

"NEVER TRUST YOUR EYES"



HUNTED
BY
HOLLYWOOD

BLAKE STEIDLER

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INTRODUCTION

91% of Americans today own a Cell Phone. More than half of them own a Smart Phone which is essentially more of a wireless computer than anything else. By the year 2020 experts agree that at least 80% of Americans will own their own Smart Phone. Can we trust the information we receive on it? Are video texts safe and authentic? Are we really talking to the people we think we are talking to?

Qwerty AKA “CopperMan” is described by society as just another reclusive weirdo often ignored by the public . A homeless German man that devotes his life embarking on his own personal studies teaching himself self taught tricks of **CGI or (Computer Generated Imagery)**. He eventually develops his own CGI program which digitally clone people. Thanks to his invention **ZIOD MPXL (Zeroing In On Digital Megapixels)** he now has a digital power like you wouldn't believe. ZIOD MPXL can give Qwerty the power to have anyone say things they never said or have them do things they never did.

There's a catch. The entire ZIOD MPXL program is heavily encrypted and can't be duplicated. All of Qwerty's work is stored in a Flash Drive the size of a thumb. ZIOD MPXL also gives you the power to make high resolution Hollywood movies all with a few key strokes on a computer. ZIOD MPXL can be used for both good and evil but Hollywood celebrities feel threatened by ZIOD MPXL's ability to create Oscar Winning movies for \$0.00 because of its enhanced CGI.

Nikki Cha and Jeremy Ballins are both just two innocent teenagers from the same neighborhood that just might one day fall in love. Ironically they accidentally intercept the Flash Drive not knowing what it is or what it can do. Nikki experiments using it and is shocked by its pristine capabilities.

Will Nikki and Jeremy give back Qwerty's work? Will Nikki and Jeremy fall in love? Who is the mysterious **Lollipop Killer**? Who is **CopperMan**? And most importantly.....who believes they are being hunted by Hollywood?

Dedications

I would like to dedicate this story to my deceased Grandmother “MomMom” who passed away December 14th 2013. The very next day I raced in the 2013 Jingle Bell 5k run in freezing rain and set my best record ever of 23:08 which is pretty fast for the age of 32. (I'm now 34 and a big fat BillyBigRigger LOL) MomMom knew how to cook the best Turkey Burger in the world and always taught me that to be successful in life I just needed to take my time. Since then I have been given the gift of being able to write.

“Quick to bed and quick to rise makes a young man healthy and wise” -Ruth J. Steidler

**QWERTY PUTS
POP POP IN
VEGAS** (see next page)



Was he ever really there?



CHAPTER 1

The black Lincoln Town Car crept slowly down Peril Boulevard as if it were looking for trouble. The rims weren't decked out all goofy like so chances were it didn't belong to a "brotha" man. There wasn't so much as a scratch on the Lincoln and it's dark tinted windows really made you wonder who was inside. The engine was so quiet the vehicle could scare the living daylights out of just about any wondering hooker. It really had the ability to creep up on people with its quiet but powerful engine. It was supposed to be a quiet Sunday but something juicy was about to happen in Jeremy's town Marxton. Marxton Virginia is just 30 miles away from Alexandria VA. Home of the CIA training headquarters.....aka, "The Farm". And why they called it that? Only the CIA was supposed to know.

The black Lincoln eased down the street like a twisted predator stalking a child. 18yr old Jeremy Ballins was smart enough to realize the fancy ride more than likely didn't belong to a predator. Those sickos could only afford run down vans with busted up floor boards. Jeremy had a hunch that whoever was in the Town Car was probably someone of importance. *Celebrity maybe?* Nah. If that were the case he'd be staring at a Rolls Royce.

Jeremy wasn't like the other teenagers his age and it was hard for him to make friends with his classmates sometimes. It mostly was because they picked on him for liking Justin Beiber a bit too much. Jeremy wasn't even remotely gay. In fact the women loved him. His obsession over the Beib started after the big Pop star went overboard with the partying and demonstrated his insubordinate attitude towards law enforcement. For some reason Jeremy found The Pop star's resisting arrest charge pretty downright cool. *Why should a millionaire adhere to the instruction of somebody that fell short of making it to the NFL and now had to dress it*

up with some funky pins, shields, and stripes just to get a little respect from people? Jeremy loved following up with the Beib and sang along with most of his songs.

The black Lincoln Town Car turned around and continued to ease back down Peril Boulevard so slowly you'd think the driver was looking for some lost eye contacts that had fallen out. Jeremy got curious and placed the big pile of mail back in the mailbox so he could jog up the street to get a better look at this strange acting vehicle. *Were they perhaps only lost?*

Just as he sprinted down to the intersection he was startled by a loud gun shot. It scared him at first thinking the shot was meant for him. He began to figure things out when more shots rang out and the tires squealed loudly burning rubber. Glass shattered everywhere as the car sped down the street weaving in all directions making its way into a dark alley. Jeremy was quick to figure things out. Somebody had shot the driver!

One would think that at only the age of 18 gun shots would cause trepidation and panic but that was hardly the case for Jeremy. Sure his heart beat a little faster but even the car wreck following the gun shots would not stop him from running down the dark alley to see what was going on. He would have a story for that Chinese girl he liked in school come Monday morning for sure!

When he got to the alley he hid behind a green dumpster that smelled like burnt pizza. The Lincoln had hit a brick wall and was totaled. Smoke dispersing in every direction followed by a bunch of yelling in some other language. *Chinese?*

Bang! Bang! Bang!

This time the gun shots frightened him because they were so close. There was no more shouting following the gun shots. *Was everybody dead? Were they Chinese? A gang maybe?*

Jeremy stayed hidden behind the dumpster for a good five minutes before he would even budge. He never in a million years thought he would be at a crime scene long before the cops. The front end of the Town Car was smashed up looking almost like a scrunched up nose on a pit bull. His heart skipped a few beats when he saw the bodies lying on the ground. Chinese men in suits. All of them dead. This was weird. *What was the discrepancy over?*

His German genetics took over and he was able to steel himself to get closer and get a better look at the bodies. He nearly tripped his own self to the ground when he discovered that one of the well suited Chinese was still in fact alive. Barely.

Jeremy gaped in horror as he watched the only survivor push his index finger into the bullet hole in his chest and then take a taste sample of his own blood. The China man was writhing in pain but he did happen to notice Jeremy watching. He stared at the boy with dead pan eyes.

"Dying is a bitch ya know. We don't actually get 20 virgins for this martyr shit."

Jeremy was tough as nails. He could handle almost anything but he wasn't tough enough to laugh at a dying man's joke. Especially since he idolized the Chinese people so much for their engineering skills. *Who do you think invented cool stuff like gunpowder? Didn't you know your iPhone gets assembled in China? Couldn't you just about on any given day read the back of a product in a store to see where it was made?*

Jeremy reached for his iPhone.

"I can call for help. I can get you an ambulance."

There was still a glimmer in the dying man's eyes. It seemed as though he liked the big dumb white guy still stuck on wearing skinny jeans.

"Don't bother. They'll take me to jail. I'd rather die than have to eat chicken every Monday and fight for a seat in the TV room just to watch

American Idol. You Americans are pathetic you know that?"

