spirit. I saw nothing but love and trust there. So I told her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I started off slowly, almost skittishly. I could see by her face that she could tell that this was a big deal; a huge secret.

I explained to Genie that the guy who was setting up my underground fights had lots of other questionable business dealings, and that the fight with Victor Velasquez had been a favor that he had gone out of his way to set up. I then told her about the quarter of a million dollars purse that Miguel had put up, and the people he'd had to pay off in order to set up everything.

Genie was amazed, no, impressed. As I told her these things, I could see that she was hanging onto every word. She was listening to a mystery unfold, and loving every word she was hearing.

I told her about how the fight promoter had called in his own favor. About how he knew that my business was selling and installing security and fire alarm systems and how he needed me to use that knowledge to disable a system in a strip mall in Boca Raton to help a friend of his.

Before I could say another word, Genie, with her eyes glistening, and like a child on Christmas morning, blurted out, "How much did you make?"

I was shocked. No, the word I was looking for is stunned, but not in a bad way. It took me a few seconds to gather my wits before I answered her. When I came around, I told the truth: five hundred thousand.

Her eyes grew even wider, and the smile on her face told me all that I needed to know. I could see that she was thrilled. She could barely contain her excitement. She was like a kid in a candy store.

She started asking me questions, wanting to know details; how was it done, how did I feel about it, how much the business owner had made. The only thing she didn't ask about was for names, which I would not have told her anyway.

I lied about some of the details—the less she knew about certain things, the better off we would both be. I told her I didn't know how much the owner had made, but I guessed it was around ten million or so. I told her that really didn't matter to me as long as I was paid for my trouble.

That was good enough for Genie too, because she stopped the questions. I could see though, that the half million I'd been paid really psyched her. She couldn't stop talking about it. All of a sudden, she was treating me like some kind of super hero, similar to what she'd done after I'd taken down Velasquez, but with a little more, let's say vigor. She kept me up for a day and a half, until we both

collapsed in exhaustion.

And I had been fearful of what she'd think. Go figure, huh? And that was only the beginning. When we woke up, Genie started asking other questions. Since things had gone so well, I decided to tell her about some of my past jobs. Not all, mind you, but some of the bigger ones here and there.

She absorbed it all, and when I was finished, she told me she wanted in.

Wow.

Now, I gotta tell you, that was the farthest thing from my mind, so I told her that I did these things only very rarely, and only when I felt the risk was worth the reward.

Again, Genie accepted what I said, and she told me she would be patient, but that she definitely wanted to participate. She got that determined look on her face that I loved, and I reluctantly agreed to let her come along on my next job. What I didn't tell her was that I would be picking the job, making sure it was an easy one, with low risk for her.

Genie continued to teach martial arts and I continued to sell alarm systems and break into homes, watching, waiting.

In no time at all, the perfect job came along. It required some extensive planning and coordination. I figured Genie

would get a kick out of it, and it would satisfy her urge to participate in a crime with me.

T.O. called with a specific car order. He needed two cars, to be exact. He had a buyer in South America who wanted two matching Lamborghini Diablo cars, one yellow, one red, and he would pay me seventy-thousand dollars for each one. Not bad, and because it was two cars, he wasn't pressing me on time.

So, I told Genie about the job. Seeing what she thought.

She was all ears and all business. I thought she was much too serious than necessary, but that was alright. It was her first go at this kind of thing, and I could tell she was trying to impress me with her efforts.

I got on my computer and got a list of all the Lamborghini owners in the state of Florida, and all the car dealerships that sold them too. There was a dealership in Longwood, near Orlando, just off Interstate 4 that looked good. I wanted to keep to the central Florida area, otherwise I'd have to go all the way down to Miami to find some.

Thankfully, the dealership had a yellow model and a Pro ball player for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers had a red one, so my targets had been acquired. Of course, I found backups in case those cars were somehow unavailable, which was always a part of my planning. Genie liked that when I explained it to her.

She was also very surprised at how easy it had been for me find the two primary cars and the backup cars. I explained to her how every time anyone made a purchase, someone, somewhere, kept track of it. Put it on a database and how those databases could be very detailed and specific.

I told her how companies could alert you by way of email or text, advertising their feminine products around the exact time that you needed to purchase these types of items.

Genie found it hard to believe at first, but she knew that I was telling the truth. Technology, with all its' great advancements and good it has done our society, has also made us exposed and vulnerable.

I talked with T.O. and arranged for him to get me a race car trailer. A special lift inside the enclosed trailer would allow me to carry the two cars at the same time. I had it painted a dark midnight blue and had a matching dually pickup truck with it. I'd used both before, to transport high end cars that were too noticeable to drive. In addition to the special paint job, I had plans to disguise the truck and trailer with decals and stickers from a few popular tool suppliers.

After I had all of the transport problems handled, I decided it was time to recon my targets.

The dealership was fairly easy. They had all of their keys on a pegboard inside a locking cabinet that was inside of an office. All of the keys had labels on them with numbers and descriptions that told which car they belonged to. Whenever someone came in the dealership to look at a car, a salesman would go to the office, grab the keys, and come out to show it to that person. When he was done, he'd put the keys back in the cabinet and lock it.

There were cameras all over the place inside catching every angle and nook and cranny. I only saw one camera outside, focused on the area of the doorway.

