

FORCED ENTRY - 2

Eye for an Eye

by komrade komura

Yeah I wrote this shit. Blame no one else.

London - November 2014

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Dedications

Personal: To you, yes you, my favourite komrade. It makes more sense when you are around.

Political: To all women and men that come up from their knees with their fists clenched. Respect.

Pot lital: To everyone that grows the herb. Whether for profit, for medicine, or for fun, thank you.

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There isn't much to the act itself, just a few movements of the index finger, and then they stop — less than three inches of movement in total. It shouldn't be so simple, but it is -- then no more. Nothing. Mass and dimensions, again, become the most important attributes, as it was at their beginning. Where once were opinions, happiness, sadness, and, perhaps, love, there is nothing now except lifeless bulk. And it's not the act that offers the challenge. Humans long ago devised methods to make it easy and as impersonal as possible. We are no longer required to slash with a sword or cut with a knife in close quarters. We can remain at a distance, helping us, the wretched. Some are so far away that their victims show up as images on a satellite from a distant country. I was not that fortunate.

Pensacola, Florida is becoming like other beaches around the world: tall, high-rise towers at the edge of the water reach to the sky like huge stalagmites. With each new construction the view becomes more blocked, establishing ownership to the beauty of the sea. The few remaining low-rise buildings are the scattered houses of the wealthy or the older townhouse rows, waiting for their price point conversion into the next generation of high-rise buildings.

Papers' real name was Henry, Henry Ambrose. I had waited for hours for Henry to leave his townhouse. I had been waiting since morning. Two coffees, a bagel, and a salad later, he finally left. The problem with waiting so long is that it affords me time to think. Thinking leads to questions, questions about resolve. Could it be done? Did I have what was needed to pull the trigger? I never killed someone before. And every time I got to the question, I remembered my previous morning, burying Taylor's body out at the Barnett Reservoir. The limpness of her body, just a shell now, where once was a vibrant young girl. Then came the reminder of how my heart ached as I threw the first few shovels of earth onto her wrapped body, amplified by the sound of the dirt hitting the plastic sheet. Every time I closed my eyes the auditory hallucinations began again.

And with the memory came the animal again. The animal within demanded blood for blood. Blood for Taylor's, blood for selling me out, blood for unintended tragedies, and blood for being one of the lowest forms of life on the planet, a snitch. The animal

demanded revenge. The best my brain could do was work to keep the tragedy from including me. Reaching the conclusion to kill Henry was easy as it wasn't a matter of intellect and reason. The animal doesn't work that way. The animal stamped the action on my life like the lady at the post office, who stamps the front of a large manila business envelope. From that moment forward, the actions were assured, but the outcome was not. So my brain went to work on that problem alone.

It was just after 8PM and dark. I was glad for that. The motorcycle cruised a couple of car lengths behind Henry's. My leather coat fit tight in the shoulders. I responded by shrugging to stretch it out more. Henry was a large man, about 275 pounds. On a tall man, it wouldn't have seemed so gross, but Henry was only about five foot eight inches tall. This made him very obese with a middle circumference that dwarfed all of his other dimensions. It also made him prone to a career without requirements for significant activity. Providing fake identification was one of those careers. A decade earlier, Henry would have looked just right at a science fiction convention. Now, his long black hair was thinning and combed over the top of his head from the right to the left, a joke everyone got, except Henry.

I followed him on my motorcycle to the fast food place, between the Mexican restaurant and the service station, and waited on my bike at the service station, near the air pump and vacuum cleaner. It took almost eleven minutes before Henry came out from the other side of the line, his hand shoveling a pair of long French fries toward his mouth as he navigated toward the edge of Gulf Blvd. His early 1970s Mercedes stood majestic against the grain of the newer vehicles flying by him, a reminder of more elegant automotive times.

He moved into the right lane and turned onto the causeway bridge, heading off the island. I sighed in relief. This was exactly what I needed; an island escape was just too risky. I let several cars drift between us. He drove very carefully, using blinkers for each lane change and one mile per hour under the speed limit. He was the perfect criminal, making sure he broke no laws, suspicious only by his steady conformity. To a careful observer, he appeared to be either drive like a criminal or a saint, not that there's a big difference between the two.

He stayed in the right lane most of the trip. I waited for an opportunity to move in beside him, shoot, and then quickly turn right and speed away. I was ready to go at one of the stoplights. I lowered the zipper of my jacket to make the gun easy to grab. Just as I began to release the clutch to move beside Henry's car, I noticed a police cruiser enter the back of the queue at the cross street. I kept the clutch engaged and zipped up my jacket a little. The black helmet restricted my peripheral vision a little, and I cursed it for that. I would need to turn my head and look both ways before acting, lest I risk an unseen cop car.

Henry eventually turned onto Creighton Road. He drove for almost a mile before he slowed down and turned into a parking lot. The building was made of cinder blocks with a sheet metal roof and two glass doors at the front. There were four other cars in the parking lot on this particular night. The large sign out by the road said "Pensacola Cyber Mart." It was one of those computer stores run by local geeks. They would be able to tell numerous stories about the Atlanta gaming convention from two years ago: the high scores, the tragic defeats. But they had no stories about the girl who spent the night. I moved quickly toward the entrance of the parking lot. I entered no less than three seconds after Henry. His big black car handled the transition from the road to the lower parking lot surface smoothly. My rice machine motorcycle dropped from the road with a thud. I slowed down until Henry was turning into a parking space.

Then I sped up beside the driver's door of the car. He was reaching to turn off the car and didn't initially understand the event. That changed less than a second later when he saw the gun. The Ruger SR9 extended from my arm as the arc of my movement aimed it. Fortunately there was nowhere for him to go with his seat belt on.

My previous concern regarding my own preparedness seemed to have been overestimated. My finger traveled the brief distance without hesitation when the monster in me flashed images of Taylor's lifeless body. This was justice, hard and swift, the monster told me.

The first bullet went through the glass window and then Henry's outstretched hand before hitting him in the face. It didn't kill him. He began twitching and jerking like he was having a seizure. The second bullet hit him in the throat and he responded by slowing down the jerking, but clawing at his throat, as if he were choking. Finally, I

aimed carefully with the sight, and then shot him in the forehead. He slumped down on the front seat at last. I saw one of the geeks from inside the building run to the front door as if to come outside. I aimed above his head and shot into the glass. The bullet shattered the glass and it rained down onto him. He was sufficiently discouraged.

Shoving the gun inside my black leather jacket, I jammed the motorcycle hard, and it leapt forward. It jumped over the edge of the road and slid sideways slightly as my back tire searched for a grip on Creighton Road's asphalt. It found it, and I shot forward again, as if from a slingshot. The first four blocks went by in less than thirty seconds. I turned onto North Davis Highway and headed toward Interstate 10. The smooth concrete of the interstate took me to the Scenic Highway exit. I pulled into the Dairy Queen parking lot and drove to the back, near the dumpster and a parked BMW. I removed the helmet and the leather riders, jacket, and pants. Underneath was a pair of cut off denim shorts and a t-shirt. I kept on the gloves. I threw the boots into the dumpster and slipped on some leather sandals. In less than 30 seconds, I had changed my clothes and my appearance. I slipped the motorcycle keys into my pocket and the gun into the front of my shorts. I opened the door to my car, got in quickly, and started the engine. In less than forty-five seconds, I was pulling out the parking lot as just another anonymous soul. Two minutes later I was crossing the bridge over Escambia Bay. I lowered the window and threw the keys to the motorcycle into the bay. Less than a mile later, I tossed the gun into the water, followed by the gloves. Justice for Taylor Oswald had begun.

The distance from Pensacola to Biloxi, Mississippi is approximately 120 miles. All of it can be done on Interstate 10, that long Atlantic to Pacific cross-country road with some of the most mundane scenery ever imagined, an autistic paradise. I drove back to the grow house with the cruise control set three miles an hour below the speed limit. My mind was rushing with paranoid thoughts of things I had forgotten. I had parked the car away from the view of the CCTV cameras at the Dairy Queen. I had changed with my car between me and the restaurant. A baseball cap had been fitted less than a second

after the helmet was removed. What had I forgotten? Were there other CCTV cameras I hadn't found beforehand? What did the man at the computer store see? I was dressed like a black Power Ranger, no facial features were available. I reminded myself of this several times as I drove back to the fiftieth out of fifty states in many vital categories.

Paranoia (noia) is a wicked affliction. For commercial cannabis growers it's a way of life. Looking out from behind the curtains is normal. The use of wireless IP web cameras helped reduce the "noia," but not as much as I had hoped. Two cameras were hidden in the front yard, providing good coverage of the neighbors. Two in the back yard let me know how my neighbors on the street behind me were doing. Still, the "noia" was always strong. I had morphed from someone who could and had slept through a hurricane, to someone who woke at the slightest sound. The wife had noticed that when I woke up startled, I had begun to automatically reach for a weapon, a dangerous reflex, even in full consciousness.

I ignored my wife's calls and text messages until almost Pascagoula, Mississippi. She was still expecting me to be heading back home with Taylor in the seat next to me. Some things about myself I have never liked, and when I confront them I respect myself more. I returned her call through the Bluetooth connection in the car.

Narrator: Hi, darling, sorry. I guess I had my phone on silent. I turned it down when I went into the restaurant for lunch and never turned it back on again.

Her voice came booming out of the speakers way too loud. I urgently pressed the volume button on the steering wheel. Her voice had a syrupy tone to it that I knew too well from watching her interact with kids.

Wife: Well, it's about time I heard from you two. And I look forward to meeting you, young lady. I want to know so much about you. What's your favorite food, your favorite color, movie star, and television show? There's so much to get to know about you, my dear.

There are moments when life comes apart at the seams. The fabric is torn and can't be sewn back together -- ever. My mind recalled the thud of the dirt on the plastic sheet. I pride myself on not being sentimental, but an obsessed planner with no regard for such trivial weaknesses. I was wrong. I'm as weak as the next person. My wife's voice, again, broke me from my grief.

Wife: There's no need to be shy, dearie. Let's start with your favorite food.

Narrator: Darling, Taylor isn't with me.

Wife: What? Why Not? (in a surprised tone)

Narrator: I'm sorry, but I can't talk about it right now.

The tone of a voice can change on a dime. Hers was no exception. It quickly went from surprise to demand.

Wife: Why not?

I wasn't doing well and was fighting a little-girl urge to start fucking crying. I heard the thud of the dirt. Fuck this shit! I cleared my throat and tried to speak clearly and without a hint of what I was feeling. My confident tone came out as desperate and scared.

Narrator: There was a problem.

There was no reply for almost a second. Then she replied with the concern I had heard before.

Wife: Is she OK?

Narrator: I'm sorry; I can't talk about it now.

There was another short pause on the other end. She processed that something bad had happened.

Wife: Are *you* OK, darling?

Narrator: Physically fine, just upset right now.

Wife: Is she hurt?

Narrator: Listen, darling, I really can't talk about it now.

Wife: But you said she was coming home with you. I've made up the upstairs bedroom. I even put up the Bob Marley posters back up.

Narrator: I'm truly sorry, darling. I wish she were coming with me.

And in my mind the dirt hit the plastic sheet again. I needed the monster now; I needed his resolve. But he had abandoned me to the emotional hell I was descending into.

My wife's tone swung to the dark side.

Wife: You didn't do anything to her, did you?

Narrator: No! Of course not!

My wife's reply held a tone of relief.

Wife: Good, just checking. I know you're good in a crisis, but sometimes crises turn out bad.

My tone of voice snapped with anger.

Narrator: How many fucking times do I have to say that I can't fucking talk about it right now?

I pressed the Bluetooth button on the steering wheel and disconnected the call. Less than four seconds later it rang again. I turned down the ringer volume. Fifty-two seconds after that, it rang again. Two minutes and twelve seconds after that a text message arrived.

Wife: I'm sorry Please talk to me #loveyou.

I didn't have a response. I was empty like a spilled bottle of soda, now just a vessel with nothing inside. I was being consumed in my own horror show. The fucking sound of the dirt played on a continuous loop in my head. Sometimes it felt like I was being shoved when the dirt hit. It wasn't just a physical shove; I felt the shove across all levels of my being: my psyche, my reason, my history, my soul. It was the kind of shove that makes your whole life stumble.

"Get your FUCKING shit together," I yelled aloud to myself as I sped down I-10 past the Gautier Van Cleve exit. "RIGHT! What're the options? What're the constraints? Evaluate the circumstances, ASSHOLE!" I screamed the words. "You are a project manager. Fucking act like one!" I slapped my face hard and yelled, "Fuck," because it hurt. My left cheek was stinging and beginning to feel warm. Sometimes pain works to break a thought pattern, and this time it was successful. I began to shout out loud the assessment and conclusions.