Jeremy nodded his big strawberry blond head. He knew.

As the China man gasped for his last breath he used his remaining strength to reach deep into his vest's inside pocket. At this point Jeremy thought maybe it was a note for the man's wife and kids perhaps. Jeremy was surprised when the China man dangled what looked like a *Thumb Drive?*

With one thumb corking the bullet hole and the other on the flash drive Kan Vu was running on adrenaline. He did his best to masquerade his pain so he wouldn't frighten his newly found American friend.

"Here take this thumb drive and hide it from your American government. It's worth millions if not billions to the Chinese. It needs my thumb print for the passcode but I'm not cutting my thumb off for you, you little prick. You look like a smart guy. Take a pic of my thumb with your iPhone before the police get here and figure out how to bypass the security code."

Jeremy held the flash drive in his hand and gave it a curious look. *Could he get in trouble for this?*

"What's on it that's so important?" He finally asked.

The question forced a grin on the China man, despite all the dying pain he was in. He even managed a slight chuckle.

"We're all fed up with that silly movie you guys made "The Interview" So guess what? We're taking down Hollywood!"

With that the man died. All four of the Chinese moguls were officially dead. Jeremy loved Lincoln Town Cars, he had all the respect in the world for Chinese. His girlfriend from high school was Chinese. Now his entertainment for the day was all destroyed and bodies lying on the

ground. Sirens started wailing and Jeremy knew what that meant.

Jeremy steeled himself to lift up the dead man's thumb and snap a quality picture with his iPhone 5. Evidently something in that flash drive was worth killing for and he intended to use his resources to find out just what that was.

The sirens blared louder which could only mean they were getting closer. Jeremy placed the thumb drive into his fifth pocket of his jeans and took off running. *Would his girlfriend want him to stay and talk to the cops?*

CHAPTER 2

It didn't take long for Nikki to figure out something was not right with Jeremy. BunBun was good entertainment but only on occasions. Jeremy was already feeding the rabbit his third carrot. She had never seen Jeremy pay so much attention to the rabbit over the opportunity to caress her long silky black beautiful hair. She was even wearing new stuff from Bath and Body Works so what made BunBun so special today? Why was Jeremy showing her so little attention?

Nikki Cha placed her feathery hand in front of the rabbit preventing him from feeding it. "He's had enough. What's wrong Jeremy? I know something is wrong."

Jeremy took the carrot and took a nibble of it himself. He had heard once that carrots are good for your vision but he never knew if it was really true. Nikki sure did look good in the checkered mini skirt she was wearing. She almost looked like a Catholic school girl. One of those strict discipline type if the government still allowed those type of schools he really didn't know. Both Nikki and himself attended Kearson High School. A public school just 6 miles away.

He nibbled the carrot once more. "I dunno. I feel like I should have maybe gone to church today."

Nikki was confused. She grabbed the carrot stub from Jeremy and took a bite herself. She knew he wouldn't eat it down far enough like her mother had trained her to do. She once feared getting Cyanide poisoning from all the apple seeds she had inadvertently swallowed trying to please her mother as a kid taking apples down to the core.

"Okay now I know something is wrong. I told you that it doesn't bother me that you don't go. I only go to keep the peace with mother. What's going on Jeremy? Something is definitely up with you. You like someone else?"

Jeremy rolled his eyes. He studied the Chinese. Loyal, very loyal. *Why would he have an interest in someone else? Nikki was beautiful!*

"No no! It's no other girl. You're right. Something is definitely wrong. I'm just a little shaken up that's all."

Nikki was still confused. "It's Sunday. What could possibly get you all worked up on a Sunday?"

Jeremy took in a deep breath and then exhaled. This was going to be tough. *Could he trust her?* Sure why not.

He reached in his pocket and pulled out the small black flash drive and placed it in the palm of his hand.

Nikki freaked out and whacked it out of his hand. "Really Jeremy? On a Sunday? Really? You come over here to confess you have a porn habit? That's what's been bothering you? I'm not into silly games!"

Jeremy couldn't help but chuckle. He felt loosened up right now basking in her frustration. Nikki never gets worked up like this. He giggled once more.

"I didn't come over here to confess a secret dirty porn habit. I wouldn't

have a use for that." He said picking up the flash drive from the ground. "Your people handed me this right before one of them died."

"My people?"

Jeremy shrugged his shoulders. "They were all Chinese."

Nikki was still lost. "Died? Who died? What's going on Jeremy?"

Jeremy poked his head down the hallway and then shut the bedroom door. Nikki's parents weren't home yet but he was just playing it safe. Today's happenings were going to be tough to explain to his friend Nikki. He wondered how she would feel about all the men that shot each other being Chinese.

He pushed aside some stuffed animals on the bed and instructed Nikki to sit down next to him. He twiddled his thumbs nervously as he proceeded to tell her the entire story. All the way from A to Z. Starting with innocently going out to fetch yesterday's forgotten mail.

Nikki was in shock. "You didn't call the police?"

Jeremy shook his head no. "It all happened so fast. Didn't need to. They were already on the way."

Nikki was still confused. "Why did the last one give you a flash drive before he died? You didn't give it to the police?"

Jeremy thought about it for a moment. "No need to. It's mine he gave it to me remember?"

"But that's tampering with evidence. You could get in a lot of trouble for that. You have to give that thumb drive to the police!"

Jeremy thought about it some more. There were no lawyers in his family but he was pretty sure he knew the law and he also knew about loop

holes. He shook his head no nice and slowly.

"Nah. Not giving it to the police. Technically I don't have to. The Chinese man was still alive when he gave it to me. He said he would be in trouble but charges had not yet been brought up against him so I don't feel in the wrong. Remember? Innocent until proven guilty? I merely accepted a gift. There's no crime in that."

Nikki played with her long silky jet black hair as she listened. She could already sense the firmness in his voice. There was no point arguing with him. Jeremy was the type where *he's going to do what he's going to do*. She soon found herself doing the pretend *I'm pulling my hair out cuz I'm stressing* routine to get Jeremy to expedite spitting out whatever was going on.

"Okay, okay I get it. I'm not gonna bother to try reasoning with you. So what exactly is it that's on the flash drive?"

Jeremy scraped off some dirt at the tip of the thumb drive that probably came from the man plummeting to the ground. Then he held it up to the light just to be sure it wasn't some kind of highly sophisticated listening device. It was merely just a flash drive.

He handed it over to Nikki. "I dunno. I haven't checked it out yet."

Nikki's pupils dilated from the excitement and the curiosity. If Chinese men were shooting each other up over it there must be some juicy material or files in it. "We'll come on. By all means....I say we take it over to my computer and see what's on it!"

Jeremy followed her to the corner of her bedroom where her brand new DELL computer sat on top of her desk. Nikki never opened any junk mail that would give her computer viruses so it booted up in a jiffy second. He watched eagerly as Nikki plugged in the flash drive. The moment she clicked on the drive the words ZIOD MPXL took up the entire computer screen. ZIOD MPXL spun around on her screen in

Capitol blue letters in 3D. It did look pretty cool.

"Try moving your mousey." Suggested Jeremy.