Now, you might think that's going to be hard for me to get, but you'd be wrong. You see, people are basically lazy, and creatures of habit. You can make the best security system in the world, but it is only as good as the person operating it.

Genie and I sat in the parking lot of a truck stop/gas station about a quarter of a mile up the road from the dealership, watching them, looking for patterns. I had a digital video camera with a telephoto zoom lens set up in the back of the rental SUV I was using and it was pointed straight at the room where the keys were sitting. I had placed some extra tinting on the SUV's windows to keep the camera set-up from being seen, and I hooked it up to a

laptop computer so that Genie and I could sit in the front seats and watch it without having to move. The picture was a little dark because of the tint, but I made some adjustments and we could see things pretty well. So well, in fact, I could even read the labels on the keys.

After about twelve hours of watching and as the dealership was closing for the day, I asked Genie if she'd figured out how we were going to do things. She looked at me and came up with some kind of crazy scheme about how we could disguise ourselves and break into the place in the middle of the night and break open the cabinet, then get out and get the car.

I let her go on for a few minutes, even asking her questions about how she would do this and get past that. When she finally ran out of steam, I looked at her and smiled.

She looked back and said, "What? You have a better way?"

I nodded my head then told her. Her mouth dropped open in astonishment.

"B-but, that's so...."

"Easy?" I interrupted.

“Unexciting.” She replied in a kind of deflated way.

I chuckled and told her that sometimes it worked that way, I told her there was still a lot of work to do then and asked her if she still wanted to do it. The gleam was still in her eyes as she nodded.

“Good,” I said, and we got to work.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Our next job was to go to Tampa and recon the football player's home for the red Lamborghini. The owner, a wide receiver who had been drafted by the Bucs from the University of Florida six months before, was a bit of a show off. He was obviously new to money. He lived in a multi-million dollar mansion, with six cars in his garage and several more parked in his driveway. He drove the Lamborghini every day. I guess he wanted people to know he had 'made' it.

Genie and I watched him for a week from a wooded area near his home to get his patterns of movement down. By the time the week was over, I had figured out that the best way to get the car would be to hijack it while he was on the road, in the sub-division, where he would feel the safest.

Genie enjoyed the whole week we spent 'camping out.' We ate military MRE meals and freeze-dried food, talked to each other a lot about our pasts and where we wanted to go in the future. We took a lot of notes on the receiver's movements. At times, I would have Genie follow him after he left the gated community and tell me where he was going by phone.

After all of our reconnaissance was done, Genie and I

packed up everything, cleaned up the area, and went back home to plan things out. Once we had everything ready, we went back to the sub-division to put things into motion.

Genie went into the wooded area behind Mr. receiver's house to watch for him to leave. It was early evening and from our earlier surveillance, we knew he would be going out within the next hour. Genie had a 'burner phone,' and would contact me on my burner when he pulled out of his driveway.

When I got the signal, I quickly set things up. I was about a half mile from the front gate to the sub-division. The gate was hidden from sight by a curve in the road, and there was a small wooded area I could conceal myself in. There was no moon out and it was cloudy with drizzling rain.

I laid a dummy in the middle of the road that was the size of a small child and was wearing colorful children's clothing. Beside the dummy, I placed a child's bike. Before I went back to my hiding place, I flipped a switch near the dummy's chest that activated a small battery operated motor that moved one of its' arms a little bit in order to enforce the illusion of life and injury.

A minute or two later, car lights came around the corner and just as I predicted, Mr. Receiver, Mr. red Lamborghini screeched to a halt, jumped out of his car, and ran to the injured 'child.'

Before he could place his hand on the dummy though, I was right behind him. I slugged him on the side of his neck where the sciatic nerves connected right below his jaw. He went down like a sack of potatoes.

I caught him before he hit the asphalt and quickly drug his limp body to the edge of the woods, propping it against a tree. I threw the dummy and the scooter in the passenger seat of the still running Lamborghini, closed the door and drove off.

After going through the gate, I drove about two miles to an empty school parking lot and put the car into the trailer. I called Genie to let her know it was done. She walked out of the woods and drove our rented car to the rest area we'd parked in when we'd be been surveilling the car dealership.

Earlier that day, about an hour before they closed, we had gone there to look at some cars. We had been disguised as an affluent, middle-aged couple looking for a few 'play toys.'

We drove up to the dealership in a 'clean' Mercedes that Miguel loaned me. When we got out of the car, A salesman approached us and showed us some cars.

When we got to the Lamborghini I wanted, I sat down in it and turned it on while Genie chatted with the salesman, keeping his attention. I turned off the car and switched the

keys from the ring they were on with a set I had in my pocket. I had gotten them from an associate of T.O.'s, a locksmith, and had bought the ring and tag from a hardware store. I made a label on my computer from the video I'd shot.

Yes, it was simple as that.

About an hour after I'd stolen the car from Mr. Receiver, I pulled the trailer to the side of the road about half a mile from the dealership and called Genie on the phone. She drove up and picked me up, then dropped me off at the front of the place. By now, it was raining steadily and pretty hard, so visibility was pretty low.

I got out of the car, walked onto the lot, walked right up to the Lamborghini, and opened the driver's side door. I drove it off the lot and down the street, then pulled it into the trailer. All-in-all, it took maybe five minutes. Genie followed me in the Mercedes as I drove the trailer to the pre-arranged meeting area that T.O. had told me about earlier, and a few hours later, T.O. wired me a hundred and fifty grand. Another job successfully completed.