Narrator: CONSTRAINT - must not discuss details of any illegality on an open fucking cell line. Not even TOR browser session this time.

Narrator: PRINCIPLE - Honesty. I must tell her what happened to Taylor. There is no way I can concoct a story good enough to cover it, and I shouldn't. She's my wife. She'll find out in the end anyway. Face to face is best for bad news.

Narrator: PRINCIPLE - Honesty. I must tell her about Henry. But fuck, wait a minute. That means I'll be telling her she's married to a murderer. Fuck that. No, Henry is my secret. Take that shit to the grave. Rat bastard deserved it.

Narrator: TIMELINE – She'll start the questions again. I can spend all day tomorrow working in Biloxi, and then go home for thirty-two hours tomorrow night. That'll work. Just gotta keep her on hold until I get home tomorrow night.

Narrator: NEXT STEPS - Get to the house. Begin flushing the nutrients from the plants. Clean the trim machine and the spin bowl. Scope the plants for pests. Grind the garbage.

Problem evaluation restored my confidence some but mostly calmed me down enough to where I began to think about the weed growing in the house. It was approximately 1,700 square feet of a 2,300+ square foot house. Two strains were growing in the house: Black Widow from Mr. Nice Seeds and Blue Dream from Humboldt. Both strains needed at least ten weeks of flowering, which meant having the lights on for twelve hours and then off for twelve hours. Ten days before harvest, the plants start getting a diet of just plain, reverse-osmosis filtered water. If you've ever tasted weed that seemed nasty or left a hard, not quite right taste when you exhaled, then it either wasn't flushed well or cured long enough. Flushing ensures that all of the fertilizers are removed by the plants.

I concerned myself with the task at hand, lost myself in my work. I turned off of I-10 and headed south on 110 to Rodriguez then toward Popp's Ferry Road. The ranch house was on just over two acres, near the back bay of Biloxi. The house sat a hundred feet from the road with several large trees shielding it from view. The attached two-car garage ensured that supplies and harvests could be transported safely. The red brick house had a large living room and kitchen. The entry foyer was open to the living room, and the garage was attached to the kitchen. Only the foyer and living room were visible from the front door, and thus were the only spaces not full of plants. Even bathrooms and closets had plants. This was my first complete DWC house. DWC stands for Deep Water Culture and it's the largest yielding method of growing cannabis I've found. It's not for those devoid of technical skills. There's no soil, only bubbling buckets of very

precise liquids as the plants grow in small orange clay balls that look like small ancient bullets from a musket pistol.

I eventually reached Savannah Estates Road and turned left. As soon as I made the turn, I wished I hadn't. The blue lights were down the road near my house. OH FUCK! I smashed the panic button with my fist. No, No, it can't be about Henry. It can't be! That's impossible. If I turn around and run, they'll come after me. I'll die on the side of the road, another unarmed victim of police violence. FUCK! Henry sold me out completely, gave them everything. I should never go back to any of the houses, except the Georgia farmhouse. I reminded myself that there was a large stack of cash I could use for bail, legal expenses, and becoming a fugitive. Fuck, this is not how it's supposed to end. 'I am unarmed,' I said aloud in the quiet of the car, preparing myself.

I slowly let the car move toward my fate. As I got closer, I could see three police cars, all with their blue lights on, like beacons in the night for the lost. There was one in my driveway and another in my neighbor's, who was directly across the street. There was also one parked on the side of the road, on my neighbor's side of the street. Nearing the houses, I forced myself to take a deep breath and said to myself, "Don't get shot. Can't become a numerator." There was one cop at the car parked across the street from my house. What the fuck were they doing? There seemed to be too few for a bust on my house. I discounted this as my ego talking; cops will take it anyway they can get it. But as I drew closer, I noticed the three cops were standing two outside and one inside the front door of my neighbor's house. In the driveway, a female cop had the woman who lived there in front of the garage door and was examining her face. She pushed the hair from the woman's face. The woman acted embarrassed by the attention, like she wasn't worthy.

I barely know my neighbors. The family on the side of me had a teenage son, Conrad, with a new Dodge Challenger and a heavy foot. He had introduced himself early on. But the others across the street were just faces without names. He looked like corporate mid-management (yeah, takes one to know one). She looked like the childless stay at home mom. They were a two SUV family: a Ford for him, a Porsche for her. His Ford had two Ole Miss stickers on it. There were none on the Porsche. I had seen her once at the grocery store. She had upmarket idleness written all over her.

Seeing her against the garage door, relief poured over me like a waterfall. I slowly drove my car with my new crap-stained underwear past the cop cars. The woman looked up from her feet viewing useless cunt stance, and watched as I passed my own driveway. I continued around the curve in the road, and then back up the other side of the horseshoe shaped road. There were two houses with 'for sale' signs in front of them around the backside of our street. One of them had the realtor lockbox on the front door. I parked in the driveway of that one. I walked back on the road and toward my house. The neighborhood had never been completely built. There were still some wooded lots full of trees. I carefully moved to the one that was down the road, but offered the best-protected view.

For the next fifty-three minutes, I watched as the black policewoman spoke to the female occupant. The woman with the badge motioned with her arms often. The movements were emphatic, and most of them involved a chopping like action. Still, the woman stood there as if she were a teenage kid being lectured performing a quiet shuffle from side to side. Most questions were answered with a nod of the head. Every few minutes, an older male cop would come talk to the policewoman. Each time the woman with the badge would shake her head NO. The other cop would then go back inside while the policewoman continued talking to the woman with the bruises on her face.

Domestic violence is foreign to me. I've never been around it or understood it. It seems illogical to me, so I always put it on the long list of things that don't make any sense in this world, like religion and government. It must require a special sort of weakness to be a man who beats a woman or a woman who beats up a man. I'm willing to allow that anyone whom we share our lives with will, on occasion, be annoying, an idiot, and will piss us off, but violence? I love my wife so much that violence would never, ever be considered. If you don't feel the same way about the person you share your life with, then you best just pack your fucking bags and get the fuck out. Nevertheless, I don't understand it.

After one final shake of NO, the older cop went back inside and brought the man out of the house. I watched the fear on the bruised woman's face as he moved down the driveway to the police car. The policewoman took the injured female back inside and

closed the front door. The silver haired cop leaned against the front of his cruiser as he talked to the man in his gray and black striped pajama pants and blue t-shirt. The man hung his head down like a kid wilting under authority at a Catholic school. The two men spoke for about twenty-five minutes more. Again, the old cop used hand motions, except he pointed his finger sharply and in an accusatory manner directly at the man.

There was one final discussion via radio, and then the female cop inside and her colleagues exited the house. They got into their cars and left. The last to leave was the old cop. He put his hand on the man's shoulder in the way a father would talk to his son. After a few seconds of parting words, he shook the man's hand, and then walked to his car. I watched as the husband-thug walked to his front door. He pressed the doorbell and, after a few seconds, the door opened ever so slightly. He went inside, closing the door behind him.

I waited a few minutes, and then walked back out to the road from the safety of the trees. A couple of minutes later, I was back at the empty, for sale house and my car. Feeling that it was safe, I got into my car drove over to the grow house. The remote opened the garage door and the dark gray BMW slid smoothly into the garage. There was something that prevented me from getting out of the car. The timer on the garage light turned it off. I sat in the dark, the peaceful dark, the safe dark, with its quiet and its cold counsel.

Which day of the week is garbage day? It's one of the most important considerations when selecting a grow house. To maintain an adequate cover, there must always be garbage set out for collection. It doesn't need to be a lot. And the rolling garbage bin can't be put out days early, only the night before. So which day of the week is a casual question, but the response has high importance. It's best to confirm it with the folks who operate the trucks. I would've said call the sanitation department, but like many other vital government jobs, it's been outsourced to a private company these

days. Of course the company is non-union most of the time because a middle-class job is now a luxury in our new economy. I transported garbage in the trunk of the BMW four times a week. To prevent the trunk of the car from smelling like a French Quarter dumpster after a couple of hours in the sun, I triple bagged the garbage. The outer most bags are those heavy walled contractor bags. It would be removed and used at harvest time for collecting stalks and stems for grinding and disposal.

That night, I hardly slept at all because of the nightmares that flooded my unconscious mind like a tsunami hitting an island village. Carrying Taylor's body from the car kept replaying over and over. Then the glass of the Mercedes shattering from the bullet headed for Henry's face. At 2:52AM I woke up, gasping for air, as if suddenly there was none left in the entire world for me to breathe. My hands were trembling. I got out of bed and walked over to the stash box I kept in the largest flower room.

Purple Kush is a hard-hitting Indica that always gives me couch lock followed soon after by sleep. I ground up some and put it into my lolite vaporizer. The taste was floral as always; the effects hit quickly after only the third long draw and exhale. I felt the muscles in my body begin to relax. It was then I realized that I had spent most of the time since the death of Taylor Oswald with my shoulders so high as to be seen as a perpetual shrug. It felt good for them to finally return to a more natural position. I didn't need to be a psychologist to recognize PTSD -- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

I took three more draws from the vaporizer. Then turned it off. Yawning took hold of me. Once again, I lay down on the bed. Not a real bed, but rather a futon with a fancy thermo-elastic mattress on top of it. The choice of a futon was entirely decided by the need to maximize grow space. There wasn't a real bed in any of the grow houses. This was as good as it got.

The next morning, I woke with a start as the timer on the television turned it on, and the morning traffic report for an area without much traffic filled my ears. From my nights staying at this house, I had learned that the local traffic jams never seemed to be caused by the rush of too many toward the same destination with a capacity constraint of the roads and volume. Rather, it was caused by those at the bottom of the ladder, whose cars were not as reliable as the driver's intention. The morning traffic report was

reduced to a listing of all of the local vehicle breakdowns. Poor people and tow truck drivers form a parasitic ecosystem like a suckerfish on a whale.

I walked into the kitchen and past the eight-pack of DWC containers with their beautiful, budding, Black Widow plants. The colored spectrum from the Black Dog LED lights always looked pretty in the mornings to my bleary eyes. It would be another hour before lights out in this part of the house for the next 12 hours. Within a couple of minutes, coffee was brewing. My phone showed me that I had missed a call from my wife while I was in the only bathroom with a functioning shower that wasn't full of plants. I dialed the number without knowing what to say. It rang only one time before she picked it up.

Wife: Good morning, honey. Did you sleep well?

Narrator: Good morning, darling. No, not at all. Fucking nightmares.

Wife: Oh my. You usually don't remember your dreams. We'll have to work on getting you a good night's sleep when you get home. Get you so tired that you'll sleep like a baby.

One thing my wife knows well, is me. She knows that I adore making love with her and that my psyche is most in balance when I have three things: good sleep, good exercise, and a low sperm count.

Narrator: I'll be home tonight. Just gotta do my work here; then I'll get home for a day.

Wife: Wonderful. I'll make the eggplant dish you like so much.

I took my coffee back into the smallest grow room upstairs. I turned the little valve at the bottom of the first reservoir to the off position and checked the fluid levels before I disconnected the line from the reservoir to the DWC buckets.

Narrator: Thanks. I need something like that right now.

Wife: Then I'm just the girl to take care of it.

Narrator: We'll have a long talk when I get home. You need to know about Taylor.

Wife: Is there anything we can do to help her?

Narrator: No.

Each reservoir had eight DWC buckets attached to it, and each bucket had a small float valve inside. The float valve was attached to a pump inside the reservoir and ensured that each bucket had a sufficient level of nutrient-rich water bubbling up onto the roots. The eight-pack system was repeated over and over in the house. Where possible, each square meter of the grow space had an eight-pack with eight plants. With room for moving around, I had right at 1600 square feet of space under cultivation. With the right strains, this would yield well over 200 pounds per harvest. Black Widow and Blue Dream were the right strains. Bathrooms, closets, and the pantry, they all had been used as grow space. In spaces where an eight-pack of buckets wouldn't fit, a smaller number were attached to a reservoir.

Wife: I almost forgot. Number two is coming home this weekend. She's bringing Andy with her.

Andy was a nice enough fellow, a business major with a penchant for success. His career goal was to become a serial entrepreneur, starting businesses from his great ideas, bringing them to fruition, and then selling them for a lot of money and starting all over again. I had mentioned to him on several occasions that the linchpin of his ambition were the ideas. So far I hadn't heard any I liked. But he did have a gift, a gift for finding and refurbishing real estate. He had three rental houses near the university by the time he reached his senior year, and they provided him a modest, but adequate, income.

Narrator: Oh, great (sarcasm). I look forward to time spent with Mr. Not Worthy.

This is my name for any man who thought he was good enough for my daughters.