Nikki jiggled the mouse pad and ZIOD MPXL eluded the screen. The words "Place thumb one inch from camera" was now all that showed on the screen.

"What's this? It wants me to put my thumb up to my web cam?" Asked Nikki debating which one of her thumbs she wanted to try.

Jeremy grabbed her hand before it could get tangled up in the stupidity of things. "No, no. I got it from here. There's something I gotta do to it first."

"Huh?" She said playing with her hair once again. She watched as he fished around in his pocket for his iPhone.

"The man let me take a picture of his thumb before he died. Here....watch this."

Jeremy brought up the photo on his phone and placed it exactly an inch from the web cam. He heard three beeps and within seconds numerous files popped up on Nikki's computer. Nikki was impressed. "That's pretty cool! I want a thumb drive with a security system like that. I'm tired of remembering passwords."

There was more files on the thumb drive then they were prepared to deal with. Nikki thought it best to start with one of the folders in the middle. The one labeled "Entertainment favorites of Kan Vu"

"Let's try taking a peek at this one first." She said skeptically. She was really hoping that Kan Vu's "entertainment" was for the public's eyes and would not harm her computer. When she clicked on it she was very surprised to see a long list of movies pop up. All of the movies she had never even heard of. She highlighted the first one *The Last WeaponIII*

"Jeremy do you see this?" She said in shock. "Have you heard of *The Last Weapon* one or two? This is kind of weird. I know all of these actors listed. Has Hollywood moved to China?"

Jeremy giggled at the thought. "I doubt Hollywood stars want to squish themselves into a tiny home and eat their dinner sitting bow legged on a floor." He joked, "Here, I'll look these movies up on my smart phone."

Jeremy first tried looking up *The Last Weapon*. He got nothing. Not even a one two or three. Then he tried checking an action movie starring Bruce Willis. There were no results for *Cancers of Society*. He tried a few more. Nothing. Jeremy was getting frustrated.

"None of these movies exist in Google yet I recognize a lot of these actors. This is like totally weird. How did they make these movies? Why doesn't Google know about it?"

Nikki was awestruck. She clicked on *The Last Weapon* and watched the movie play. It looked good enough for red box. Even good enough for theatre. "Jeremy if this technology we are looking at is what I think it is.....we got some serious shit here!"

Jeremy felt his heart skip a beat. "You...you're not suggesting....these movies....all done by the works of a computer? These actors never actually acted out these scenes?"

Nikki nodded her head. "Ever heard of CGI?" She asked.

"No what's that. Another form of FBI? Jeremy joked.

Nikki knew a little about almost everything. "Computer Generated Imagery" She vaunted. "Those dumb cartoon movies made by computer. You know how you're always impressed by your video games every year starting to look more real with the graphics?"

"Yeah. So."

"I think this is CGI taken to a whole another advanced level. Somebody finally took the time to count all five million dots on their computer screen and figured out a way how to dictate each one separately. If this program is what I think it is. It can be both beneficial and extremely dangerous. Our government might not ever be able to trust the validity of any high resolution video or even a recognized voice in a phone call. This is serious digital cloning Jeremy. This is real."

CHAPTER 3 (ZIOD MPXL exposed)

BunBun stirred around in his cage while Jeremy and Nikki perused through the numerous files they were finding on the flash drive. There was so much to look through that Jeremy finally had to pull up a chair. Nikki could hardly stay seated from all the excitement and constantly got up to point at things she saw on the screen. Every time she got up her cleavage rubbed against Jeremy's shoulder and he wondered if some of her perfume had rubbed into his t-shirt.

Jeremy finally noticed something unusual on the screen. "Look! See the yellow lightning bolt on the bottom corner?"

Nikki noticed it too. "Yeah, it says CREATE right underneath it. Should I click on it?"

Jeremy shrugged his shoulders. "Might as well. How long do we have before your folks get home another hour?"

Nikki made a peace sign with her fingers. "We still have two. Here I'm clicking on it."

A program opened up and they were looking at what looked like a highly sophisticated photo shop menu. Nikki was more computer savvy so she did all the mouse clicking while Jeremy watched. Poor BunBun would not be getting much attention this Sunday evening. It only took

five minutes of tinkering before Nikki clapped her hands together then placed them on her cheeks.

"I think I figured out how to use this! This thing is very similar to how they used to make cartoons! The only difference is no need to hook your body up to sensors cuz the program operates off of the webcam somehow. Here, slide over Jeremy I think I'm going to try this thing out."

Jeremy watched in awe as he kept his eyes on the screen watching her click on the name "Connie Chung".

He couldn't help but ask. "Who's Connie Chung?"

Nikki smiled. "One of the greatest news anchors of all time. I always wanted to know what it would feel like to be her. Now I'm going to find out."

Jeremy watched carefully as Nikki stood in front of the webcam and pulled her soft silky hair back. She then clicked on a red record button at the bottom.

"Hello everybody residing on Peril Boulevard. This is Connie Chung of CNN reporting live. There's been a breakthrough in today's digital technology where Hollywood stars are no longer needed. That goes for musical pop stars as well for the time is coming where every bored teenager will be able to put together a platinum winning album together all with a few key strokes on their very own computer. Good luck to all you Hollywood stars out west. It's time you feel the crunch from this economy like the rest of us. This is Connie Chung reporting live."

Jeremy laughed at her joke and then scrubbed away an eye bugger as she then clicked on the stop button. "So let's see the results!" He said excitedly. "We really gonna see Connie Chung on this thing?"

"We should.... Hold on." She said scrolling down to the play box. Nikki was shocked when she recognized Connie's face pop up in the video.

"Oh my gosh! She is mirroring my every move! Look at her playing with her hair just like I had done!"

Jeremy stood up from his chair and placed an arm around Nikki as they watched Connie Chung repeat the news on Peril Boulevard verbatim as Nikki had reported earlier. It was freaky. It was weird. It was cool?

"How does that thing work? She's repeating everything you said except her voice is not yours. Is that really Connie Chung's voice? Do you recognize it?"

Nikki just kept her hands cupped to her cheekbones. "Oh my gosh is this freaky. This looks so real! That is definitely Connie's voice! I've just been digitally cloned by Connie Chung!"

BunBun stirred around some more in his cage. Animals tend to sense danger impending in the air. This program was worth killing for. BunBun might only be a rabbit in a cage, but BunBun knew. Somebody would come back to retrieve this flash drive.

CHAPTER 4

Michael was extremely nervous. But then again Michael Emerson was always nervous. Being nervous is what made his TV show *Person Of Interest* such a great hit. Everybody liked to watch the great "Harold Finch" that designed the ultimate machine that could ultimately spy on people. Aside from the great "Harold Finch" himself, there was only one person in the United States that paid attention to enough movies to know that *Person Of Interest* was more than just a Hollywood television show. It was real life. The latest technology always starts out west where the money is at. Beverly Hills California being the main hub of course.

Michael Emerson grunted into the mike. He was no eye candy and he

knew it. His creative paranoid faces he could make is what made his show a success. *Would Jennifer Aniston stop flirting with Brad Pitt so he could start with his presentation?*

"Um..hmm..." He grunted once more. Evidently the Orange bow tie he had on wasn't doing the trick today. Not with an entire room of Hollywood celebrities. "Okay people. This is more than a chit chat. This is a serious business meeting. Hollywood has been breeched and I'm here today to discuss the good and the bad."