Genie was amazed. She couldn't believe that it was that easy. She was ready to hit Fort Knox or the World Bank.

I chuckled at her enthusiasm and stopped her before she got too wound up. I explained to her that this wasn't a game, that there were always unforeseen occurrences,

things could go wrong. Like my old buddy, Neville used to say, 'no plan survives contact.' Although everything had gone well for us that night, anything could have gone wrong and we would have had to be ready for it.

I told Genie about my time in prison, and how I'd gotten there. It really moved her heart. Tears flowed down her face as she listened to me and thought about me being locked behind bars. She wanted to go find the rat who'd put me there and beat the crap out of her.

I then told Genie that my issue wasn't with the rat, it was with a dirty cop who'd stolen my money while I was in jail.

Caesar had gotten back with me a few weeks before with the information. I now had a name and address. The cop's name was James Raine. He was a detective who'd been one of the investigators on my case.

I told Genie that I was trying to let it go, to forget about it, as Caesar had advised me. To be truthful, I still wanted my money and also a little payback to go with it. But, I couldn't figure out how to get it without going back to prison.

Genie agreed with Caesar, saying she knew it was best to just let it go. She was very supportive. She now knew about everything. Well, almost everything. She knew about my childhood, my mother dying and the damage that caused, my life as a thief, my time in prison. I didn't tell

her about Heather, my dead prostitute girlfriend. I just couldn't see the need to tell her about that.

Genie loved me, and I loved her. For the first time in my life, I was truly happy. We talked about marriage. I told her about my dreams of retiring in South America or Mexico or somewhere like it.

She told me she'd go anywhere with me, near water if possible, as long as we were together. Wow! I really love that woman.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Genie continued to teach martial arts. She would accompany me on a job every once in a while. Easy jobs, nothing too complicated. Everything became routine, and I was very okay with it.

By this time, I'd gotten two dogs, a German Shepherd and a Pit Bull as I had before. I named the Shepherd Goldie, and the Pit was Kong. Genie loved them as much as I did. I had told her about losing Tiny as a child and she understood my need to love my dogs. We both walked them a lot.

I started getting close to my neighbors, Bob and Jill Luftkin. I ended up giving them a spare key to my place and the code to the alarm system. I asked them to walk and feed Goldie and Kong when I was out of town. I felt I could trust them that much.

Besides, I had cameras placed to keep track of them if I wanted to.

A year passed, and then another. Genie had moved into my trailer and we were making plans to get married. We were thinking about buying a house in the Keys, or maybe in the Caribbean.

Around that time, Miguel told me about a big job that he

thought was perfect for me. He said it was the kind of job that a man could retire on.

I already had around eight million dollars in the bank, and he said this job would triple it.

He gave me the details. It was similar to the job I'd done for Vienguilay Otemrouth years before. A heist for an insurance payout.

I couldn't sleep. The job was the only thing on my mind. This was it! The big score! The one I'd been waiting on most of my adult life! And wow, it was so simple...yeah, there were some risks, but there were always risks. Nothing I couldn't deal with.

DeBeers, the world's largest buyer and distributor of diamonds, would be hosting a show in Miami. Diamond aficionados from all over the world; France, Sweden, The United Arab Emirates, China and so forth, would be there showcasing their jewelry and stones.

The plan was simple. Tommy Zuuca and several of his associates from New York, Las Vegas, and L.A. would attend the show. They would purchase large sums of diamonds at wholesale prices for their jewelry stores, while also bringing some of their own merchandise to display for sale.

They would all stay in the same luxury hotel and of course keep all of their merchandise in the hotels' safe for security

insurance purposes.

That is where I came in. My job would be to steal the diamonds and afterwards, everyone would collect from their insurer. That is, after they added some fat to their inventories.

The stolen diamonds would get returned to their original owners and be redistributed around the world by various questionable means I didn't ask about and I didn't need to know.

So, I started preparing for the job. The International Diamond show was only four months away. A hotel was selected, The Fountainbleu, one of the oldest, extravagant hotels in the area. Miguel provided me with blueprints of the hotel and diagrams of the safe.

Now I was getting nervous. Why? Everything was simple and straightforward. I knew how to access the safe. Its' weakest point was the back. I would cut through an eight inch outer wall, then a six-inch concrete block, and finally the one inch thick steel lining. It would be a breeze.

Accessing the area behind the safe would also be very easy. There was a corridor between the walls that allowed access to plumbing and wiring. Service technicians could go back there and make repairs with little or no disturbance to the guests.

Of course, there were cameras in those corridors, but that

would be a small obstacle for me to overcome. I could do the job very easily.

But still, something was gnawing at me. Someone with a lot less skill could do the job too. Maybe not as clean as I could, but the job was definitely a no-brainer.

I had to assume that there were factors, variables that made this job land in my lap. Something that someone with less proficiency would overlook.

I called Brody and told him to tell Miguel that the hotel they had picked was fine. I had already checked the place out to make sure that everything matched up with the blueprints and diagrams, taking pictures with a digital camera to compare everything. So that was good.

I had not decided whether I would let Genie help me to do this job or not. I knew I could use another set of eyes on the lobby to watch the entrance to the safe from that side and warn me of any approaching problems. She would be in absolutely no danger, but I still hesitated, so why not?