I hooked up the hose to the eight-line manifold to a new reservoir, containing only reverse-osmosis water. I rolled the old reservoir to the hallway bathroom. I stopped to adjust the earphone and clip the microphone wire to my t-shirt.

Wife: I hope you're sitting down.

Narrator: I'm not, but I don't think anything can shock me anymore.

Wife: Number two says that Andy wants to have a chat with you.

I was shocked, but shouldn't have been.

Narrator: What the fuck?! Does this mean what I think it does?

Wife: We're not sure. Number two has no indication from Andy that he's about to propose. He hasn't woken her up measuring her finger or anything like that.

Narrator: He knows Dad's Rule #1, doesn't he?

Wife: Yes. You've only repeated it to him a few dozen times since they started dating.

Narrator: Then he's wasting his breath and his time.

Dad's University Rule #1 is simple: Daughter #2 is NOT permitted to get married until her final semester of GRADUATE SCHOOL. When a Master's degree is within sight and the final classes are being attended, then, and ONLY THEN, can the subject of marriage be discussed. There's also Dad's University Rule #2, but it's gruesome and involves abortion before graduation... so you probably don't want to know about it.

Wife: Well, I know how much you hate surprises, so I wanted you to be aware before the two of you have your 'little chat.'

Narrator: Thanks, darling.

I poured the reservoir water into the shower. It ran around the four plants in the tub and down the drain.

Wife: Listen, Sean keeps sending you emails and he's started posting stuff on your Facebook page. He wants to know how you're doing and if you're ready to come back to the corporate circus.

Sean Bates is the director at the company I used to work for. A nice enough fellow, but talking to Sean was like talking to a devoutly religious person. Sean's belief in the sanctity of the free enterprise system was absolute, even though he either didn't understand or chose to ignore the hundreds of examples of the "not-so-free."

Narrator: Please respond to him. Anything short of 'FUCK OFF' will do fine.

Wife: He mentioned a contractor day rate of \$900. Just wanted you to know, in light of recent events, whatever they may be.

Sean had used me for five years as the project manager he sent in to replace the incumbent project manager when a large project was headed for failure. He had started calling me "TK" for Turnaround King. I hated the name, and it caused me to become a

minor celebrity in our obscure wing of the 100,000 plus matrix organizational structure. People would bring me their project problems and expect me to give them the secret to success. I would help where I could, but their expectations always seemed higher than my advice. On several occasions the person explaining the problem seemed to be the bigger problem. There were several times when people left angry and in a huff.

Narrator: Not interested, darling. One way ticket only.

Wife: OK. Just wanted you to know. We can talk about it more when you get home.

I rolled the reservoir over to the sink and began to fill it with the cleanest water outside of a science laboratory. I checked the PH with the orange PH meter with a digital display. I then added a few milliliters of PH Down solution. A 20-inch piece of 1/4-inch plastic pipe was used as a stir stick for the solution. I let it settle and tested the PH again. Five point nine was the reading. Good enough for flushing. I rolled the reservoir back into the room and began to swap it out with the reservoir for the next eight-pack in the room. Only 148 more to go. I didn't need to get them all done today. Still, I'd need to get them done by the day after I came back from home.

Grower's working days can be really long ones, sometimes more than sixteen hours. And the granddaddy of them all was coming up when I harvested this house. It would take me five days to harvest all the plants, run them through the trimming machines, hand trim them to finish them, then put them into the drying net hanging in darkened rooms.

Narrator: So what am I supposed to tell Mr. Not Worthy? My answer will be 'No,' and he knows it.

Wife: Just try to be kind in your reply. Not so cold. He's a nice kid, and she really likes him.

Narrator: Education first. No exceptions.

Wife: Work on your delivery, dear. That's a bit too strident.

I swapped out almost eighty reservoirs before I quit and took a shower. After, I dressed in my blue suit, white shirt, and red tie. I put the garbage into the wheelie bin and pressed the button to raise the garage door. As I proceeded to take it out to the street, I saw the woman from last night at her mailbox. Normally I avoid my neighbors,

except in the first four weeks after arrival. Then I have to set my story, so catching neighbors outside for a hello and a quick introduction is vital. This neighborhood was different, more standoffish, except for Conrad of the Dodge Challenger club. He had struck up a conversation the first day and told me about his plan to leave tire marks at every single stop sign within a ten-mile radius of his house. He had it all mapped out and was methodically going about accomplishing his goal.

The woman was dressed in a pair of white tennis shorts, the kind with the fat open pockets, just right for putting in a tennis ball. Her blouse was a sleeveless golf shirt, salmon and white stripes. She had dirty-blond hair, about shoulder length. She was one of the optimizers, the kind of woman who can calmly assess their lack of beauty and create an appearance that puts forward whatever pleasant features they have in a prominent position. In this instance, it was her nice full lips and her perfectly tanned legs. She waved to me as I started down the driveway toward the street. She held two pieces of mail in her right hand, which was crossed over her left arm as she stood looking at me, obviously waiting for me to reach the street to have a word. I waved back as I walked toward her. When I reached the road, she spoke to me in a soft Georgia accent, the kind that sounds so sweet that even the most vicious words would sound agreeable if the sentence ended with "bless its little heart." Normally I'm not a fan of this kind of accent and consider the sweetness an affectation more than an accent.

Woman: I apologize for last night, Paul.

I was surprised she knew my "name." Better just get the introduction over with.

Narrator: No problem. I don't think we've met. I'm Paul Beebur.

I left the garbage can, walked across the street, and extended my hand. Her hand was very soft and her handshake the weakest in recorded history. Even the queen puts out more effort.

Narrator: I hope it all turned out fine in the end.

Woman: Just a little misunderstanding. I'm Jenny, by the way. Jenny Hollister-Price. You're the new neighbour Conrad told me about. He comes over sometimes when he needs help with his calculus.

Narrator: Good to meet you, Jenny.

She let her hair fall into her face. Her makeup had been painstakingly applied so that her bruised face was barely noticeable.

Woman: Charlie gets real loud sometimes. It's all the pressure from his job. They keep demanding more and more from him. Every month it gets worse. Sometimes he just snaps, and then he starts yelling at me.

Narrator: What kind of work does he do?

Jenny: He's the district manager for Wal-Mart. He's responsible for all the stores across the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Narrator: That's a pretty tough job, I bet. Don't know much about Wal-Mart, but what I hear in the papers and see on TV. Doesn't sound like a top one hundred place to work.

She moved her hand to her hip as she spoke. It was a pose, and I resented it slightly.

Jenny: You don't know the half of it. He gets threatened with termination at least once a week, for anything from a clogged toilet to some toothless, welfare mother stealing a box of pampers for her baby. The Regional Manager is determined to become the South Eastern US manager, no matter whose back he has to climb up on. Charlie's region is the lowest performer, so he catches the brunt of the asshole's anger.

I have to admit that listening to this woman make excuses for her husband seemed surreal, or at least deeply illogical. Yet it was happening. It was a Twilight Zone moment of eerie abnormality.

Narrator: Modern corporate life is difficult, except at the top.

She looked at me with a strange look on her face, as if I had piqued her curiosity. I wasn't happy about this; my generalized platitude was mistaken for wisdom. She smiled at me from behind her sunglasses.

Jenny: So what do you do, Mr. Paul Beebur?

Narrator: IT Projects. I run large computer software projects in the South Eastern US.

Jenny: Do you like your job?

Narrator: Does anyone REALLY like their job?

Jenny: I used to like mine when I was an elementary school teacher, before we got married. But once we got married, Charlie wouldn't let me work.

Narrator: Then consider yourself lucky. I've never had a job that I didn't end up disliking.

Jenny: You sound like Charlie. He hates his job too. He regrets not attending law school while he was up there at Ole Miss.

Narrator: I know what he means. I always wanted to be a literature professor... until I saw how much they got paid.

She laughed. Her chemically whitened teeth flashed a smile and, instantly, I knew what had attracted Charlie. It was one of the prettiest smiles I had ever seen, and when she was smiling, she seemed to suddenly go from very average, but well displayed, to down right cute as a button right before my very eyes.

Jenny: Well, I guess life is a series of compromises and disappointments.

Narrator: But it shouldn't be. Something inside of me knows it shouldn't be and that if I can just stop being my own worst enemy, I might finally figure it out.

Jenny: Well, Mr. Beebur, I need to get ready for the close of my art auction on EBay. Let's see how much the fools are willing to pay for the work of a painter with soft brushes and bad eyes. Charlie gets upset when I make more money from my art than he does at his job. He doesn't consider it real work.

Narrator: Well, it was nice meeting you, Jenny.

She turned and walked away. That's when I noticed her limping slightly and the barely visible deep red mark peeking out from the edge of her tennis shorts as she moved. More of Charlie's work.

It had been sitting there, waiting for me to address it. The obvious thing that could not be ignored, but I tried to ignore it anyway. PROBLEM: Domestic violence across the street will continue to draw cops. This is a security risk that is too great to sustain. Fuck, fuck, fuck, damn, shit, fuck! There would be a whole house full of weed ready for harvest in less than two weeks! FUCK!!!

As I drove back home to Florida, I once again returned to my analytical ways and began to consider the alternatives. Alternative 1: Walk away. Right now. Never go back. Nothing was traceable to me as far as I knew. But Henry had turned that from a 100% certainty to a probability calculation with a huge penalty for getting the answer wrong. Fuck, fuck, fuck! I reached over and took a sip from my bottle of orange juice, and then put it back in the cup holder.

Alternative 2: Go back one more time, strip out the cameras, the other vital equipment that could possibly cause a problem, and then never go back.

Alternative 3: Same as alternative 2, but burn the fucker to the ground too.

Alternative 4: Shit my pants again, suck it up, grow a pair and finish the grow and harvest. Then shut down the house.

I did the math in my head as I exited the tunnel in Mobile, Alabama. To walk away would result in two negative outcomes. One: a manhunt for a grower with people who can identify me, and two: the loss of \$600,000 dollars. Damn, this was the biggest payout I had ever gotten from a single harvest. This is what I'd been working so fucking hard for.

The Florida state line was a twenty-minute distant memory by the time I finally grew a pair of balls. It wasn't just the money; it was also my inflated fucking ego that told me that I was a risk management specialist. Sometimes our own self-image gets in our way. Looking back, I now know that I should've chosen differently. My problem has often been that my mistakes are big ones.

I started noodling on the problem. What could I do to increase the likelihood of success in completing the grow and harvest? Security Sweeps came to mind. I had two cameras aimed at the front yard and the street. They were well concealed, but with rotation capabilities that would give me a good view of anything going on. I would never have to do the freak out drive past the cops again if I would just check the cameras from

a few blocks away. I would check these cameras every ninety minutes when I was away from the house and on the hour when inside.

Growing cannabis indoors is a labor intensive process, and it's easy to lose track of time when going through a room full of bud, checking for disease and pests, checking water levels, and looking at trichomes on each plant. My phone alarm would remind me to check the cameras. I also decided to spend more time exploring the backyard and what an escape out the back would require. I also decided that I needed to bring another gun back. Fuck! I hate traveling with an unregistered, untraceable handgun in the car. It made me almost as paranoid as the harvest drive.

If I wanted to reduce my exposure to risk, then I realized I needed to reduce my exposure to Jenny and Charlie. Any further interactions with them needed be avoided. Seemed like a real bastard move, but a necessary one. It simply wasn't my problem to fix. Fuck! My sweetest producing house ever, and it's ruined because some man couldn't come to terms with his own failure... or whatever else was going through that warped thing atop his shoulders. He should spend the rest of his life apologizing to her every morning, followed by bringing her breakfast in bed. Instead, he beats the fuck out of her, and there isn't a fucking thing I can do about it.

The gray BMW pulled into the driveway just after 10PM. My wife was waiting at the door for me. She put her arms around my neck and kissed me hard on the mouth. She held me as tight as she could and pressed herself against me fully. After a long kiss and hug, she turned me loose, took me by the hand and led me inside.

Wife: I always liked that suit on you. Bet you were the best looking project manager at every meeting.

I didn't really have anything to say. She took me into the kitchen. I made a pot of coffee, fixed myself a cup, and sat down at the kitchen table.

I wish I could tell you that I was completely honest with my wife about everything. I didn't tell her about my original plan and how I had not only considered killing Taylor, but had also stopped and bought all the stuff I needed for the deed.

When I told her about Animal Cop, she started crying. As I told her that I couldn't remember hearing the gunshots, only the flash on the screen and the flash from the house in my peripheral vision, I heard her gasp. It was the kind of gasp I had witnessed

only once before: when we saw the films from the Nazi extermination camps. I tried really hard to tell her about burying Taylor, but I couldn't make it through that part. I stopped talking, and she looked at me and saw the pain in my eyes and the tears running down my cheeks. I never finished telling her what happened.

Wife: But you recorded everything they did, right?