The little slut from the new TV show *Mom is Boss* raised her hand enthusiastically. If it wasn't for her good acting skills and looks, Hollywood never would have given her an opportunity. She usually tried to hard to be funny. "Ooh..oh..is it really true we are all getting laid off due to this new technology? I'm all about a pink slip party!"

The crowd giggled but Michael failed to recognize the humor. He was one of the few actors that acted the exact same even off the clock.

"Well I wouldn't go that far with it but some of us might be tempted to pull some Martha Stewarts come tax time. ZIOD MPXL is very real and effective. The experts are already admitting they can't differentiate the real videos from the faux. I would start being real nice to the screen writers. Maybe even give them some more recognition by placing their names at the top of the cast that comes on at the end of the movies."

The theatre that the celebrities gathered in was very posh. Every chair in the room was valued at at least \$2000. There was even girls dressed up as playboy bunnies parading around and handing out martinis. Clint EastWood was the only celebrity showing zero interest in today's business meeting. *Why couldn't we go back to the old days of projectors? Let the counterfeiters try to manipulate hundreds of yards of film. So what if John Wayne appeared to be riding that horsey just a little bit too fast.*

Michael was getting irritated by the crowds incessant chatter but

continued his presentation anyways. He adjusted his orange bow tie hoping to get their attention.

"Are there any news reporters in here? Can I please see a show of hands?"

A few hands went up. Michael pointed to the one dressed in black leather looking like a million bucks. Katie Couric.

"Katie you look like fun today. Nice dress by the way. Can I ask you to come up here for a minute?"

Katie was shocked. This was a room full of very, very important people. *But how could she say no?*

"Sure." She said getting up from her seat. She even was blessed with a play boy bunny to usher her upstage. She was always a big fan of *Person Of Interest so why not?*

The great Harold Finch smelled a whole lot better than he looked. Katie was quite comfortable standing next to him. She did her best to smile as much as she could to get her money's worth for years and years of excellent dental care. She was so blessed not to be cursed with what she likes to call "horse teeth" that she has occasionally noticed on lower rated TV anchors.

To make it look professional Michael placed a hand on her shoulder as he started with the questions. A projector screen in the background started to lower and the words "ZIOD MPXL" danced around on the screen in 3-D. In just the wink of an eye eight different photos appeared on the screen. Some of them appeared very comical.

Michael made sure to keep his hand stagnant while he rested it on her shoulder. Even in real life he was quite the gentleman. "So Katie....lemme ask you something....you like your job right?"

Katie smiled. "Sure, why wouldn't I?"

Michael did that paranoia look with his eyes. The same one people looked for in his TV show. "Do you see yourself still doing it 40 years from now?"

Katie's smile slightly diminished. It was a scary thought realizing that if she reached her 90s people might not want to see her still smiling on their TV. *Could she still keep her job at that age?*

"Well...I would like to say yes but I'm afraid I just don't know. It does sound interesting though. You're not going to ask me my age now are you?"

Michael couldn't help but smile. "Of course not. You're probably ten years younger than me anyhow."

The crowd of celebrities giggled. Everybody's got jokes but they all agreed Michael needed to get the ball rolling. There's never enough time in the day when you're a celebrity.

Michael continued. "Well...what if I could guarantee your job not just 40 years from now but 100 years from now!"

Katie rolled her eyes while showing off her flashy black leather dress. "Okay Michael. We get it. Explain to us what's going on."

Michael slicked back his hair before he addressed the crowd. "Folks we are living in times where essentially we are no longer needed. Deleted scenes will be a thing of the past as we gravitate towards this newfound technology ZIOD MPXL. Zeroing In On Digital megapixels. I hate to break it to ya folks...but some nut job actually took the time to zero in and count all five million dots on his computer. Over time he developed a program that picks up patterns in which he can individually dictate each and every square by itself. Every hue you can possibly think of folks. This German Nazi weirdo is basically the next Weird AI of CGI.

Do you guys know what that is?"

As it turned out celebrities were not as intellectual as they portrayed themselves in their movies. Not a single hand was raised or a voice shot out.

"CGI...Computer Generated Imagery...you know how the new Grand Theft Auto video games are starting to look pretty real? Some homeless German nut job that runs around in a copper body suit has found a way to perfect it. Each and every one of you run the risk of getting digitally cloned. Movie producers feel the millions they pay us is just too high and thanks to ZIOD MPXL I have to agree with them. They really no longer need us. A lot of people along the east coast are excited about this. They think it's time for us to bust out the Ramen soups and feel this economic crunch. It's happening folks. DVDs get scratched. Everybody can now afford computers. You can load hundreds of movies all into a thumb drive that can get plugged into the side of your TV. As for stopping piracy? Forget about it."

Katie was wondering why the hand fell away from her shoulder. She had a few questions of her own. "So what about my job? You said you can keep me working at 90?"

This was the part Michael was looking forward to. It was time to stop the technical chatter and show off ZIOD MPXL. He could hardly wait to see Katie's face when she would witness her very own self on TV reporting news that she never reported. *Talk about freaking somebody out right? Who cares about the machines that spy on us when there's a machine that can actually REPLACE us!*

Michael turned to the side and stepped away momentarily from the mike. "Mr.Treque Kung will you please fetch Mr.Sands to bring the product up here? I'd like to show off ZIOD MPXL to the crowd."

Just then an enraged Chinese man darted into the auditorium while pulling his hair out. He shouted loud enough for a Chinese fire drill.

"ZIOD is gone! They never made it! They all turned on each other! Everyone is dead! The flash drive is missing!"

Even the great Harold Finch felt his heart skip a beat. *Where was the flash drive that could not be copied? Where was ZIOD MPXL?* He felt his eyes grow very large.

"Ladies and gentlemen. We thought the inventor of this product has been bought out but evidently he has returned to take back his work. Ladies and gentlemen.....Qwerty is on the loose....never trust your eyes folks, throw away your televisions and never trust your eyes."

CHAPTER 5

Nikki was very fond of Jeremy and hoped that one day they could take their friendship to the next level. She had in fact once been in love but the man she so deeply loved had broke her heart right before Valentine's Day. Trevor. Pretty boy Trevor. The very first love of her life that ended up cheating on her with her best friend Patricia. *How could somebody do that right before Valentine's Day?*

Jeremy finally got curious as to why Nikki continued to highlight photos of Patricia and paste them onto the ZIOD MPXL program. "I thought you and Patricia weren't friends any more after what she did to you?"

Nikki smiled while she clicked on the mousey. "We're not friends and never will be. I just wanna try a little experiment."

Jeremy was mind boggled when he watched Nikki turn the web cam back on and suddenly she was Patricia. Nikki waved her hands in front of the web cam to test it out. Sure enough they watched Patricia on the screen wave back.

"Why do I have the feeling you are up to no good?" Asked Jeremy.

Nikki giggled and placed his hand on the mousey. "Here. Pick out whichever one of these black guys you think Patricia might find cute. Trevor was always a racist son of a gun. I think he's gonna be in for a big surprise when he sees this video."