I don't know what it was, but my gut was trying to warn me that something was not right. I ignored it, chalk it up to being my last job before hanging up my hat.

So, I got the tools together that I would be using, then decided to tell Genie about the job. She definitely wanted in. Her eyes lit every time we talked about it and she was so full of energy, I thought she was going to jump out of

her skin.

I didn't tell her how big the payoff would be. I was afraid that she would get nervous and maybe mess up something, or sense something was wrong too. She just assumed that it was another half-million dollar payoff like the one I'd done before, and I let her believe that.

I also explained to her that I couldn't discuss the details of the job with her because the less she knew, the better I could protect her. She told me that was ok, that she had faith in me and that was enough for her.

The four months flew by. As the day the show approached, I still felt nervous, and I understand why. Maybe it was the excitement of the huge score; more money than I could ever have dreamed of. I tried to convince myself that it wasn't anything. I mean, why couldn't the job be easy? I was very good at what I did, possibly even the best. I'd practiced this job over and over for the past four months, setting up mock walls and corridors that corresponded to the diagrams and then using the tools to cut through everything.

I was using a RAPTOR, a device the size of a large fire-extinguisher that was helium driven and fired steel nails at five thousand feet per second. It was very quiet and would easily crack concrete up to ten inches thick, after which I would use a small hand-held jackhammer, or mini hammer,

to clear out the rest of the concrete. For the steel line, I would use a hand-held plasma cutter that could make a good-sized hole through the metal in just a few minutes and I had a water-filtration system that eliminated the smoke. I practiced with everything until I got my time down to around twenty minutes, including the packing of all the jewelry.

Genie's part would be to sit in the lobby, in disguise, to advise me if anything happened up front. She would be posing as a Middle-Eastern woman, with her face and body completely covered. I got her an earpiece that allowed her to amplify sounds in the lobby so that she could easily hear any conversation clearly just by turning that way. She would communicate with me by text, using single word messages: stop, go, good, bad, etc....

We went in at 11:00PM, when most of the lobby traffic had died down for the day. Genie gave me the go-ahead and I started working.

I was dressed as a maintenance worker and had wheeled my cart full of tools in the back and had accessed the corridors. I had taken care of the cameras thirty minutes earlier, splicing into the feeds and playing a digital 'loop' that showed an empty corridor.

Everything went smoothly, and I got through the walls and steel lining in eighteen minutes. Genie said she

couldn't hear anything at all. It took me another five minutes to gather all of the diamonds. There were so many of them! I was out of the hotel by 11:45PM.

A few hours later, I met up with Brody and confirmed a wire transfer of the twenty-four million dollars before giving him the merchandise. Everything was pre-arranged by DeFriese and went without a hitch. I then met up with Genie at a parking garage a few blocks from where I'd had my meeting with Brody and we drove back to our place in Central Florida.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

We got back home around 7:30AM after driving straight through, only stopping briefly for gas and restroom breaks. We also stopped at a boat dock near Vero Beach and threw all of the tools in the ocean.

When we got back, we took a quiet shower and went to sleep. We got up about six hours later and went out to eat. Afterwards, we took a walk on the beach. It was then that I told Genie how much money we'd just made.

As soon as she heard the amount, she looked at me for a moment as if I were joking. When she realized I wasn't, her legs kind of collapsed and she sat down onto a sand dune and started hyperventilating. I sat down next to her and told her to calm down. She cupped her hands in front of her mouth and in a few moments, her breathing slowed.

When Genie finally collected herself, she jumped up and tackled me. She started screaming and laughing and carrying on like we'd just won the lottery.

I guess in a way, we had. Twenty-four million dollars was a really big chunk of money.

After she settled down, we went back home and went back to sleep. We were pretty much worn out. We had both been pretty tense leading up to the job and during the

actual work, and that kind of stress can be pretty hard on your body and mind.

The next morning, we went back to work as usual. That is to say, I went back to selling security systems and Genie to teaching her martial arts classes. I knew it was important to maintain my cover to confuse anyone who might think I had anything to do with the theft.

Nothing had been mentioned on the media about the burglary yet, which I thought was strange. I was sure that there were good reasons for the police to delay, and sure enough, while Genie and I were at lunch, she checked her phone for news and saw a breaking news alert on CNN.com that mentioned the theft, saying that the total of the merchandise was a little over three billion dollars.

Genie's eyes got huge and she spit out her juice when she heard the amount. Some of the people around us glanced at her and she covered by laughing out loud for a few moments then wiping up the juice from the table. She then whispered to me that she couldn't believe that the duffle bag I'd filled had held that much stones. She then stated that the thought of being responsible for that much money scared her. I looked at her and could see her hands visibly trembling. She quickly placed them on her lap so no one around would notice. I told her everything was alright. That we'd already been paid and had nothing to worry about.

She eventually calmed down and we left. She went back to work and I decided to take the afternoon off. I was going to spend some time with my dogs and think about the future a little bit.

When I got back to the trailer and was pulling up the driveway, I saw Mrs. Luftkin sitting out on her patio, sipping from a cup. I got out of the car, waved at her and moved toward the front door. I really didn't feel like getting into a long conversation with the woman, because once she started, she would usually go on for hours.