I cleared my throat and wiped my cheeks with a napkin.

Narrator: Yes, everything, and they had their masks off.

Wife: Then we need to make sure that the animals pay for what they did to that poor girl. We can't let this go unpunished.

One of the things I most admire about my wife is that she has a near perfect sense of fairness. We agreed about which side to be on nearly 100% of the time. It's simple: we always support the person or group getting screwed over in the deal. It makes it easier to sleep at night.

Wife: They're going to pay for this, so help me fucking god.

I smiled a little.

Narrator: Thanks, darling. We need to work through this very carefully. There can't be any mistakes if we're going to pull it off.

Wife: Let's work up the plan.

She was as serious as can be. I had seen it before, what the British call "bloody-mindedness." It's the way I used to become on a large software project when no one was cooperating and everyone was only throwing up obstacles. It's similar to owning a large dog in the city. It's 10PM at night and he needs to go out for one last crap before bedtime, but he doesn't want to go. He's big and struggles well for his size. Bloody-mindedness is when that fucking dog is going to go for a walk, even if his ass is raw from being dragged for several hundred feet along concrete in a sitting position. My wife was displaying bloody-mindedness in spades. She demanded justice.

Wife: What're we going to do about that jerk who sold us out?

Narrator: Papers?

Wife: Yeah. If the little prick hadn't talked, Taylor would still be alive. He needs to pay for what he started.

Of the two events, Taylor's death affected me more. Henry was as deserving a bastard as there ever would be, but at this exact moment in time, I had no response to give her question.

My wife interpreted my non-responsiveness differently.

Wife: You do agree with me, don't you? The asshole needs to pay for the chain of events he started.

Narrator: Definitely. Just need to think of a way to get to him.

Harvest is always a lot of hot, sweaty work, and this was my biggest one yet. Harvest is also one very sticky mess. I worked wearing paper coveralls, only a t-shirt and boxer shorts underneath. Vinyl gloves kept my hands from becoming as sticky as glue.

The Harvest Pro automatic trimmer was an excellent mid-sized bud trimmer. But with around 200 pounds to trim, it was smaller than what I needed. It would be a long five days to harvest the house. I looked forward to the break after the third day, when I would spend a day at the farmhouse in Georgia. It was the one place dearly departed Henry fucking scumbag Papers hadn't known about. I cut the plants down one at a time. I took my shears and cut the main stem of the plant. Then I removed the side branches. The large fan leaves, so synonymous with the popular idea of cannabis, were then cut off and put into a garbage can. I laid the entire plant out on a large rolling stainless steel table. The long stems had beautiful buds attached. Then I took each branch individually and cut the buds off. Some were too small to bother with, so I put those into a five-gallon bucket on the table. Those that met the standard were dropped into the opening of the Harvest Pro. They fell down the chute onto the surface of the grating blades. I turned on the machine, and the blades beneath started spinning at high RPMs. The whirlwind effect started and the buds began running around the trimming drum as if caught in a tornado. Their leaves would fall between the grating mechanism and be sliced off by the razor sharp blades. After about thirty seconds, I opened the side escape chute and the trimmed buds began to fling themselves into the side chute and

then fall into the five-gallon orange bucket below. I calculated that with this process alone, I had twenty-seven to twenty-eight hours of work. But there was much more. Grinding and disposal of stalks and stems had to be done. Setting up the drying tents and air filtration system had to be done. Final trim would take two days, even with the spin bowl trimmer. Then there was the sweet spot.

The sweet spot happens with all those small nuggets that didn't measure up. Added to them are the THC laden little snippets of the leaves from my final hand trim or from the spin bowl trimmer. These may not look like much, but they were one of the best business investments possible. All of this was used to make bubble hash. Bubble hash is three times stronger than smoking buds and often leaves people gasping for reality. Nothing cements a solid commercial relationship like lagniappe, that little something extra thrown into the deal at no extra charge. It was always one pound of bubble hash. I threw in a free pound of bubble hash into the deal with every harvest, and every harvest it caused an enthusiastic smile. David never sold all of it on to his customers. He, too, used some of it as a deal sweetener.

The music playing was an eclectic mix of songs, everyone from Louis Armstrong to Filter to Beethoven. My lolite vaporizer was full of Satori as I worked away on the next plant, the next stalk, the next stem. Satori is my daytime smoke. Cheb Mami was playing. North African music is very good in small amounts. It always has a good beat; so what if I can't understand the words. Cheb Mami is meant for dancing and sliding across the floor in your socks. Someone as spastic as me can only dance when I'm alone.

Lunch was a large salad my wife had insisted that I bring back with me. It was good, and I enjoyed the walnuts and the spinach. I sat in my sticky overalls and looked at the mess I had created. The floors would definitely need deep cleaning when I finished. It was an interesting contrast, that at the end of a grow house, assuming you don't burn it to the ground, that right before leaving with the fruits of the harvest, the grower must put in several days of janitorial work. David had mentioned a very special cleaning team that would come in and clean a grow house spotlessly for ten thousand dollars. Not even the DEA would be able to tell there had been a grow when they'd

finished. I was too paranoid to use them. David was the only person in the business I dealt with, and I wanted it to remain that way until I finished.

The Latin countries weren't wrong with their idea of a siesta. I laid down on the futon and slept for ninety minutes after lunch. The short nap would permit me to recharge my batteries and clear my head. The space foam pillow was nice, but it only reminded me of its inadequacies. I felt it slowly begin to conform to the contour of my head. It would be a long day and night. My time on the clock wouldn't end until 10PM tonight, and begin again tomorrow at 6:30AM. I fell asleep, pleased with my progress so far. The iPad was beside me, the image of the front outdoor cameras on the screen.

I woke up to the Chemical Brothers album, *Exit Planet Dust*, and a vaporizer full of Satori. The next few plants went quickly as the hyperactivity of waking up took hold. After the fifth plant, I rolled the garbage can with the big fan leaves and the wooden stems and stalks into the kitchen. In the corner of the kitchen stood the TEK Model 29 20HP Chipper/Shredder. It was a vicious machine that could easily consume my arm, so I always treated it with great respect and only started it when I was standing as far away from it as I could and still reach the pull chord to start it. It was noisy and efficient; the chips and tiny bits of shredded leaves fell into the large contractor bag underneath it. Several hours later, when it was dark outside and I had run it a few more times, I took the bag of shreds outside with a shovel and a bag of lime. It took me about twenty minutes to dig a hole for the scraps of my grow. Lots of lime went on top of the mulch before I shoveled the soil back on top.

I was almost finished cutting down the second room when I noticed movement out of the corner of my eye on the iPad, which was running a continuous feed from the two cameras outside the front of the house. The image came just in time for me to see Jenny as she reached the front door. The timer had turned on the television, so from the front door, she would know that I was home. The camera zoomed in on my command to get a good look at her. She didn't look to be injured. She rang the doorbell. It was not a simple, polite one or two rings. It was a manic series, as if to annoy as much as possible, or as I later decided, to show desperation. I immediately switched off the trimming machine and turned off Cypress Hill's *Black Sunday* album, and then sat down

on the floor and watched her. She was moving side to side nervously. She moved her hand up to her face to wipe it. It was obvious that she was, or had been, crying.

Come on, seriously, what would you do? Would you be a Good Samaritan and open the door to a house in the middle of a massive cannabis harvest to deal with a woman whose husband was the lowest of the low? Would you risk a long prison sentence because every time he looked in the mirror he saw a loser and was too dumb to figure out how to change? Yeah, I didn't think so.

She tried the doorbell again, this time along with the knocker, both executed again in a desperate manner. I heard her call out my "name." I cringed from my own cowardice. I remembered crouching in the shrubs across the street, watching the webcam on my phone as Taylor was raped and murdered, frozen as my own fear rationalized itself as survival instinct, my honor leaving on a long vacation with its best friend, self-respect. Sometimes we SHOULD die trying. My problem was that I never could.

Jenny: I know you're home.

I heard her call out to me as she gave another long staccato blast on the doorbell. Still, I cowered. She rapped the knocker hard three more times, and then stopped.

Jenny: I understand.

She called out again as she shook her head in the same disappointed manner I remembered from my father.

Jenny: I'm sorry I bothered you.

Then she turned and walked back down the sidewalk to the driveway, and then down to the road. I sniffled a little and realized that she hadn't been the only one crying. I turned off all of the appliance timers and lights, except in the room where I was working. Add another failure to my long list.

More Satori in the vaporizer helped me get back to work. I had three buckets of nugs for bubble hash. I would get several pounds of bubble this run. David would get an extra pound.

It was closing in on 10PM and my arms and back were aching. Another thirteen minutes until quitting time. My progress was on schedule, having lost the early lead I had established. I've always been a sprinter, good for the short burst. Long games are difficult, but I make the effort. Bloody-mindedness. Anyway, it was right about that time that the ambulance came screaming down the street. It pulled into the driveway across the street, and two EMTs got out of the large red and white box on wheels and walked briskly to the front door, bags in their hands. Within ten seconds a police car came to a flying stop behind the ambulance, and a cop got out quickly and ran to join the EMTs at the front door. He unsnapped his holster as he ran, then left his hand on the butt of the pistol.

Charlie answered the door. He was wearing slacks and a business shirt. Everyone moved inside, but the front door remained open. My heart dropped. My god, had the bastard finally killed her? What the fuck did he do to her? How much of it was my fault for not helping her?

One of the EMTs came and got the wheeled gurney. It was six minutes and thirty-nine seconds later when they emerged again. Jenny was on the gurney. She had her head lifted up and was complaining to the EMTs. I zoomed my camera to the max to see her. As she talked, I could see that her mouth was bloody and it looked like some of her teeth were missing. She also had a long red laceration above her left temple, extending around to her forehead. Her face looked like she had just been put in the ring with the heavyweight-boxing champion for a dozen rounds. It was red all over. Her left eye was nearly closed like the boxer trying to finish before the referee stopped the match. Reaching the open back doors of the ambulance, the cop emerged from the house with Charlie. This time he was in handcuffs. As much as I dislike the police, I was happy to see them doing their job. The cop jerked Charlie to a painful stop with the handcuffs. I could see Charlie complaining. The cop reached behind and pulled the front door closed. Then he shoved Charlie hard on the shoulder to get him moving again. And again, Charlie complained. Another cop car came to a screeching halt out in front of the house.

The black female cop from the previous night jumped out of the car and ran over to the ambulance. Charlie was being led past the ambulance toward the cruiser parked

behind it. The woman cop turned and spoke to the other pig. She shook her finger from side to side and pointed toward her cruiser. The other cop shrugged his shoulders and took his hand from Charlie's shoulder. The woman walked over and took his place. She pulled his handcuffs up hard and high. Charlie's face scrunched up in pain. She shoved his shoulder hard to get him moving. He started yelling at the woman. She responded by pulling his handcuffs even higher, forcing him to bend forward. She steered him down to her vehicle; his angry words flowed nonstop like a river. When she got him to the back door, she jerked him to a stop. She opened the door and placed her hand on his head as cops do to force your head inside of the car. She had different plans and slammed Charlie's head hard into the top frame of the door opening. His head bounced back slightly. She caught it in her hand and slammed it again. Charlie fell down, dazed and barely conscious. The woman yelled at him, and it didn't take a lip reader to know she was yelling, "Get up, you piece of shit." She reached down and grabbed him by the handcuffs. She jerked them hard, forcing him to stand up. He only made it onto his knees. He was very unstable, like a boxer who's one good shot from losing the fight. She kicked him over and over until he scrambled into the back of the cruiser to escape the pain from her boots. She kicked him one last time, and then leaned in the back door of the police car and spat on him. She slammed the door shut as hard as she could. She got into the front of the car, turned on her headlamps and blue lights, and sped away.

I watched as the other police cars and then the ambulance turned on their lights and followed her lead.

Another police cruiser arrived at the scene about five minutes later, after everyone had left. He pulled into the now empty drive way across the street. He got out of his car and turned and walked away from the house. It only took me a second to realize that he was headed for my house. I slammed the trimmer off button and killed the lights. Fuck me! Fuck me! The cop is coming to my door. Fuck. Fuck. What to do? What to do? Need a gun, yeah a gun. I ran into the room with the futon and got the two Berettas I had stashed there. I moved quietly into the living room and sat in the dark, on the couch, directly across from the front door. I pointed both pistols at the door and left the safety in the ON position on both pistols. The ringing of the doorbell or the knock on

the door, even though completely expected to happen in the next few seconds, might just startle me in my current state of hyper paranoia, and I might accidentally fire the pistols. The safety had not been disengaged on the gun that killed Henry until about two tenths of a second before it fired. I began to take long calming breaths.