Jeremy was getting rather curious. *Was Nikki going to do what he thought she was going to do? A fake sex tape? They were both still virgins. Could she still be that upset with Patricia and Trevor?*

"How about this tall one. He looks just like an NBA basketball player." He said clicking on the black stranger.

The web cam caught Jeremy's motion movement and Jeremy was amazed watching the black man on the screen mirror his every move. It looked so real. *Did ISIS utilize this technology with all of their alleged beheadings? Could some of the Ferguson cops have use for this technology to save their jobs that were getting losses due to their impatience with the insubordinate?*

Nikki wrapped her hands around Jeremy's 32 inch waist. "Okay lover boy. Kiss me!"

The two embraced and sucked face with each other for the first time. Jeremy liked it at first but was getting a little excited down there and his skinny jeans offered him very little protection of any jutting objects. Nikki pulled him closer and took things a bit farther by sticking her tongue down his throat. That really got the virgin boy all excited. Jeremy pulled away for a second to get air.

"How far are we going with this?" He asked optimistically.

Nikki stopped and clicked on the red stop button. "We're all done handsome. Just wanted to run a little experiment."

Jeremy placed his hands on his hips as he stood in awe watching the 45 second clip play on the screen. *How could this thing look so real? Was a*

computer screen really essentially nothing more than five million squares that illuminate? Jeremy knew Patricia. It was kind of weird watching her kiss a big black man that had mirrored his kiss to Nikki whom was allegedly Patricia. *What would happen if somebody opted to digitally clone the President? Did ZIOD MPXL have the potential to be dangerous if it got into the wrong hands?*

Nikki couldn't stop herself. She grabbed at Jeremy's skinny jeans looking for a rectangular bulge.

"What are you doing?" He said possibly wondering if the make out video wouldn't suffice. *Was she really looking to make a fake sex tape?*

Nikki pulled out his smart phone and plugged it into the computer. "I can't use my phone or he'll recognize my number."

"You're seriously gonna send that making out clip to Trevor? What if he sees my name on the caller ID?"

Nikki giggled. "He's not gonna know. Yours is a prepay phone. They screwed up your name when you registered it. When you call the caller ID comes up Jimmy Wallins. Those Sandbaggers that can barely speak English never care if the name is right when they register those prepay phones. I can't wait any longer. I'm sending this clip to Trevor now. He will be forced to trust his eyes. Even if he ever figures it out....I'm not worried. The image of a big black man French kissing his girl will always be planted in his mind. That's satisfaction enough for me."

When Nikki finished syncing the video to Jeremy's phone she wasted no time entering Trevor's number and pushing the "send" button. She only wished she could witness the look on his face when he would watch the video on his phone.

ZIOD MPXL was cool. ZIOD MPXL gave the screen writers power. *Could the ZIOD MPXL program be duplicated?*

CHAPTER 6

Qwerty always believed that there were two types of people in this world. People that lived to work, and people that worked to live. For many, many, many years....Qwerty had feigned portraying himself as the latter. Society has dubbed him as lazy. That was all part of his master plan. Convince the people in this world that he was lazy and soft. No threat to society. Just another dumb dumb spending too much time with video games and fruit roll ups.

As Qwerty carefully stitched up the hole in his copper body suit he was distracted by the news about the shootouts involving the Chinese in a black Lincoln Town Car. He lay down the needle to pay attention to what was being discussed on the evening news.

"This is Lisa Price reporting live from news 11. Police say some important government Chinese men have been involved in a gory shoot out right here in Marxton VA on the darker side of Peril Boulevard. There are no witnesses but the police believe the incident is somehow tied in with the home break in of the local news Anchor Marlene Jones which happened just an hour prior to the shooting incident. The story is really heating up as the Feds have jumped in and refuse to discuss just what it was that was stolen from Marlene's home. Four Chinese men with no identification all sustained gun wounds and were found dead on Peril boulevard. They found no stolen goods on any of the men but police believe a homeless man may have robbed the men after they died."

Qwerty felt his heart beat wildly. *Chinese men?* That was NOT part of the deal. *What about Marlene's fingerprint? Those sick Chinese. Did they cut off her thumb? Or were they smart enough to change the passcode to maybe their own fingerprint?*

Lisa Price continued to report the news as Qwerty stitched up the hole in his mesh copper body suit. He couldn't help but wonder what the NSA

thought of him. *How could this guy keep finding ways to disappear? Why does he continue to drop off the grid? How is he doing it?*

Qwerty had a serious condition of paranoia since he was a tween. EVERYBODY was watching him. By the time he had reached the age of 20 Qwerty was convinced that the government had planted a super small tracking device inside of his body. Nanotechnology was coming a long way and the government already had the technology to squeeze a wireless micro cam inside something as small as a pill capsule. *So why wouldn't they plant GPS tracking devices inside of someone's body if they had the technology to do it?*

As he put the finishing touches of stitching up the hole in his mesh copper body suit Qwerty shook his head and thought to himself. *How did they know that he knew that they knew what nobody else knew? Why hadn't the public paid more attention to the movies that came out in the 90's to realize that Hollywood knew EVERYTHING?* Qwerty folded up the mesh copper body suit and picked up the pile of newspaper articles he had clipped and saved over the years. One article described the court system as "vehemently irate" at the progress teenagers were making with photoshop. Fake News sites were the next gold rush and celebrities were losing their patience with photobombing. Just in the year 2014 alone 600 cases were dismissed due to lack of evidence because pictures were finally becoming inadmissible in court. An MIT student had written an award winning book titled "Never Trust Your Eyes" which had the government's attention throughout the entire United States.

Qwerty was very much proud of his work and his ability to be able to zero in on each and every megapixel and learn how to control each and every dot and place it under a microscope. ZIOD MPXL had been built from the ground up. Qwerty started out with a fascination with duplicating and breaking down bar codes. In his early youth he tinkered with so many QR codes he soon learned how to hack into virtually anything he wanted. He knew all the neighbors bank accounts. He could get into anybody's personal emails at any given moment. At Christmas time Qwerty always insisted on getting reams of grid paper so that he

could create his own QR bar codes. His mother thought for all those years her son had Down syndrome. Qwerty had no friends and when queried about his work he insisted on repeating his B.S story about making attempts to communicate with aliens. Nobody ever dreamed that he had the power to hack into classified restricted websites belonging to the pentagon. *But now that ZIOD MPXL was finally created?* It could very well mean the next digital revolution.

As Qwerty carefully shuffled through the articles as if they were baseball cards he took deep breaths of fresh oxygen into his tiny nostrils. Exhaling took just as long because his nostrils were just that small. It was hard to believe that ZIOD MPXL had been stolen from the news anchor he had sold it to. Qwerty had specifically designed ZIOD MPXL with a special encryption so that it could not be duplicated. It was his life's work and he had spent years creating it. The town thought he was nuts when he first started out with his experiments years ago. Years ago when he had filled an entire corn field with grid paper just so he could think. All five million squares had been laid out and each one had a letter and a number. The neighbors knew he had money to spend but they just assumed he was just another schizo nut out in a cornfield trying to figure out how to play battleship with aliens. Nobody ever suspected that ZIOD MPXL was already in the works. Ground Up.