Before I reached the door, she yelled over to me, and ran to the fence. "Hey Manny (that was the name I was using: Manuel Malick) "Hey, you just missed them," she said.

I stopped and turned to her as a cold shiver ran down my spine and gripped my stomach. "Missed who, Mrs. L?" I asked politely.

"The service men who were here to fix the water leak," she replied. "Bob let them in." She also said that it was strange, that they must have gone into town for materials or something and taken Bob with them, to get away from the house for a little while or something. She smiled and shook her head, saying something about how he liked to putter with stuff.

I looked at Mrs. Luftkin and smiled. I thanked her and told her I had to hurry and get back to work. I went to the

car and reached into the glove box where I kept my Glock 26 .45 caliber pistol. I concealed it in my coat pocket and made my way back to the front door. I looked over and saw Mrs. Luftkin had gone back inside.

I paused at my front door, my left hand on the knob. Something was definitely wrong. No one was in there, but I could definitely tell something was not right.

I decided to go around the back. I ducked below a raised portion of the deck and made a gruesome discovery. Goldie and Kong were laying there, dead. I looked at them carefully and saw that there were several bullet holes in both of them. I took a moment to say goodbye to both of them and crawled under the trailer's back wall until I came to the space under my laundry room, where I'd cut out a square in the floor in order to bury my safe in the ground. When I got there, I breathed a small sigh of relief when I saw there was no disturbance of the ground or the piece I placed in the opening to conceal it.

Leaving the safe alone, I pushed up on the wood piece and crawled up into the trailer. I slowly moved into the living room, looking, listening, smelling, feeling for anything odd or wrong.

I immediately saw Bob Luftkin's body laying on the floor in front of the couch. He had a bullet hole in his chest and another in his skull over his left eye. I didn't have to check

for a pulse. He was dead.

My small living room smelled of his urine and feces, and it almost covered the other smell: ammonia. I looked through the living room and saw a sixty-gallon metal oil drum sitting to the right side of the door, with some wires coming from it and connecting, one of the metal plate at the bottom of the door and the other to a metal rod sticking in the floor. It only took me a moment to figure out what was going on. The barrel was full of high explosive ammonium nitrate. When the plate touched the rod, it would close an electrical circuit and trigger a small primary explosion in the barrel that would then cause a larger explosion.

The whole trailer would be demolished, incinerated. Maybe even the Luftkin's place would be destroyed.

I took a few deep shaky breaths. I could have opened the door and never known that would have happened.

I turned to leave the room and I paused for a few moments to say a prayer for Bob. I said another for Jill. They had been together since high school. I couldn't imagine what she would feel once she realized her friend, lover and companion of over fifty years was gone forever.

I shook my head and breathed out a sad sigh, then turned away from Bob's body. I went through the trailer quickly, picking up a few necessities for myself and things I

knew Genie would need or want, then I dropped down through the hole, dug up the safe, and got all of the money and gold I'd left there; about seventy or seventy-five thousand in cash and about one pound of gold.

I walked around to the front door of the trailer. When I got to the car, I pulled out my phone, another burner, and texted Genie. Whoever had rigged up my trailer to blow up may have been on the way to hurt her.

Genie and I had set up a code, a signal to alert one another of possible danger. She understood why it might be necessary, that harm and danger were sometimes an unfortunate consequence of my line of work. The signal was a single word: Refugio.

Pronounced re-foo-he-oh, it was Castilian for refuge, it was taken from the Latin word *refugere*, which meant to escape, or to flee safely.

After I sent the text, I drove to a large shopping center in the next town over, parked my car near a large tire store there, then went to the outskirts of the parking lot and stole a car, a Toyota. I was counting on the car being a store employee's vehicle and not finding out it was missing for several hours. By that time, I would have gotten rid of it and be in another, totally different vehicle.

I changed the license plate, popped open the door, then put in a 'master-key' for the Toyota that I'd gotten from

T.O. a year back. I took off and drove to Jacksonville, where I would be meeting Genie.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I only took about an hour to drive to Jacksonville, and I found the coffee shop where Genie and I were to meet fairly easily. We had both been there several times to familiarize ourselves with the area.

It was one of many small shops in an open plaza next to a convention center. Plenty of open space and exits.

I drove around the outskirts of the plaza three times, scanning faces and vehicles, trying to see if I recognized anyone. I opened my senses, feeling for danger.

Nothing.

When I was satisfied that no one was there looking for me, I parked the car and walked into the plaza. I took a random route, not going to the coffee shop directly. I was also disguised in a ball cap, sunglasses, and a windbreaker. I slumped a little to change my height and walk.

As I scanned the crowd, I was becoming more anxious, but it only lasted a few minutes until I spotted Genie. She didn't notice me. I stopped by a sunglass hut and turned my back to her and pretended to look at some of the glasses while I watched her through a mirror. She was dressed in drab clothes and had a wig and glasses on but I still recognized her.

Her face had a look of concern. I could tell she had some questions, probably many questions. I knew those questions would have to wait. This was only a meeting place to make sure that we were each alright. It was only a first step, but probably the most important one in my opinion.

I watched Genie for a minute or two before I finally approached her. She smiled when she recognized me, and stood up to give me a quick kiss as I got to her table. I could tell she wanted to embrace me, but we really didn't have a lot of time. I asked if she had gotten another burner phone and she pulled one out of her purse briefly before wrapping her arm in mine and we walked a half-mile down the street to a church where Genie had parked our 'emergency car' one I had purchased for cash with an I.D. that no one knew about except the both of us.