When the doorbell rang, I leapt to my feet with the fastest, smoothest motion I have ever performed. It was like I was shoved up from the sofa by a spring. The sound was like electricity for my muscles. A fraction of a second later, I realized that my index fingers were straining against the locked triggers. Fuck me. If my heart had been even the slightest bit unhealthy, this moment would've been my last because a heart attack would've dropped me like a rock. But good diet and exercise are the only things that help the "noia." This time I didn't die.

Late Cop: Open up. It's the police.

He said the words in a baritone voice. Not the phrase I had hoped to hear, but it didn't matter to me. As long as he stayed on the other side of the door, he would remain alive, and my life wouldn't turn to shit in an instant. He walked over to one of the windows. He didn't try to look in at first, but rather tried to raise it. I sat down on the sofa again. The aim of my guns moved with him as I watched him on my iPad. He tried to look in, but the nice window cover that looks like one of those heat blockers people put on windows, the ones so popular in the south, prevented him. It was actually a special product disguised to black out windows. He went back to the front door. This time it was the knocker. My eyes had adjusted to the dark over the last few minutes, and that fact will forever be one of the most important of my life as this simple thing permitted me to see that despite all of my planning, my strategy, my technology, and my fancy education, my project plans, and my risk management, despite all of it... the front door was unlocked!

I covered the distance to the front door in less time than it takes to tell you I did. My index finger and thumb engaged the twist for the lock less than a fraction of a second before he started to turn the handle. Calm, calm, calm I repeated in my head. Don't let him hear the deadbolt. Softly, softly. My slow twist was silent and barely in time. The knob on my side twisted hard back and forth a few times, and then stopped.

Late Cop: Fuck.

I heard him say it from the other side of the door. My body collapsed, and I slumped onto the cold tile of the entry foyer. The doorbell rang again. I lay on the cold tile of the entry foyer. A pistol I had dropped lay beside me and I held the other in my hand. I was shaking uncontrollably. As I lay there, I heard the back door handle in the kitchen being twisted. My memory of locking it made me sigh comfortably at first. Then I realized that there was a cop trying to get into my house without a warrant and was acting as if it were just same old, same old, no biggie.

Systematically, he tried every door and even the downstairs windows in the house. He wasn't a very big man, maybe five foot ten inches, if that, but he had a way of carrying himself that I recognized as the "trouble swagger." I had seen it in high school when the bullies would get in my face. My cameras watched him as he finally walked back down the driveway to the street. I expected him to drive away, but, again, he surprised me. He kept walking past his cruiser and up to Jenny and Charlie's house. He didn't try the front door. He just opened it casually as if he had expected it to be unlocked. I watched on my iPad as the light in every room in the house came on for a couple of minutes, and was then turned off. It was different when he reached one of the rooms upstairs. The light stayed on for a long time.

Nearly twenty-five minutes after he entered the house, he came back out the front door. I zoomed in to get the best look possible. The right pocket of his pants was bulging as if he had stuffed something that was almost too large into it. He walked to the back of his cruiser and raised the trunk. He then emptied his pockets into one of those blue plastic coolers that holds a six-pack of beer at the beach. The big thing in his pocket was made of glass, and I couldn't make out what it was. However, I didn't have a problem seeing the long gold chains and rings all tangled up in a wad, one in each pocket. He threw all of it into the cooler. He closed it; then closed the trunk. I sat staring at the iPad, not believing my eyes. I figured he had picked up a few thousand dollars of stuff in his twenty-five minutes and that he would gladly be on his way. Again, this man proved me wrong. He didn't leave, but went back into the house.

You know those new speakers that everyone is talking about? The ones that are voice activated, will tell you the weather, the latest news, stock quotes, and play any music in your library... and make it sound really good? Less than ninety seconds after entering the house the second time, the cop came out carrying those speakers under each arm. He put them into the trunk of the police car, and this time, he finally got in and drove away.

David was impressed with the harvest. Especially with the two pounds of bubble hash I gave him for free. I sat out in the hunting shack as he tried the Black Widow. He slid the glass of scotch toward me. I don't ever drink alcohol, can't stand it. HOWEVER, after driving with enough cannabis in the car to send me to prison for at least ten years, I always needed a stiff drink. David knew this and made sure there was the best-in-class waiting for me at the shack. David took another long draw from the joint, and then passed it back to me. My hands shook as I held the glass and the joint. David looked concerned.

David: I like this one. It leans to the Sativa side more than the others I've had before. Gonna be an easy sell for sure.

I adjusted my bony arse on the hard stools in the shack. There were two bunk beds, a table and stools, a wood stove, and a sink in the shack. There was an outdoor shower connected to a roof rain collector. This was a basic shack, one that required a bear-like approach to defecation.

Narrator: Glad you like it. It took a few before I found this one. Personally, I don't like the strain.

David looked at me like I was a madman.

David: Why not?

Narrator: It gives me the munchies, uncontrollable fucking munchies.

David: That, it will do.

He smiled. David always smiled. He was a people-friendly kind of person. He ran an antique and collectibles business in Mobile, Alabama. Largest on the Gulf Coast, he always claimed. He processed the belongings of the downwardly mobile or the dearly departed and distributed them to the upwardly mobile and still warm across the Southeast. The antique business is a nice slippery one where the actual value of items is open for debate and the variances between estimates can reach well over 100%, sometimes a lot more. It was this seam that David Pennington exploited in order to process a lot of the money from his more lucrative cannabis business. The dirty South is still far behind the curve on medical cannabis and legalization, so the cannabis trade is still high risk, high reward.

David was a man in his late forties, maybe early fifties. He had brown hair, green eyes, and stood just over six feet tall. He could have done almost anything with his life, but got the antique bug while in college and had been hooked ever since. The problem is that antiques don't always pay very well. Gotta find a customer for the ancient, one-of-a-kind, early edition sink fittings from a tear down on Esplanade Avenue in New Orleans. David had dealt weed in high school and started it up again after a particularly bad antique investment that could only be considered a swindle, to hear him tell it.

David: Listen, Caleb, we need to have a chat about the price. The cowboys that moved out to Colorado are offering to sell me pounds for \$3,200 delivered to this very shack. Cross-country and all for free. Now they aren't offering any bubble or extras, but I gotta admit that it's a very competitive price. Wouldn't you agree?

I took a hit from the joint and passed it back to him. The trembling subsided a little as the effect of the smoke began to start.

Narrator: Yeah, that's a really good price including shipping. Have you tried it? Don't want a Nigerian prince.

David smiled again as he took a toke, and then thumped the blunt against the inside of the ashtray to lose the long ash.

David: Yeah, it's good. Not as good as your Neville's Haze, but on par with the rest of your stuff. And it comes in with a better trim. But then it's all hand trimmed out there. Those boys are using the legalization as a cover to grow some serious quantity for export all over the country.

Price negotiations are a funny thing. Many of us are trained from an early age to avoid talking directly about money. Both David and I were not in that group. I took another sip of the scotch.

David: So, what can you do?

Narrator: How much are they offering?

David: A hundred pounds a month. Not the quantity I wanted, but they said they could ramp up in four months to double it.

Narrator: OK then, how about \$3,000 for the first hundred pounds and \$2,800 for every pound after that?

I just took a \$70,000 haircut on my paycheck for this harvest, but there was a leverage point that David had over me that he didn't know about. Without him, I had no idea where I'd find someone willing to buy my harvest. I had met David through a very secret introduction by a friend in an online community that I trusted. At my insistence, we had met in Amsterdam prior to any transactions. We had smoked a lot of weed together that week. David knew a lot about me, except my real name and where I lived.

David: You know how to keep your customers happy. Thanks.

Narrator: No problem.

David: I understand if you want to keep the bubble.

Narrator: No, it's fine. I enjoy making it, and my wife likes it for her aches and pains.

David extended his hand and we shook.

David: Let me get the gadget.

The "gadget," in David's terms, was his laptop. He pulled the slim Apple out of his backpack. One of the few advantages to the hunting shack, besides its isolation, was its proximity to a cell phone tower constructed a few years ago to bring better service to the people living out here in bum-fucked Egypt. The next few minutes were taken up by a series of online transactions, which I cannot describe because many people currently

use them for this exact purpose, and I really don't want to help the cops with their job. But after five minutes, I was assured that \$580,000 had been transferred to my accounts.

David: So, how much longer?

Narrator: The plan is eleven more months.

David: I'll keep the cowboys in Colorado on the hook. Do you mind if I start to ramp you down and ramp them up over your last three months?

Narrator: No. Sounds fine with me. Been getting worried lately.

David: Worried about what?

If you tell anyone in the illegal cannabis business that you're worried, you can be assured that you'll have their undivided attention for as long as it takes for them to determine how far your risk extends to them. I took the final sip of scotch.

Narrator: Not the predictable things at all. Smell, light bill, all the grow stuff I've got covered. Got cameras out the ass, watching everything.

David: Then what's the problem?

Narrator: The unexpected. This harvest came from my largest house, which sits right across the street from a house where the husband beats his wife regularly and the cops come out. Poor woman left in an ambulance a couple of nights ago and he left in cuffs.

David: I see what you mean. What're you going to do about it?

I shrugged my shoulders before I replied.

Narrator: What can I do? I'm going to shut it down. No choice.

In any other walk of life, David and I would be close friends. He was like an older brother to me. Our commercial circumstances prevented that last bit of closeness. But sometimes he spoke to me as if the gap had been closed.

David: You know you've had a good run. I've purchased over six million dollars of cannabis from you in less than two years. Perhaps these last few months are the ones that you should reconsider.

Narrator: Never. I've got my goal of thirty months, and I'll meet it.

David: I hope you do; I really do, but consider ramping down. It sure beats wearing an orange jumpsuit. Listen, I've watched you carefully over the months. You've gone from someone who was as precise as a Swiss watch to someone who struggles for precision now. Your nerves are getting shot to hell and you're too proud to admit it. Today seems to be one of your worst ever. Soon you'll reach the point where I don't feel safe doing business with you, my friend, and *that* will be a tear we can't mend. Think about it, Caleb.

I spent the next day at the Georgia farmhouse. It was the one grow house that couldn't be tied to an alias created by the late Henry Ambrose. But there was a bad reason for this. This was where a lot of my kinfolk lived. They had moved to this area to retire or to raise their family. Why? Because over one hundred years ago, my family had been one of the largest landowners in the county. It was a source of pride for those still clinging to the greatness of the past because they had produced none of their own. But with the passage of time, fortunes waned for the family. Drunks and swindlers reduced the family holdings from fifteen thousand acres to less than one hundred. Luckily they were piece-meal parcels scattered all over the county.

The farmhouse came to me eventually, long after my grandmother died. She wasn't a particularly loving grandmother, always bossing everyone around, especially my father. Her children had fought each other for everything she owned when she died. They couldn't agree on an even split of her estate, as some complained that they deserved more due to having to bear the brunt of her withering bluster most of their lives. My dad was smart, he left home with a girl the night he graduated from high school.

The family wanted \$85,000 for the farmhouse and the ten acres of rich farmland attached to it. Eventually my father bought it from them for \$75,000, matching the best

offer they had to date. I bought it from my dad for the same price the week he was diagnosed with lung cancer.

The one thing about farmhouses is that they're a marvel of periodic construction. The original house had barely been eight hundred square feet. Now it measured almost twenty-five hundred. It was raised off the ground as many farmhouses are. This presents problems for producing cannabis. Grow rooms must be light tight. When I first set up the house for growing cannabis, I spent days making it light tight for when the large High Pressure Sodium bulbs would come on. My first evening of lights on resulted in me desperately sprinting back into the house to turn them off before they were spotted by a passing plane, a helicopter, or the International fucking Space Station... that's how bright it was. Three days later, and many hours in the soft red clay dirt underneath the house, and it was ready, no alien spaceship landing.

Today I was removing the bottom spindly branches from the plants. They were too low and too shielded by the branches and leaves above to get much light, so removing them let the plant concentrate on making the big buds at the top. My phone rang.

Narrator: Hello, darling.

Wife: Hi, sweetheart. Just checking if you'll be home this weekend. Andy still wants to talk to you, and they'll come back this weekend if you're going to be here.

I grabbed my hand held microscope, which was tethered to a leather strap around my neck. I pulled it up to the leaves of an OG Kush Plant and looked at it. It was clean. The War of the Spider Mites was a distant memory now. I had lost the war in my seventh month of growing, and this entire house had been gutted, cleaned, and air sealed again.

Narrator: Warn him not to expect much from me. I'll try not to yell NO too loudly.

Wife: I know you won't.

My wife spoke to me in the pleasant tone she had carefully crafted for use when she knew I was under stress. She had developed it during my days on the corporate plantation, when I would be dropped in to recover a project where the customer was threatening legal action.