I have to get my work back. Qwerty thought to himself, Good thing this clueless little church town has already gotten used to seeing me everyday parading around this copper suit.

CHAPTER 7

Jeremy had spent his usual hour of rolling around in his bed before he could finally get to sleep. Nikki had often teased him about his body pillow and they had a bet going as to whether or not he could go a week without it. So far he was winning the bet but that didn't stop him from curling up all his blankets and tucking them between his legs.

As he tossed and turned a few more times his body finally entered a deep slumber. Jeremy was having a nightmare. In his nightmare the China man was tormenting him. Kan Vu. The thumb guy. Rapid eye movement plagued him as he became tormented by images of Kan begging for his life. It was sick. It was twisted. In the nightmare Kan was shot and bloodied in the street but very much alive. It was like the China man was trying to look deep into Jeremy's soul. He looked up at Jeremy while hemorrhaging. There was much hate in his eyes.

"You Americans and your need for greed! Your country wastes food while the rest of us starve over seas. Then your so called Christian people taunt us with free bottled water with gospel tracks taped to them while your criminals behind bars give substantial donations to Cancer charities while only making 12 cents an hour! Blah!"

With that Kan Vu took a big bite into his thumb and ripped his entire thumb off with his teeth. Blood spritzed everywhere just like a Kill Bill movie. Jeremy could only gape in horror. Kan spit his own bloody thumb right onto Jeremy's Nike shoe. *"Go on! Take it! It's just like your country to coerce the innocent to become organ donors. Greedy little devils all of you!"*

And with that Kan died. Jeremy was too much in a stupor to pick up the bloody thumb up off of his shoe. The scene in his nightmare eluded him and Jeremy found himself slipping into an entirely different nightmare. Star Trek???

Wharf from Star Trek The Next Generation stood abreast of him while he walked along streets of yellow gold that looked kind of like a scene from The Wizard Of Oz. Wharf continued to walk along side of him but didn't say a word and it gave Jeremy the creeps. *Where was he? Were Cling-ons actually real? Did Wharf carry a phaser?*

That's when all hell broke loose in Jeremy's nightmare. He knew something dire would happen the moment Wharf whispered into his ear. *"It's a good day to die!"*

With that at least 20 mean looking Cling-ons jumped from out of the bushes and shot their phasers at Jeremy. The shots didn't kill him but he could literally feel the burning. It felt like someone was taking a blow torch to his skin! It was the smell of smoke that awoken him from his nightmare.

Jeremy jumped out of his bed but was too shocked to scream. His entire Sealy's mattress was on fire! He raced out of the bedroom and down to the kitchen as fast as he could to look for the fire extinguisher above the stove. It didn't take him too long to find and he quickly raced back upstairs and removed the pin while he pointed it towards the flames on the mattress. To his surprise no foamy extinguisher fluid shot out but he heard a noise from inside the red canister.

It was a robotic voice. "So you decided to toy around with my work huh? Like fires you little punk? You have no idea who you are screwing around with. The Chinese will hunt you down if I don't get to you first. This is Qwerty. Some people just know me as the copper man. Want my advice you little punk? Run.....Just keep running."

Jeremy was completely caught off guard. *Who is Qwerty? How did somebody get in here?*

CHAPTER 8

BunBun continued to stir around in his cage as if he could tell Nikki was up to no good. She was. As soon as class had let out she had gone straight home to her computer and plugged in ZIOD MPXL. She was finding the entertainment quite addicting. ZIOD MPXL had thousands and thousands of files of virtually almost every celebrity in history. The program even mirrored not only all facial expressions but voice sarcasm as well. ZIOD MPXL made Nikki feel like a digital God.

Nikki was experimenting to learn that ZIOD MPXL could also be used

without having to act in front of the web cam. Evidently you could type words you wanted people to say and ZIOD MPXL even had special emotion buttons to perfect sarcasm and mirth in one's voice. BunBun butted his nose against his rabbit cage while Nikki debated whether or not to make another faux video to send to her ex-boyfriend. Perhaps a video of Patricia making out with a big black man was not enough payback.

The doorbell rang and Nikki quickly fumbled around with the computer mousey like a teenage boy quickly trying to stash a playboy from mother. *Who could possibly be at the door? Nobody ever rings the doorbell they just usually barge right in.* Nikki pulled out the flash drive and stuffed it inside of her bra. Perhaps it was just another Jehovah Witness looking to catch somebody answering the door in their underwear? Nikki really didn't know. She was barefoot so she opted to slip on her pink bunny slippers in case perhaps it was a high school friend looking to show off a new car. Nikki let her long jet black hair dangle in front of her face to hide her guilty look when she came to the door. *Had she been caught? Was it Patricia? The text message video make out clip?*

The front door was too new to squeak when Nikki opened it. She even wondered if maybe perhaps it was only mother needing help with the groceries and didn't have a free hand to open the front door. She shook her head back and forth to allow strands of hair fall out in front of her face and then looked around outside. Nothing. No movement anywhere. *Odd?* Nikki thought to herself. She closed the door and went back outside.

As she trampled down the hallway she removed the thumb drive from her cleavage and inspected it. *Surely there has to be a way to copy ZIOD MPXL* she thought to herself. Jeremy had allowed her to borrow it and she already wanted ZIOD MPXL for herself. It was funner than video games and she was quite the computer nerd.

Nikki sat back down in front of her computer and plugged in the flash

drive. The second she plugged in the drive she was startled when the doorbell did ring once again. She immediately removed the thumb drive and stuffed it back into her bra. *Who is doing this?* She thought to herself, *Kids playing the game ding dong ditch that they probably learned from Beavis and Butthead?*

She raced down the hallway and quickly swung open the front door hoping to catch her guest this time. She looked carefully in all directions and saw absolutely nobody. Nikki crooked her head a little more and saw Jeremy down the street walking his way towards her house. *Jeremy did this* She thought to herself, *He thinks he is being funny with his cute little games.* Nikki quickly shut the front door and returned to her computer. She had no intentions of answering the door again and nine times out of ten Jeremy usually just barges through the front door without so much as a knock. Her parents never had a problem with Jeremy coming and going as he pleases.

When Jeremy finally made his way into her bedroom she was surprised that he didn't pay his usual homage to BunBun first. Instead he crept up behind her while breathing heavily down the back of her neck like Michael Moore from the old Halloween movies.

Nikki continued to tinker with ZIOD MPXL and pretended like she didn't know he was breathing down her neck. "Nice prank Jeremy...Ding Dong ditch? Really? Don't tell me you're still watching Beavis and Butthead."

Jeremy didn't laugh. His emotions were extremely stoic. He placed his hand out in front of her and showed her the burnt plastic contraptions while continuing to breathe heavily.

Nikki jumped as if a spider was in his hands. "What's that?" She said enthusiastically.

Jeremy moved his palm closer so she could get a better look. "Somebody tried to kill me or maybe they were sending me a message.

Look at the black piece where you can tell a hole has been drilled into it. See the tiny motor with the dead weight protruding?"

Nikki looked close. "Yeah looks like a piece of straw has been placed over it. What about the other burnt pieces? Looks like part of a burnt soda bottle. Are those remnants part of a pager? Does that explain the tiny motor?"