When we got into the car, Genie gave me the phone, a 3rd generation touch screen smart phone that was pre-paid and untraceable. I turned it on and logged onto the secure site my security footage was on to check the videos.

The cameras, which were all state-of-the-art and hidden in six places in the trailer and one on the outside, caught everything perfectly. Genie and I watched as the whole incident occurred.

I was angered and relieved when I saw that Bob had died

quickly and unexpectedly. I could only hope that when the police saw the videos, after I told them anonymously about the cameras, they would tell Mrs. Luftkin that he'd not suffered. I really hoped she got some solace from that.

There were five men involved. I saw them pull up in a plumbing van, enter the trailer with Bob, kill him, kill my dogs, search the place, I guess for clues to my whereabouts, set up the booby-trap, then leave.

Of the five of them, I didn't recognize four. The fifth one though, the one who killed Bob Luftkin, was very easily identifiable to me.

It was Wyatt Broderick—Brody. Clear as day!

I took a few moments to process that, then, checked my emails. I had two. One was from Miguel DeFrieze, sent about thirty minutes before, and asking me to get in touch with Brody, it was very important.

The second was from my friend, Caesar Molina. Although we'd been doing business together for several years, I thought of him as more of a friend than a business associate. His message said, "Contact me: URGENT!"

Well, it was obvious that the poo-poo had hit the whirling wind machine. I was being hunted. Someone wanted me dead. Perhaps, Genie as well.

Maybe Caesar knew, and would tell me what was happening. I glanced over at Genie, who was concerned

with driving. First, we had to get to safety.

Five minutes after I've checked the emails, we pulled into the airport. We went to the long-term parking area, pulled out our pre-packed bags from the trunk and got ready to catch a flight. I split the gold and cash, placing them in one of my bags and one of hers.' We would check those at the baggage counter and bring a 'clean' carry on bag each onto the plane with us.

As far as the car was concerned, I wasn't worried about it. We would be gone.

We took a flight to Augusta, Georgia and caught a bus to Cusseta, which was a small city on the outskirts of Ft. Benning, a very large Army base. Because of that, there were a lot of transients in the area, and a lot of businesses that sold goods cheaply enough for soldiers to afford.

Genie and I purchased a car for 3,500 dollars cash and drove it to a decent motel where we could sleep over night before moving to a better place. Genie went in and took a shower while I checked the internet for places to rent in the area. I had thrown away the smart phone at the Jacksonville airport and had purchased four more and a laptop when we'd pulled into the military town.

We were looking for a motel that was near the major intersection and had kitchenette rooms. Somewhere we could lay low for a few weeks or months and put our

getaway plans into motion.

After searching for ten minutes, I found a pretty good place. I called them up and asked them some questions about their place.

The guy who ran (and owned) the place was from India. He said I wouldn't need identification and he would take cash. We agreed to stay for two months and would pay him a hundred dollar cleaning deposit and one-twenty five a week, paid in advance of course, but that was no problem.

When we got there the next day, the guy showed me around and I picked a great unit. It was independent and it had four rooms—a bedroom, with two twin sized beds and a large dresser, a kitchenette, counter, with a stove/oven, microwave, a lounge area with a lazy-boy, small sofa, and a forty inch TV with satellite service. There was also free wifi. The bathroom had a large tub/shower that had nice hot water. There was also a backdoor to the unit.

It only took Genie and I a few minutes to settle in. We unpacked some of our stuff, but left the important stuff in two bags by the back door, ready for a quick getaway.

That day, we hung around by the pool, watching as the other occupants moved around, came and went. We learned that most of our neighbors were illegals, from the Islands mostly: Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, etc..., and because it was a military town, there was some prostitution

but not a lot. The owner tried to keep things clean. The police drove through every now and then to check up on things, but they weren't concerned too much it looked to me. They really didn't hassle anyone.

I let things cool for a few days before I called Caesar. I used an internet service called Phone Gangster to disguise my number and location, just in case.

Caesar seemed surprised to hear from me. He was searching for words to say, was uncomfortable and seemed nervous. He asked me where I was and I replied simply, 'around.'

He sighed, then there was silence on the other end for about five heartbeats, then Caesar started making small talk. He mentioned that he'd been to a few of my fights and had made some good money betting on me. I told him I was glad that he'd had that much confidence in me. He said he'd always had that kind of confidence in me, ever since he'd met me. That he could tell by that by the way I dealt with him and carried myself that I was a man of integrity. Then he paused for a moment and turned serious.

He asked me what I had been thinking. He told me that these guys didn't play, that of anyone I could rob, not to rob them.

He sounded like he was concerned, like he really cared for

my safety, but I sensed that he was stalling me. He was fishing, hoping to pick up a clue to my whereabouts.

Maybe he was scared for himself. I guess he figured that soon, T.Z. would be sending some guys to question him, and I'm sure that he wanted to have something to tell them, something to bargain with. Something that might save his life.

Caesar finally came out and said it: "Malefic, it's not too late, you can still give them the diamonds back."

I told Caesar that I didn't have the diamonds and didn't take them either. He then asked me why I had pulled the twenty-four million dollars out of my account so fast. I asked him how he would know that and, before he could answer, I told him I got paid after I handed over the diamonds. He understood my implication, but then told me something that raised the hairs on the back of my neck and gave me a cold shiver down my spine.