Wife: I've got some ideas about Operation Motherfuckers I want to talk to you about.

Bless my wife, she means well, but sometimes she was just a corny little southern girl at heart, a Jewish one.

Narrator: OK, let's not discuss it now, but definitely when I get home. I've had a few ideas too.

Wife: Good.

Her reply was enthusiastic.

A new branch bent down to me and offered its leaves to the microscope. Tick marks were made for diseased or dead leaves, which were then removed and recorded on a clipboard under a column labeled DL. Those numbers would be recorded in a large Excel workbook that served as one of the backbones of the technology. Rooms were compared against each other. Mother plants, with their precious cuttings, even these were compared against each other. Keep the best; fuck the rest. Eventually, right before the War of the Spider Mites, variances in the grows across the houses started to disappear. Yields were coming in within three percent of initial predictions and rising. Importantly, variances had resulted in a program of localized assistance. It started with some additional LED lights put over areas that had the lowest lumens when measured with a cheap light meter from an online camera store. It quickly spread to localized heating and cooling. I turned loose of the branch and it sprang upward.

Narrator: Did you get the IRA funds transferred?

Wife: Yep, sure did. The little prick wasn't happy.

Narrator: I don't really care. Wait, actually I do. I'm glad he wasn't happy.

Wife: Me too. He didn't get to buy a new boat when we transferred our account.

Narrator: What would you say if I spent more time at home soon?

Wife: Splendid. Come home and chase me around the house.

Later that day, right as the light started to hint of evening, I finished my work. I showered, dressed, and packed the car for the trip back to the Biloxi grow house. As I

walked out to the barn the final time with some extra cleaning supplies, I saw a relative of mine pass on the dirt road. He put two fingers to his head as a tip of the hat.

Oren was not the friendliest member of my family. He had a reputation for trouble and meanness. That didn't normally concern me because I tended to ignore most of my kinfolk. What did concern me was that he was driving down this isolated back country dirt road, a road where black families occupied the only other houses. He wasn't likely to visit any of those, not from the vile shit I'd heard out of his mouth. I had also noticed some scratch marks on the front and back door locks. He drove nice and slow past the house and barn, keeping the dust level low as he looked at me with a shit-eating grin that reeked of "I know you're up to sumphthin." I smiled and waved.

A couple of minutes later, I was in the car, setting the outdoor wireless web-cams to motion notification, the same setting had been on at the grow house in Jackson that Taylor had broken into. I dreaded it. Now every rodent, deer, cat, dog, and owl that came within fifty feet of the lens would set it off in the night, and I would panic for a few minutes. Fucking family. It's a gamble which family you are born into, a gamble I lost before I even knew it.

The house in Biloxi was almost empty. The moving truck had taken two trips to bring all of the grow equipment from Biloxi to the barn at the farmhouse in Georgia. Every bit of equipment was cleaned with isopropyl alcohol or bleach prior to dispatch. There are no laws against driving with a truck full of hydroponic equipment. There are laws against driving with a truck full of THC coated hydroponic equipment. The distance is about 365 miles. On an interstate highway with a moving truck, it would take about seven hours. Being deep in the seizure of the "noia" meant I took the back roads. This turned it into a twelve-hour journey each time the truck was full. Federal, state, and local cops prowl the interstate highway system looking for their victims. Often settling for the lucrative but mundane property seizures when they can't fabricate significant criminality.

The rental truck had been turned in and my last two days of house cleaning were well underway. Today was a six-hour session of carpet, drapes, and curtain cleaning. One thing about good cannabis, when the smell sticks to something, it stays. I had danced around the floor with the long attachment to the Steam Dream 500 carpet and home steam cleaner. It was billed as one of the premiere chemical free cleaners. The added chemicals were my idea. I moved the vacuum cleaner-looking end across the carpet, and it left a trail of rising steam in its wake. My lolite hissed in my back pocket, and I removed it, took a long draw, and then put it back.

My phone rang. It was my number two.

Daughter #2: Hi, Daddy. How's it going?

Narrator: Just fine, pigeon. How're things with you?

Daughter #2: Not so good. Andy and I had a big fight last night. This one might be too big to fix.

Narrator: Have you talked to your mother about it?

Daughter #2: Not yet. You know how she gets all "I told you so" with me.

Narrator: Not really sure she does that, pigeon. I do know that you're hypersensitive to criticism from her, though. Figured that out on your twelfth birthday when you threw your cake at her.

Daughter #2 laughed. Her laugh was a nice thing to hear. These are the moments that father's cherish more than most. I reached into my back pocket and flipped the switch of my vaporizer to OFF. Stoner dad isn't always best dad.

Daughter #2: I remember that. Mom grounded me for a whole damned month, evil bitch. If you hadn't acted as lawyer, it would've been a year. Remember your "Rebellion is Beautiful" speech? I still do, especially when I feel the need to push back.

Narrator: It was nothing. Eloquence is easy when the stakes are high. So what's the problem with Andy?

Daughter #2: Well, you know how he's been wanting to talk to you?

Narrator: Yes, your mother mentioned something along those lines. You know what'll happen if he asks my permission for marriage.

Daughter #2: I know you won't give it. And secretly, I'm counting on you, Pop. I don't want to break his heart by saying "No."

I started laughing. It was the laugh of a parent that feels a huge surge of relief.

Narrator: So why would you tell him "No"? Thought he was "The One."

There was a little hesitation in her voice before she answered.

Daughter #2: I want to know that I can stand up on my own before I make a lifetime commitment.

"That's my girl," rang in my head. Daddy's girl, definitely. An independent streak a mile wide and deep. I was smiling as I laid down the steam cleaner hose and attachment and walked over and sat down on the hardwood stairs.

Narrator: Sounds reasonable, pigeon. So why the fight?

Daughter #2: He refused to tell me what he wants to talk to you about.

Narrator: So what?

Daughter #2: Daddy, if it's a partnership, then it's a partnership. If it's a dictatorship, he needs to tell me and I'll head on down the road. Partners don't keep secrets from each other.

Narrator: Understand. Couples shouldn't keep secrets from each other.

Yeah, I know. Hypocrite of the Year in a unanimous decision.

Daughter #2: I told him this morning that he has until midnight to tell me what it's about or it's over between the two of us.

Narrator: Damn, pigeon, that's a bit extreme, don't you think?

It was taking everything for me to keep from laughing. Number two would sometimes do a thermonuclear escalation on things that didn't seem to merit it. But she's my daughter, and our opinions differ on this. Regardless, I am always on her side, right or wrong. That's my job; I'm Dad.

Daughter #2: Well, we'll see if he's a coward or a fool.

I adjusted the earpiece.

Narrator: What? That doesn't seem to be much of a choice. How does that work?

Daughter #2: Well, if he caves in and tells me, then he's a coward, easily intimidated, and I lose respect for him.

Narrator: Damn, that's cold.

Daughter #2: No, it's not, Daddy. It only means that I need to be the strong one in the relationship until he matures. Not a problem for me. Not a problem, not one damned bit.

Narrator: Word. And if he's a fool?

Daughter #2: If he's a fool, he stands on his silence and it costs him the relationship and the wildest woman he'll ever get his hands on.

Narrator: OK, I'm starting to blush.

Daughter #2: Don't blush, Dad. You're the reason I'm like this. Inherited the libido from hell from you, Pops.

Narrator: Not a good place for him to be in, either way.

Daughter #2: No, but you always told me, know who's on your side and know how far they can be counted on and know when they'll cut and run. That was you, wasn't it? Or did I dream it?

Narrator: Guilty as charged. Perhaps you could be a little subtler about it in the future.

Daughter #2: I'll try, but don't count on it.

I wouldn't. I looked out across the carpeted dining room and saw nothing but a showroom level of clean. I needed this in the entire house. A soft, slight lemon scent came from the carpet. I hung the curtains back up as number two told me more mundane aspects of her daily life. Sleeping well, check. Eating decent meals, check. Automobile in safe order, check. Mom paid all the bills, check. Got money in the bank and cash in the purse, check. It was the same checklist every telephone call. Daddy's Ten Point Maintenance Inspection is what Number two called it. She didn't like it much at first, not until the first time her car broke down and left her stranded. Then Dad's \$100 hidden in the purse and never spent, except in emergencies, came in handy. Eventually we said our "I love yous" and returned to our work and studies.

The living room carpet was easiest to clean; there had been no plants in that room. I kept the working bottles of nutrients on an extra large and thick bath towel. It would be buried in the back yard along with the fluid from the steam cleaner. I picked up the towel and headed to the garage to get the shovel. As I passed the living room window, I looked out. Past the trees at the edge of the road, I could see my neighbor walking toward her mailbox out by the street. Her hair was pulled up into a bun on top of her head. She wore a neck brace. This time there was no attempt made to cover the work of Charlie's anger. Her eye was still puffy and purple from the beating. Three days was not a long time to heal. The laceration on her forehead had opaque tape over the sutures. She took the mail from the box and looked at it. She spoke aloud in response to one of the envelopes. It wasn't possible for me to hear what she said, but I did notice the three teeth missing from her mouth, the two on top and directly in the front and one at the bottom, directly below the upper gap. She wasn't wearing her usual upmarket couture. Now it was a big fluffy robe and slippers. The only good thing about her appearance was the paint on her fingers. She was obviously capable of painting. I hoped that it would help her heal from the horrors of domestic violence. She shuffled back into the house with a slow determined step that indicated further pain beyond the observable.

Fuck! It hurt to see something I could have prevented. There was no excuse for me; I could have done something, gotten her a hotel room, taken her to a women's shelter, something, anything. Instead I stayed on the other side of the door, the other side of making a difference in this world, more interested in making a difference for myself. My failures were starting to pile up, and I needed to do something to swing the pendulum back. For them and for me.

I moved the steam cleaner upstairs and started on the bedrooms. My iPad was tuned to the web cameras out front. It was about ten minutes before lunch when the florist truck pulled into Jenny's driveway. The driver pulled his hand truck to the back door. I counted as he loaded twelve boxes, each containing a dozen long-stem roses onto the hand truck, and then roll it up to the front door. He rang the doorbell. Humans are not creatures that handle shock well. The delivery driver stepped back slightly when he saw Jenny's battered face. She pointed just inside of the door, and the man moved

them inside. Her fingers no longer had paint on them. She signed his clipboard; he smiled and left. She stood at the door watching him leave, like someone who wished she could leave with him. When he had vanished from sight, she stood there for almost a minute, looking off down the street, far away in her thoughts.

The Sun Herald is the local newspaper and posted the crime reports on its website. The report simply said Charlie was arrested for "disturbing the peace" and under investigation for "possible domestic violence." The judge, the Right (Dis)honorable (Scum-sucking Rat-fucker) Mark Calhoun, set bail at \$500. He also fined the arresting officer two hundred dollars for Contempt of Court because of her outburst in the court when the bail amount was announced. Reading it made me feel sick. I went back to the steam cleaner, feeling worse than before. I needed to find something to change my trajectory.

The paper coveralls made their exit, and I worked in my boxers, t-shirt, and cross trainers. The steam cleaner would raise the temperature in the room by a few degrees and spike the humidity, making it a sweaty work environment. Growing cannabis is often consumed with some of the most mundane work imaginable, and this was one more shining example. I comforted myself in the knowledge that my own choices had lead me to this point in time, no one else's, just my own.

I smoked a little more Satori and thought about what I could do to change things. Maybe it wasn't a big change that was needed; maybe just a small one would deflect me from the downward spiral I had created. The lemon scent was getting stronger, reminding me to fill the reservoir of the steam cleaner again. The rest of the day was consumed by the steam cleaner and later by the burial of a few forgotten pieces of grow equipment, in a hole, in the back yard, after dark. I emptied the final fluids from the steam cleaner into the hole then covered it all up. Back inside, I cleaned the machine thoroughly with alcohol and bleach before drying it and putting it in the trunk of the BMW. It was the last night in the house and it would suck. No bed, no futon, just a sleeping bag and a pillow on the floor.

The next day was departure day. But before I could go, I had to spend hours going over the entire house. I was dressed in paper coveralls, hospital footies over my shoes, a double set of vinyl gloves on my hands, safety glasses and a hospital surgical

mask on my face. Today was the bleach exorcism. It took me hours to go over every single spot in the house that I might have ever touched with a large sponge soaked in bleach. Bathroom sink faucets, toilet handles and tank lids. Every single door handle both inside and outside of the house. If I couldn't remember, I assumed that it contained my fingerprints and cleaned it. I even pulled the vinyl paper from the kitchen cabinets and buried it outside, just in case I had touched it. For hours the house was inspected and cleaned, re-inspected and cleaned again. The mailbox, the local newspaper tube, the wheeled garbage cans, everything you could imagine. Every window had the tinting removed and then cleaned with alcohol. As I got near the end, I finished the lolite full of Satori. I took the remaining quarter of an ounce along with the lolite herb chamber and buried them in the back yard. lolite herb chambers are cheap enough that I didn't need the risk of traveling with a dirty one.