Jeremy continued to breath heavily. "Back in the day ID wasn't required to activate pagers. I'm guessing the soda bottle was filled with gasoline. Somebody concocted some sort of deadly fire bomb and planted it in my mattress. Do you know how flammable a Sealy's mattress is Nikki? Somebody tried to kill me!"

Nikki immediately arose from her computer chair and gave Jeremy a hug. "Oh my gosh are you alright?"

Jeremy showed her the burn marks on his hands from putting out the fire. "I'm just wondering how they snuck into my bedroom to plant this thing inside of my mattress. I was having a nightmare about Cling-ons jumping out from bushes and shooting me with phasers. Somebody must have known I was in bed sleeping and then dialed the number to the pager. They make IEDs like this all the time in the Middle East. Sometimes they even use CB radios."

Now Nikki was just as frightened as Jeremy. She pulled her long jet black hair away from her face as she tried to think. "I saw you walking up the street. Who was ringing my doorbell?"

Jeremy felt goosebumps crawl up his skin. "Shit Nikki. There was nobody at your house or even in your yard. This isn't getting funny any more."

He watched her twitch her eyes back and forth trying to assess everything as quick as possible.

"ZIOD MPXL?"

Jeremy shook his head. "Looks like they're coming back for it."

CHAPTER 9

Qwerty removed his copper body suit and hung it up in the closet. His deep imagination always made him wonder what other positive healthy things came from donning a copper body suit. He couldn't help but wonder if everyone would be wearing one in the future to repel all the WiFi and radio activity that fluctuated throughout the air. Copper. The nosy government liked the ability to extract information from people's smart phones via wireless communication. Qwerty got headaches a lot and couldn't help but notice every time he donned the copper suit the headache mysteriously went away. *Doesn't the public know how much radio activity permeates throughout the air? Don't they want to stay healthy and block out the exposure?*

Qwerty also noticed that athletes were already figuring out the benefits of mesh copper knee braces and even copper infused socks. There were more television advertisements as studies proved pain mitigated with knee pads and socks fashioned with copper. *But an entire body suit?* only Qwerty had thought of that. Just donning the suit made him feel smarter and ten years younger. He knew that in just 15 minutes of donning the suit....the nosy government was blocked out. No monitoring thoughts. Qwerty even had a mesh copper night cap he wore at night to prevent the authorities from peaking into his dreams. The copper suit puts you 100% OFF-THE-GRID.

Not a single person in the world knew that Qwerty was a part time serial killer. He wasn't the rapist type but he most certainly HATED men. Qwerty so far had 8 notches on his bed post representing the strangers he had killed over the years. All men. All men and all 8 had been killed right inside of public restrooms. And why? No possibility of Big Brother watching. Because Qwerty knew that there would be a shit storm if the

public ever found out about security cameras in restrooms. Each and every one of his kills in the past 8 years were very much alike. *Monster Dongs* Qwerty liked to refer to them as. He had never known any of his kills on a personal level. All of his kills had to do with envy and spontaneity.

Qwerty still had 6 pounds left of sticky blueberry flavor on his 10 pound lollipop. It was the perfect murder weapon. Qwerty always enjoyed eating up all of the bloody sticky evidence. He had on occasion read newspaper articles about authorities on the hunt for the *Lollipop Killer*. It gave him a huge rush sneaking up on his victims while they urinated. *A ten pound lollipop to the back of the head?* You better believe it.

As Qwerty sucked away on his bloody lollipop he couldn't help but wonder about the Chinese girl probably going crazy over the doorbell ringing with nobody there. It didn't take him very long to take her doorbell apart in the middle of the night. He had taken apart her doorbell and rigged it up to a small timer he had purchased at Walt-Mart. It was kind of cool how easily the screws came out so he could fit his tiny contraption inside the doorbell. His stunt brought back memories of the stories he used to tell his psychiatrist. *You spent how many hours pulling the legs off of daddy longleggers? Why didn't you just kill it?* His Psychiatrist used to ask.

Qwerty didn't know that his court appointed shrink had been studying serial killer behavior. Evidently serial killers had three things in common. Bed wetting, Day dreaming, and teasing animals or insects. Qwerty spent most of his life 2 for 3. That all changed by the time he hit 30. Qwerty wet the bed all the time. He blamed most of it on his crooked dreams.

As Qwerty licked away the blood from the massive lollipop he couldn't help but wonder what rush he enjoyed more. Bludgeoning someone from behind with a massive lollipop or gambling. Qwerty knew that when it came to gambling the odds in the end would always be stacked against him. He won big every now and then but over all he lost a small

fortune. Qwerty believed that he was mezophrenic which is basically a word that doesn't even exist. Qwerty had coined the word himself when he figured out that he had a serious "rush" addiction. By age 13 he had already stolen at least 7 cars. He had no respect for the law and although gambling costed him a fortune it also kept him out of jail. *But sneaking up behind someone and bludgeoning them with a lollipop bigger than a frisbee?* The ultimate rush. Qwerty wasn't the type of guy you wanted to stand and take a leak beside.

Qwerty's stomach began to churn from all the sugar in his system. He couldn't help but wonder if donning his copper body suit mitigated stomach illness as well. His landline phone began ringing so he put down his lollipop and sprung from the chair. He answered on the third ring.

"Hello?" He greeted timidly.

It was a female's voice. Qwerty recognized it. "It's gone.....got burglarized....I need it back....you flush away all that money I gave you up at the casino yet?" Said the news anchor expecting a long sigh in return.

Qwerty only grunted. "I put it all on red. It went green can you believe that?"

"Okay, okay. I have no time for games. I need ZIOD MPXL back and I'm willing to pay a lot to get it back. I told too many people about it and somehow these Chinese men burglarized my home while I was at Vero Beach. You do have another right?"

Now Qwerty finally sighed. "Only one made. It's heavily encrypted. It's not possible to duplicate."

The news anchor lady let out a long sigh as well. This was not good. She was already used to always getting her way. "I need it back and I'm willing to pay more than before."

"Already on it." Replied Qwerty, "I'm already on it."

CHAPTER 10

Trevor was already having a bad day. His Yellow Subaru sports sedan had broken down once again and he was forced to walk home from basketball practice. And to make matters worse? His foot had a huge blister. His stressful day caused him to pull on his straggly blond hair as he walked along the sidewalk. Trevor was taller than the other guys on his basketball team but a terrible shot. He wasn't even sure he was all that crazy about the sport but Patricia was a big fan of the game. If playing ball kept her happy then he'd surely keep at it. Besides, Patricia looked pretty cute when she insisted on borrowing his jersey. It all but came down to her knees and she liked to wear it around school to show her friends. 16. Trevor's number.

As if his day wasn't bad enough a bumble bee taunted him as he traipsed down the street. He was relieved when he felt the *buzz*buzz* from inside of his pocket. Probably Patricia. A few text messages should surely cheer him up.