Caesar said that DeFrieze was double-crossed, but not by me! I told Caesar that it must have been Brody because he was the one I'd handed the diamonds to.

Caesar told me that was impossible. When I asked him why, he said that Brody was dead.

CRAP! My mind went blank and I felt a dread fall over me. Brody, dead? What was going on? More importantly—who had set me up and what was I going to do?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I shook my head and my thoughts started shooting around my brain like lightning bolts. I almost didn't hear what Caesar said next.

He asked me to meet with him so that we could figure things out together. My thoughts coalesced, and I realized there was danger there. I wondered to myself if there was a price on my head, or if Caesar was just trying to save himself. I quickly hung up the phone and stomped on it.

Either way, I knew it was time for me to disappear.

Genie and I discussed things, made plans. She wanted to head to directly to Mexico the next day, but I told her that it was too soon, that men would be looking for me at all of the border crossings. I said that the best thing to do would be to lay low for a while, to blend in and let things cool down.

Ten weeks went by and we weren't getting any sense of anyone snooping around our area. We'd become friendly with all of our neighbors and especially with Mr. Rathrapal, the owner of the motel, and asked them to tell us if anyone came looking for us. They'd heard nothing at all. It was time to go.

First though, I had one stop to make, although Genie

wasn't happy about it at all. She tried to convince me to let it go, but I couldn't. I was leaving the U.S., but I wasn't leaving without getting revenge for the theft of my money years before. That stinking cop was gonna pay.

As for the money—why would I need the two point seven million when I already had about thirty-three million? (twenty-four from the jewelry job and eight million I'd earned over the years in Florida.) And as far as the thirty-two million, where was it? Ha! Well, I'd learned some things from not only Caesar, but on the internet about how to establish I.D.'s and hide money in untraceable accounts around the world. I had figured that Caesar knew the names and accounts he'd given me at first and probably had ways to keep track of them, so I got all new I.D.'s and accounts, just in case. And, it turned out that was a good decision because now, my money was safe and no one knew where I was.

The reasoning behind my getting my money back from the dirty cop were a lot more complex. I couldn't really explain it. Maybe it was my Russian DNA or something. I just couldn't let it go.

So, the plan was to steal back as much of my two point seven million dollars as Detective James Raine had left, and then I was going to burn his house down.

I'd thought things through over the years, and I figured

that Raine had the money hidden somewhere in his home. I had checked records on him up to the past week and found that he didn't have any storage units or any other properties in his name or any of his family or associates names where he could hide it.

I'd also run checks over the internet for everyone who had rented a storage unit or purchased property from a month before my money was stolen up to the past week, and all of it checked out. Now, I know it's not a good idea to assume things, but in this case, I believed I was making more of an educated guess that Raine had the money close by. I knew he wasn't so dumb as to just start spending it, so it was hidden. Probably in a wall or floor safe. I had also learned that he'd purchased a top of the line security system shortly after he'd robbed me too, so that kind of sealed the deal for me, so to speak. You know, the funny thing was, he bought the system from my old employer, and had not updated it over the years, so I knew everything about his system, including the factory emergency code to deactivate it. I could be in and out of his house in less than ten minutes.

After finalizing things, Genie and I left Georgia and traveled up to Arkansas. When we got there, we took two days and nights to recon Raine's house and track his movements. Usually, I would take up to a week to do this,

but, I wanted to get things done quickly and get gone. Caesar knew the cop's name and might remember that I wanted to recover my money from him and might send someone there to watch for me. Plus, I figured that Raine was probably comfortable in the knowledge that he'd gotten away with it and that he would fall into patterns and habits that were predictable.

We discovered that his home was nicer than most of those in his neighborhood. There was a two-car garage to the side, where everyone else had carports, and he had a pool and what looked like a few additions to the back of the house.

The first night Genie and I were there, he went out for dinner. We followed him, being careful not to get too close to him. He was still a police detective, and would probably notice if someone without skills tried to follow him. When he pulled into the restaurant, a nice, fairly expensive one if my memory was good, we drove past and pulled into a gas station about a half mile down the road.

We waited there for about an hour, then saw his car pull out and we followed him, he drove back home and went inside for the rest of the night. The next morning, he went into work around 7:30AM, and Genie and I drove to a diner down the street, where we ate some breakfast, then went farther down the street to a shopping center. We shopped,

talked most of the day, then drove back toward the police station around 6:00PM. I had learned from calling the station that Raine worked from 8am to 6pm. Monday through Saturday, so we were going to follow him to see if he went directly home from work.

He did, so that made up my mind on what I'd be doing. I'd go in tomorrow, after he left for work.

Just to be sure of things, Genie and I watched him again that evening. Like the night before, he went out to the same restaurant and stayed an hour, then came back home. His lights turned off at around 10:00PM Genie and I left and went to a local motel I knew about that took cash and didn't ask any questions. We slept until six in the morning, grabbed some coffee and a quick bite to eat, then drove to Raine's neighborhood and parked down the street to wait for him to go to work. I had called the station before we left the motel to make sure Raine would be working that day and the secretary who'd answered had confirmed that he would be coming in around 7:30AM.