Everything was moving along nicely, and I would finish in the early afternoon. Charlie usually came home around six thirty in the evening, most evenings. Would be good to be gone before that asshole got home. Some sumbitches deserve bad things to happen to them. He's one of them.

That's the problem I've always had with people who talk about karma. It's like they think it's the law of the fucking universe that could be relied upon. It's not. If it were, then Hitler would've died after the first Jewish life was snuffed out, Stalin after the first death in his purges, and Bush after the first innocent Iraqi family reached "collateral damage" status. But karma isn't dependable. It's just an excuse for lazy fuckers to remain inactive and feel good about themselves. "Don't worry, karma will catch up with them. What goes around, comes around." BULLSHIT!

There would be only one risky item on the travel agenda. I still had one of the Berettas with me. The other had already been moved successfully to the Georgia farmhouse and buried in a tub of granular nutrients. It would be a "noia" drive because of the gun, but not as bad as having cannabis in the car. If I got caught, the untraceable gun would cause me grief, but not jail time.

My phone rang. It was the wife this time. The thought of me chasing her around the house, both of us naked, flashed in my mind, and I smiled as I answered the phone.

Narrator: Incredible Chicago Pizza, home of the Tuesday Two-fer. Will this be dine-in, carry-out, or delivery.

Wife: Delivery please. I would like to order one medium husband to go. And can I have that on thin crust please?

Narrator: Lady, you can have it on double thin crust if you want.

Wife: Glad you're doing better. You've had me worried the last few days.

Narrator: Me too, but I'm almost done here. Once I'm away, I'm sure the "noia" will subside.

Wife: Good. Have you seen your neighbor? Do you know if she's alright?

Narrator: Yeah, she looks like hell, but on her feet. And Brass Knuckles sent her twelve dozen red roses. Can you believe it?

Wife: That's so typical. Forgive me, honey. What that jerk needs is a 9mm blow job.

Her words surprised me. It wasn't her normal attitude. She never condoned violence, but she had volunteered at a women's center for a few years while I was roaming the globe with projects. Guess she saw it all and heard it all. Still, as hard as I tried, understanding the batterer was beyond me. I just couldn't get it. There was no set of circumstances that I could construct that would result in that outcome. It was illogical, immoral, and an injustice.

Narrator: Yeah, that would be nice.

I walked over to the kitchen counter and hopped up onto it. The house was now completely empty; I had nowhere to sit except the floor, the stairs, the toilet, or the counters.

Wife: What time do you think you'll be home tomorrow?

Narrator: Should be home in time for dinner.

Wife: Perfect. I'll make stuffed peppers and leek and potato soup. What do you think?

Narrator: Sounds wonderful to me.

Wife: Good. Number two and Andy will arrive early in the afternoon. Did they have a spat or something?

Narrator: Why do you think that?

Wife: I don't know. She had the smug tone of voice she gets when she wins. That's why I won't play Monopoly with her anymore. Anyway, I know that tone, and I know she hasn't had an argument with me recently... and she never has any with you. You two are as thick as thieves. That only leaves Andy.

Narrator: I'll tell you about it when I get home. But you MUST PROMISE that you won't talk to her about it. It's her life to screw up. Let her make her own decisions.

Wife: OK. I'll try, but I'm not making any promises.

Narrator: Then I guess I won't tell you what's been going on with our youngest.

Wife: OK, I promise.

Narrator: Listen, I'm about an hour from finishing up here. How about I call you once I'm on the road to Georgia? OK?

Wife: OK. Talk to you then. I love you.

Narrator: I love you.

I was working on the handrail for the stairs, wiping it down to make sure no fingerprints were available. I came to the bottom of the stairs. From this point on it would be a "noia" driven cleaning. Did I remember to clean this? Not sure, so I'll run and clean it (usually again). Did I remember the shelves in the middle upstairs bedroom? Not sure, clean them again. I was in the bedroom when I looked out the window. Through the trees I could see my neighbor, Jenny, still in her robe and neck brace. She was pulling the wheeled garbage can down to the road. It was a couple of days before they came and this intrigued me. As she cleared the trees, I could make out what was in the large plastic vessel. Sticking out of the top were the boxes of roses. She rolled them only as far as the end of the driveway and left it in the middle, blocking the path. First decent act of courage I had seen from her. As horrible as this sounds, while I definitely couldn't understand the mind of a man who beats his wife, I equally couldn't understand the mind of the woman who was beaten. Motherfucker beats me and he'll find his life expectancy drops to zero really fucking fast. But then I'm a thick-headed man, who just

doesn't get some things and this is one of them. I decided that it wasn't my place to pass judgment on her; she probably gets enough of that from Charlie. It just seemed so fucked that I couldn't help her out.

Good ideas sometimes come in a flash. Some of mine come like that, if I have the right ingredients in the environment bubbling. This one was one of them. I walked into the dining room where the few items remaining were waiting to be carried out to the car. I reached down and picked up the Berretta and the box of fifty cartridges. I took it back into the kitchen. I took the sponge with alcohol on it and wiped the holster carefully. I did the exterior first, then removed the pistol and wiped inside of it, scrubbing the hard leather until the gun oil showed on the sponge. One of my vinyl gloves snagged and tore on the trigger so I tripled up the gloves on that hand. It took me almost fifteen minutes to clean the weapon to my "noia" standards. After I was satisfied with my job, I started on the box of ammunition. Every cartridge and ever part of the box was cleaned, interior and exterior. The entire process took me almost half an hour. When done my eyes looked down on the holster, the gun and the box of ammunition. I put on one final pair of gloves and put on my shoes and shorts. I wrapped all of it in a new white towel that had never been used, and set off toward the house across the street.

I rang the doorbell. It took her almost a minute to come to the door. I heard her yell, "I'm coming," after the first ring of the doorbell to ensure there wouldn't be any need for a second.

When she opened the door, I almost had the same reaction as the driver of the florist van. Her face was in really bad shape. Not only did her eye look like ground meat, but also her left cheek looked as if the bone had been broken, her face sunken by the effect of it. I was shocked.

Narrator: Oh, my god, I'm so very sorry.

Jenny: I know you are.

Her words were spoken very carefully, as if not to make her mouth or face move in a certain way. When her lips parted, I could see the gaps from her missing teeth.

Narrator: Please forgive me. I should've answered the door when you came over.

Jenny: It's not your fault. You didn't do this. You probably couldn't have even stopped it. He was all upset that I went to your house for help when he started with his verbal abuse. That always comes first, then the beating. Nothing or nobody could've stopped him.

Narrator: Actually, that's why I'm here. Do you mind if I come inside?

Despite her injuries, her broken face, the slight limp in her step, she remembered her southern gentility and motioned for me to come inside. We went into the formal living room and sat on French provincial furniture, an ugly gold and blue sofa.

Jenny: Can I get you something to drink?

She paused for a moment before continuing,

Jenny: I know I am supposed to smile right after I ask someone if they want something to drink. It's to put them at ease about saying "yes." But smiling hurts too much right now, please forgive me.

Narrator: I'm fine. Think nothing of it. I know your heart is there. That's good enough.

Jenny: Thank you very kindly.

Narrator: Jenny, I'd like to give you something.

Jenny tried to smile, but stopped at a slur, the kind of mouth slur of someone full of novocaine from the dentist.

Jenny: I like presents. Charlie gives me lots of them, but usually because he's gotten out of hand with me. He's upset with me right now and taken them all back. But he doesn't know the half of it. I'm very angry with him too.

Narrator: My present isn't that kind of gift.

I handed her the towel. She unwrapped it. Just for a moment, I could tell she didn't understand why I had given her a gun. Then in a fraction of a second the light came on.

Jenny: Oh, my. Not sure I can accept this sort of present.

Narrator: I think you need it, more than anyone I know.

Jenny: Where did it come from?

Narrator: Don't worry about that. It's unregistered and untraceable.

Jenny: And what do you expect me to do with it?

I was stunned. She had dropped into southern iced tea wife so perfectly.

Narrator: Come with me.

I took her gently by the arm and walked her to the large full-length mirror near the front door. She seemed too ashamed to look at herself in the mirror.

Narrator: Jenny, look at what he's done to you. It's not the first time, and it won't be the last. I'm giving you this to protect yourself. Do you know how to use a gun?

Jenny: Very well. Daddy used to take me to the dump all the time for target practice. Called me Annie Oakley I was so good. But I'm not going to kill my husband. It would be wrong.

Narrator: I'm not saying you need to kill him. Fire a warning shot or something. And I'm not saying you should, but if, just for a moment, IF he were threatening your life, you could shoot to kill and there isn't a damned jury in the country that would convict you. The man is a monster.

Jenny: He's not that bad. Most of the time he's a caring, loving husband.

I didn't get it. She was defending him. I responded with an angry tone of voice.

Narrator: Look in the fucking mirror, Jenny. This is not a caring, loving husband. This is someone with deep fucking problems.

Jenny: I appreciate your concern for me, but Charlie has agreed to attend counseling with me. I'm sure it'll work out.

Narrator: Please, just keep the gun... and don't let Charlie know you have it.

Jenny: I'm sure it won't be necessary, but if it'll make you feel better, OK.

Narrator: Thank you.

Our conversation replayed in my head as I drove back to the farmhouse. The synapses in my brain weren't firing right. My inability to understand was now worse than ever. At least I left her with a means to defend herself. She could stop him from killing her if she needed to. That much caused a good feeling. Maybe, just maybe, my action had saved her life. I reckoned I would never know how it turned out. Fine with me, I concluded, as I passed through Zebulon, Georgia on the final few miles of paved road.

In the end, Andy didn't ask to marry Number two. He wanted to talk to me about an idea for a new service. Number two hugged me when I got home.

Daughter #2: Stand down, soldier.

I heard her whisper the words in my ear as she smiled and kissed my cheek. Andy looked very nervous as we went off to my study to have a chat. He had been working on an idea for custom advertising to be played on the lenses of the next generation of eyeglasses. Straight from your Google search history to your lenses.

I was relieved at his request, but far from considering funding. Cheeky little fucker asked us for \$100,000. When I inquired about his other sources of funding, he only could gather an additional \$25,000 from family and friends. He came from a modest family, a mixture of means. Those with the funds weren't interested. Those without the funds were all enthusiastic. Categorize me as neither. We spent most of the time talking about the requirements and format of a good business plan and the financial projections required to get a second or third level of venture capital. It was like going through parts of my MBA again.

Bottom line: I didn't say NO. I didn't say YES. And for Andy, that was a win. He had come prepared for immediate dismissal and left with a stalemate. More importantly, he now knew what it would take to convince me or others that his idea was worth the investment.

At dinner there was one new observable feature. Number two now looked at Andy with a look of melancholy. It was as if she was saddened by his choice of cowardice over foolishness. It was that introspective look indicating that she knew her shoulders would have to be the broad ones. She caught me noticing. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

Daughter #2: Whatchya gonna dew? (She added in a fake mobster accent.)

I understood her. It was a sadness she would learn to endure. After a moment of reflection on the learning she was experiencing, my thoughts turned back to my own work.

There was still a grow house near Savannah and the farmhouse south of Atlanta in operation. It wasn't what I had expected, but it would be good enough for now. I had stopped in at Pennington Antiquities in Mobile and had a talk with David. He seemed glad I was downsizing my operation. He also suggested that I consider shutting down the other house and just keeping the farmhouse in production. He would buy everything I produced for as long as we were in the business.

My wife agreed that it sounded like a sensible idea.

Wife: Finish the run in Savannah then shut it down. Make one or two more runs at the farmhouse, and then shut that down too. Declare victory and ride into the sunset.

Seemed like a good plan to me.

SEVEN WEEKS LATER

The house in Savannah was getting ready for final harvest before shutting down. I had two more days to flush before the harvest. Life had transitioned from a frenzied

guitar solo to a more down tempo pace. I had been able to spend more time at home. And when I was in the grow houses, my attention to detail was returning. Within another two weeks it would be an even more settled routine. But there were still risks, even with just the farmhouse in operation.

Oren had stopped by for a chat and a snoop. Good thing that I knew he was coming. Sooner or later he had to. He had set off the motion detectors on the cameras two nights already. He didn't get very far. The perimeter of the house was now surrounded with solar powered spotlights with motion detectors. Both times he came calling, he set them off. But that's Oren for you, and he's smart enough to know that if there ain't no one around, you ain't being seen. But both times I was watching on my phone.

I put two signs from a well-known security monitoring service on the lawn as well as their adhesive stickers on all the windows. He moved around to the back door. The screen porch door stopped him for all of a second. I waited until he was on the back porch and heading to the kitchen door. Then I turned on the house alarm and siren. He was startled and lost his footing on the painted floorboards of the porch. Then I switched on the dog barking, the deep baritones of hungry guards. His retreat was swift and complete.

The second time he came round, as an added benefit he heard a recording of a pistol being fired followed by the sound of breaking glass. Again, a swift retreat.

He's going to have to be dealt with before he fucks up and gets shot in the middle of the night. I've been spending more nights at the farmhouse, looking to intercept him on his third nightly visit. I wanna catch Oren dead to rights and put a bullet about a foot or two over his head. He needs to bring his game up to a whole new level or get off the fucking court.

I had been back in the farmhouse less than an hour when my wife sent me a text.

Wife: Log On ASAP. I just sent you a link.

I pulled up my laptop and logged on. My Gmail account had a message from her: 'I sent it to you at the other place.'

The other place is a safe-mail account. I logged in and found a link and clicked it. My screen went to YouTube.

It was a local television news report from the Mississippi Gulf Coast. There was a crisp white woman in her forties, blond hair and blue eyes and a handsome black man in his fifties, the first flecks of white starting at his temples, giving his appearance a further air of credibility. They sat behind a screen containing the word MURDER in red with what looked like blood dripping down from the bottom of the letters. The credible man looked into the camera and spoke.

News Anchor: Good evening, this is Bob Jones. Our top news tonight regards a story we brought you a couple of nights ago about a murder in the Back Bay area. A witness to the event managed to record it on his phone and has posted it on YouTube. What you are about to hear is the voice of seventeen-year-old Conrad Essington, as he filmed the shooting and subsequent police response. He is parked in a car in his driveway across the street from the victim's house, filming it. Parents are advised that this footage contains graphic violence and is not suitable for children.

The screen flipped to the herky jerky of a handheld recording device. Conrad's voice came in very excited.

Conrad: Yeah, let's see, it's 9:38PM, and she's already shot him at least seven times before I remembered my phone. Fuck, there went another one. Did you see it?

The view he was holding was of one of the upper front windows of Jenny and Charlie's house. Another flash happened followed by a large bang, not unlike fireworks.

Conrad: There she goes again. You go, girl. That asshole deserves every one you give him.

Conrad turned the phone back onto his face and speaks directly to the camera.

Conrad: I know she's shooting him because after the first shot, I heard a man's voice screaming "No." He ain't said anything else since the second shot.

He turned the phone back onto the window and zoomed in again. More flashes were followed by more bangs. Conrad counted them.

Conrad: Nine, ten, eleven..... twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen.

With each number, there was a flash followed by a bang. Conrad quickly turned the phone back on himself.

Conrad: You gotta believe me, folks. This prick had it coming. He beat the **** out of her time and again. Just a few weeks ago, he put her in the ****ing hospital. Broke her ***** cheek bone, knocked out her teeth. She had to have surgery and all that kind of ****. ****ed her up big time... and it wasn't the first time. Cops got records of all the calls they've come out here for. I hope he's already dead and in Hell. Mother ***** deserved it. I know the cops are coming, and I can't wait. I'll tell them how he treated her. Woman was too smart to be married to a man like that. She could do differential equations in her head, in her ***** head. I **** you not, in her mother-***** head.

There was another loud bang. Conrad looked startled at first.

Conrad: What the ****? Oh, my god, the **** has reloaded on him. She ***** reloaded on him. He was smiling from ear to ear.

He swung the camera around and zoomed in again. Again, there was a flash followed by a bang.

Conrad: You go, girl. Work that shit out on that dead ***** piece of meat. He ain't ever gonna smack you around again, is he? No, baby, you put a stopped to that **** once and for all. You talking for all your sisters right now, baby. Talk loud, girlfriend.

The first police car arrived after she had emptied the second clip. The officer pulled into the driveway and moved cautiously toward the door. When Jenny started with the third clip, he ran back and hid behind his cruiser with his gun aimed toward the window where the gun flashes could be seen. The cop didn't shoot back. He just stayed behind his car and watched as another fourteen rounds were shot in the large room upstairs. At the end of the third clip, he didn't make a move toward the house. The second and third police cars arrived after the third clip.

Conrad swung the camera back to his face.

Conrad: OK, there're five cops here now. They're staying put. Wait, here come two more cars. Wrong, make that three more cars. And I can see three more turning on the corner down there.

Conrad counted out the final shots.

Conrad: Forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine, FIFTY.

He waited and waited. The cops waited and waited.

Conrad: Maybe her gun has jammed... or maybe she's out of bullets. I don't know, but there're almost thirty cops here now. There's an older guy who looks to be in charge.

Conrad swung his camera around and zoomed in again. There was a very tall, skinny old man with a megaphone in his hand. He was engaged in a very heated debate with a black woman police officer. I recognized her instantly. The old man yelled at the woman and pointed for her to get back behind her vehicle. She refused and stood her ground beside him. He yelled at her some more; she crossed her arms. He raised the megaphone.

Cop-in-charge: Jennifer Turner, come out of the house now. We won't harm you. Just come out of the house now. It's all over.

There was no response. The policewoman spoke to the old man again.

Cop-in-charge: Mrs. Turner, It's time to come outside. You'll be safe with us. He won't be able to hurt you anymore.

The front door opened. Jenny came out in a long white cotton nightgown and bare feet. As soon as she appeared, spotlights from the police cars blinded her. She shielded her eyes with her free hand.

Cop-in-charge: Put the gun down, Jenny.

Jenny walked forward a few steps.

Jenny: It hurts so much. I think I need a doctor. Can you please call a doctor?

Cop-in-charge: Put the gun down, right now, Jenny, for your own safety.

Jenny turned around and looked up at the window. When she did, the back of her nightgown was visible. It was crimson red with blood, enough to make the female cop gasp and put her hand up to her mouth. From her waist down to her ankles, the back of her gown was solid red. The nightgown stuck to the bloody cheeks of her ass. She turned back around.

Jenny: I don't think he will be any bother at all anymore. But it hurts so much, I really need to see a doctor.

A newly arriving police car turned its spot light on Jenny. This time she raised the hand with the gun to shield her eyes from the blinding glare of the light.

Contagious shooting is a common phenomenon observed among police where one officer starts to fire and the rest join in without knowing why they're shooting. A voice began to narrate the action on the film.

Voice over: Officially, eighty-one shots were fired. The suspect was hit eighteen times.

The film showed Jenny's petite body being jerked from side to side by the bullets, She was spun around like a ballerina until one round hit her in the head, which exploded out the other side like a watermelon and her remaining parts fell over backward. The shooting continued until the black officer hit the old man hard on his arm and he yelled, "CEASE FIRE" into the megaphone.

Conrad: I can't ***** believe it. They just shot her down. They just *****shot her down. Why did they do that? She was a nice woman. She could do differential equations in her head.

The film ended and the image of the man and woman in the television studio returned. The woman newscaster had her back to the camera.

Bob Jones: Ladies and gentlemen, I apologize for the graphic nature of this footage. I had not seen the footage prior to sharing it with you. If I had, I assure you, I would not have let you see those disturbing images. Please accept my sincerest apologies.

The woman newscaster turned back around to the camera. She spoke in a trembling voice.

Female Newscaster: We have contacted the Biloxi police department. They have confirmed that every officer at the incident discharged their weapon with the exception of police chief Mumphrey and Officer Angela Carter, who was seen arguing with Chief Mumphrey in the footage.

She wanted to continue reading, but couldn't. She stopped and swallowed. Bob jumped in.

Bob Jones: In action related to the incident, sources inside the police department have indicated that Officer Carter has been placed on paid administrative leave, effective immediately.

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And when the last moments of my life come and my mind begins the necessary deceptions for the smooth transition from life to death without fear; mine will be neither smooth nor fearless, as my vision will be filled with the horrific images of Jenny Turner in her final moments. My sin has purchased this rough passage.

FIN

This writing gig depends on reviews. So please, like it or not, leave a review.

SHAMELESS SELF-PROMOTION

See Below for the opening chapter of MILF MONEY

Yeah, I've written more stuff:



MILF MONEY



The Mississippi Sativa Cooperative



* * * *ing Everything....so far

The very short opening chapter of MILF MONEY

CHAPTER ONE

Anna stood in the middle of the living room, a gun in each hand. She looked out the large front window. Nothing yet. The right lens of her glasses was broken, and a piece of it was missing. Blood was coming from a cut on her scalp and the eyebrow above the broken lens. Her clothes were stretched and out of place on her body. She was breathing hard. She had blood on her pretty, tanned legs, but it wasn't hers. In the den at the back of the house, the curtains were on fire on the floor. One end of the blue sofa was covered in small orange flickers as the heavy fabric began to ignite. The room also contained four bodies.

Job done.

And every now and then, when fate offered bonus points? Take 'em.

Two of the bodies were cops.

She moved back into the den. As she entered, she stepped over the body of the late Jase Winter. Minutes before, big fat Jase, six feet tall and over 300 pounds, had served as a human shield. He had provided protection from bullets, pieces of glass from the sliding door, and metal shards from the BBQ grill and two exploding propane tanks. There was a large piece of metal embedded deep into Jase's chest. She looked down at him, and realized that if it weren't for Jase, that large piece of stainless steel would be sticking out of her face. But then, if it weren't for Jase, she wouldn't be there at all.

She hadn't cared whether she survived today. Secretly, way down deep, past the platitudes and the mask shown to the external world...she'd hoped she wouldn't. She had accepted that her chances of survival were slim. Dying had seemed guaranteed. Four against one. This was about payback; nothing else. Revenge is a special affliction. It grabs a hold of the soul, deeply and doesn't release until it's satisfied or the host dies. And there are instances in each human history when everyone losing is considered a win. It doesn't happen often, but it happens.

No, Anna had not cared one damned bit about herself, not until right before the shit went down. That's when fate, the universe, and everything in it stepped in to fuck with her head. A couple of minutes before the start of her war, she was given strong reminders of why she should live. From that point forward, she reacted with instinct and intellect toward one single objective: survival.

She moved further into the room. She stepped over the body of Allie Devereaux. Allie was the queen and Jase was her king. Together, they ran a small and bloody little crime wave specializing in armed robbery ugliness. Her short, platinum blond hair was stained with her red blood in a pretty white-red contrast. Well, pretty for a dead person. Blood covered her face as she lay on her side on the floor. She had a large hole in her chest, and her t-shirt was almost completely soaked with her blood. Jase and Allie had recently become engaged. There was a two-carat diamond ring on the third finger of her left hand. The dead woman was nine weeks pregnant.

Slumped over in the corner of the room, sitting upright and missing a substantial piece of his forehead, was Paul Sae va. Paul was known as "Pablo" to his friends, and a

mad psycho to anyone else who had the misfortune to cross his path. He was the triggerman on the jobs. Now, he didn't look as cute as he had minutes earlier. No more dimples. Pablo had gone to Iraq a decent young man. He'd believed in the flag, and had loved his country and Jesus. What came home was not human. If humans can go feral, like cats, then Pablo had reverted back to his baser nature. He'd walked across human histories like Asaka across Nanking in '37.

Finally, there was Frenchy. Nobody knew his last name. He was from Paris and didn't talk much. He lay face down on the floor. His back resembled a pincushion and was covered with shards of glass and metal. He had been directly in front of the glass doors when the tanks exploded.

Anna caught movement out of the corner of her eye. She moved back to the door of the living room, and looked across the room and out the front window. She could see the cops approaching the house with guns drawn and taking those nervous, tippy-toed, ballerina steps, as if they might shit their pants at the first loud sound. The cop in charge motioned for two others to go around the sides of the house. Her opportunity for escape was closing fast. She looked in the mirror hung over the piano. Pete stood behind her. "Time to go, baby. It's bout to get crowded."

komrade komura was born against medical advice in Mississippi. Life removed him from there as a child, before he became infected. He's been running ever since. The great adventure has taken him to almost every continent. He has kissed another komrade at the Eiffel Tower at 10PM when the blinking lights come on. He stood at the Great Pyramids of Egypt. He listened to Marilyn Manson while visiting the Vatican because he didn't have enough gasoline to burn the fucking place to the ground.

Fuck this 3rd person shit.

I was extruded from the universities of the evil empire with a master's degree, yet remained a slave. Paid attention in economics, math and literature classes, but was disruptive in history class and sucked in biology. If you have read any of my writing you know one thing about me already. I don't like authority or rules.

People like me aren't bad. Nor are we the evil ones that others claim us to be because we question their power. We are just humans in our natural state of freedom. Beat us, cage us or kill us is all they can do to us because our compliance is never going to happen.

- London 2014 (former evil empire)