So, we waited. Genie and I talked quietly to each other as we watched for his car. About thirty minutes later, he pulled out of his driveway and drove in the direction of the station. Genie drove me to the front of his house and dropped me off. She then drove off to wait around the block. I would be exiting the house from the back and

going through a few of Raine's neighbors yards. I was wearing a city maintenance worker's uniform, a utility tool belt around my waist and carrying a black nylon bag to carry the money in. In addition to all of this, I had my gun in the bag, loaded and ready to go if I encountered any trouble.

I walked up Raine's driveway, straight and boldly to his front door. I knocked, nothing. No dogs or house guests. That was good.

I took a lock pick out of my pocket, put it into the lock and pulled the trigger on it a few times until the tumblers all lined up, then opened the door and entered the house. I walked down a short hallway toward a beeping sound and saw the alarm keyboard on the wall. I tapped in the manufacturers default numbers into it. The beeping stopped, and I walked into the living room and paused, sending out my senses to feel for anyone, any presences. Nothing.

I walked quickly around the house, opening closet doors and room doors, looking for areas that would hide a safe. I finally made it upstairs, to the master bedroom. Everything was neat and tidy. No dust on surfaces and no dirty clothes laying around. He was probably spending my money on a maid.

I looked in the room for about thirty seconds before I

found the wall safe in the corner, behind a hutch. I knew the exact model of safe it was, and how to open it.

I quickly shorted it out, using some electrical wires I had with me in the bag with my other 'safe-cracking' tools. After the door opened, I saw what looked like most of my money there, but before I could move it from the safe to my bag, I sensed someone in the house behind me.

He must have sprinted up the stairs because when I turned to see who it was, he was already in the room. Without thinking, I grabbed the gun from my bag and leveled it at the man.

BOOM! Before I could think, it had already fired. Who was this idiot? Raine? Maybe someone that Caesar had watching the house in anticipation that I might show up? Someone that Genie and I had overlooked?

I don't know, but whoever it was, was now lying on the floor at my feet.

I took a few deep breaths to calm myself, then, looked at the safe. My money. I reached over and scooped it all into the bag. It was a good bet that a neighbor had heard the shot. Maybe the police were already on the way.

I turned again and paused as I heard the guy on the floor moan and move his arm.

I ran to the phone and punched in 9-1-1 and placed the receiver by the guy's head and left the room. I made my

way downstairs, out the back door, then through two yards until I got to a street. Genie was there waiting for me.

I could tell that she'd heard the shot from the look on her face, but she didn't say anything. We drove out of the neighborhood and then out of the city, following the speed limit and watching for any police activity.

We made it out of the city and drove all day to the north, until we got to Cleveland, Ohio. From there, Genie and I went to a business airfield and chartered a business jet to Belize.

When we got off the plane, the weather was beautiful; about 70 degrees with a soft breeze ruffling our hair. We walked over to a car rental place near the exit and rented a car. We got something inconspicuous. Something cool, that wouldn't draw a lot of attention....A Cadillac convertible.

In no time at all, we were driving along the coast, the top down and the wind in our hair. The ocean was on our left and the beautiful Belize countryside to our right.

Salsa music played from the radio, giving a good beat and lightening our hearts. It was a liberating sound, the promising sound of victory, and freedom.

But, all of a sudden, I could hear another sound. The sound of a faint heartbeat, starting in my ears, then kind of spreading through my body. It got louder and the Salsa music started fading away.

The next thing I knew, I was back in Raine's bedroom. I was standing over the man I had shot. But, this time I could see his face. I leaned in closer, closer. I was so close, I could actually hear his heart beating. Finally, I saw his face clearly.

It was me.

What? Were these the final memories of mine as I died?

Nah!

The Salsa music returned. I turned to grin at Genie and she laughed. The ocean glistened as the sun lowered toward the horizon, and the rugged countryside to our right spread out. Genie's hand joined mine and the music swelled as we drove off into the sunset.

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About the Author, Michael E. Fulkerson....

Michael Edward Fulkerson was born in Helena, Arkansas. He is profound deaf in both ears, born premature. Fulkerson is an avid sports enthusiast, who enjoys weight-lifting and practicing Mixed Martial Arts; A spirited writer, utilizing multiple medias: Literature, music, and poetry. He is fueled by his own personal pursuit for truth and justice. Drawing much of his creative writing influences from a very dark period of his life (having spent fifteen years in prison; falsely accused and unjustly convicted of the crime of rape). Fulkerson, born almost completely deaf, currently resides in Gothenburg, Nebraska.



About the author, Michael King....

Michael King grew up in S.E. Pennsylvania and Central Florida. He loves the outdoors. He has worked at a multitude of jobs, from busboy to fruit and vegetable inspector for the Department of Agriculture. He has served in the United States military in the 1980's and holds black belts in Bujutsu, Aikido, and Togakure Ninjitsu.

He is currently working on "On the Brazil's Edge," a fictional autobiography about U.S. Special Forces as he serves in the 1980's, and, "Caliber: Worlds Apart," the first book in a series of epic fantasy books that is based on Native American and Oriental Mythology and religion.

Michael is currently incarcerated in Tennessee. Mike King#211954.

Books by the authors together:

- 1) Career Thief
- 2) Demon Stalker Vol. 1
- 3) Psychic Vampire

Music album by Michael E. Fulkerson:

- 1) The Epic Return