Trevor was surprised to see a "press play" triangle pop up on the screen. It came from an unrecognized number but Trevor knew it was safe when he saw Patricia's smiling face in the video blog. *Had she made a cute little video clip for him?* Patricia didn't usually do that. But what had him a little confused? The number. *Had Patricia got a new phone? Was she borrowing a friend's maybe?*

His diddy bop walk got curtailed and Trevor pushed the "play" button on his phone. He couldn't believe what he was witnessing with his own eyes. Patricia was making out with a big black basketball player....oh my...French kissing too!!! His heart beat rapidly as if he was losing a big hand of black jack. Just last weekend he had bought her that diamond bracelet she kept bugging him about. *Why would she do this to him?*

What did he do wrong?

Out of pure instinct Trevor smashed the iPhone onto the sidewalk and stepped on it with his foot for good measure. *Who was the guy she was making out with? Where did the video come from?*

His heart beat faster and faster as he tried to keep himself together. Trevor had a zero tolerance policy for cheating. Sure, he was a guy and it was okay for him to do it but cheating was frowned upon when women joined in on the fun as well. Trevor's family had high expectations of him as there was much talk about a good college. He could only imagine his mother's face when he would later drop the news about Patricia sucking face with a big black guy that was the size of an NBA player. *How was his world turning upside down so quickly?*

Needless to say there wasn't much pep in Trevor's step as he trekked his way home. His gait was looking much like the stick drawing from *Diary Of A Wimpy Kid*. He was so angry it was all he could do to keep from kicking over somebody's mailbox. Trevor was in such a horrible stupor that he didn't even hear a man jogging from behind him. It was Copper Man.

It scared the crap out of Trevor. An unidentifiable person clad in a mesh copper body suit sprung from up behind and intentionally brushed shoulders with him then quickly sprinted away, Trevor was in too much shock to run after his intruder and Copper Man was running just way too fast. As Trevor tried to regain his composure he felt a bee that had crawled down the back of his shirt. He immediately ripped his shirt off and beat it like a towel hoping to flush the bee out. He was completely surprised when a business card flew out and landed on his Nike. It was a business card from a flower shop. *A Flower Shop?* Trevor was confused.

He picked up the business card up from the ground and flipped it over. The penmanship looked a bit psychotic like Charles Manson's but Trevor could make out the words.

NEVER TRUST YOUR EYES

CHAPTER 11

Although he was rattled up, Jeremy was doing an amazing job acting brave in front of Nikki. His hands were shaking a little like a first time gambler but he made sure she couldn't notice.

"Here hand me the flat blade back. The Phillips won't fit right." He said trying his best to be careful.

Nikki handed him the flat blade screw driver. "Just make sure we return these tools. My dad notices everything. Besides we should hurry before my folks get home."

Jeremy did his best to take it easy on the screws as he twisted them out from the doorbell. One by one he pulled them out and placed them in the palm of his hand. He showed them to Nikki.

"Here, hold onto these screws while I take this thing apart. I have a feeling your doorbell has been tampered with. We're going to get to the bottom of it."

Just the mystery alone caused Nikki's eye lashes to flutter like a humming bird's. Her eyelashes always flickered when she got excited.

"Ok, I'll hold onto them. Just be careful taking that thing apart."

Jeremy pulled out a handful of wires that had been taped together. The wires led into a black little plastic box just smaller than a pager. He ripped the wires out from the little plastic box.

"What are you doing? I said don't break anything!" Hissed Nikki.

"I'm not. Look. This little plastic box is not part of your doorbell. Your

doorbell still works...here see?"

Ding-Dong! Jeremy touched the two wires together once more...*Ding-Dong*

"How did you do that?"

Jeremy knew his electronics. "When you push a doorbell button essentially all your doing is touching two wires together or completing a circuit. This little jerry rigged contraption here I'll bet if I take it apart I'm gonna find a remote or a timer. This is serious shit Nikki. We're dealing with some dangerous people. I think they're sending us a message or definitely trying to scare us."

Nikki handed Jeremy back the tiny screws. "This must be about ZIOD MPXL. Are you sure nobody saw the bleeding Chinese guy hand you the flash drive? How do these people know that we have it? An average working joe wouldn't have the time or resources to stalk us like this. It's...." She paused for a moment, "It's like we're being hunted by Hollywood!"

Just hearing the word "Hollywood" put some trepidation in Jeremy's thoughts. If they were truly being hunted by Hollywood stars there was no limit to how far these "messages" could go. Hollywood stars had lots of money and resources. That would also mean lots of potentially dangerous acquaintances and long lost friends thirsty for the almighty dollar. Celebrities were known for being tenacious. *Should they just give ZIOD MPXL to the police?*

Jeremy grabbed Nikki's hand and cuddled it. "Nikki, listen to me carefully. They've already gone after me and now they're coming for you. We are no longer safe here in Marxtton Virginia. We need to jump off the grid and I'm talking a full nose dive and all. I know we're both addicted to our iPhones but we need to part with them for a while. I've been reading a lot and I know a safe place we can go away for a while until this all washes over. If we want to hold onto ZIOD MPXL it's not

fair for us to bring our families into this. It's way too dangerous."

Jeremy expected hemming and hawing but instead got a flirtatious grin from Nikki. She looked up for an adventure and even caressed his lanky arm. "Okay....so where are we going big adventure boy?"

"Tent City. Pack your bags lightly. Preferably a back pack and meet me over at my motorcycle. I have an extra helmet so it will be hard for them to recognize us. We're going to St.Louis Missouri."

CHAPTER 12

The white ivory ball circled graciously around the roulette wheel. Qwerty kept his fingers crossed as he always did and went about his usual chant.

"Come on black! Let's go black!" He said being sure to stand right in front of the wheel and not let his eyes drift away for even a nanosecond. The ball continued to spin in one direction as the wheel spun around in the other. Qwerty embraced himself for the exciting part as the ball neared the bottom and bounced around the metal obstacles. It did a cute little dance right before it landed on the red number 1.

"Red number one." Announced the Russian dealer. The dealer was cute but Qwerty didn't like her. He was convinced she was purposely rolling the roulette ball a certain way just so he would lose. He had once overheard one of her conversations to her coworkers last week when she had witnessed him plopping some big Charles Barkley bets on the table. *Yeah...looks like he's crying..* he had overheard her say. He wasn't entirely sure what her comment really meant but he never tipped her again after that. Besides, he was sure he once spotted little hairs under her armpits one day. Gross.

The cute little Russian girl finally made eye contact with Qwerty. "Hey Q....You're all done I take it?" Nobody in the casino ever knew his actual

name. Everybody always just referred to him as "Q".

Qwerty fished deep into his pockets but all he found was two bucks. It wasn't even enough for a minimum bet. He was out \$1200.00 so far for the day. "It's gonna go black. You'll see. I just got to make a quick run to the ATM machine."

Jazzy just smiled all innocent like just like she always did. She was amused by the weirdo that never gave up. Deep down inside she believed that "Q" was slightly demented. She never questioned where all the money came from but had surmised that maybe perhaps he had a wealthy relative that had passed and had left him a little something. Qwerty had told her once that he read in a book once that stated "Always finish your endeavors no matter what." Qwerty had promised her that his endeavor was to take all the casino's money. Evidently he didn't realize that "The House" always wins. It never stopped him from doubling up and chasing his bets until he lost more and more.

Qwerty slid his card into the ATM and tried to withdraw five hundred bucks. A message stating "You Must Wait 24hrs Before Next Withdraw" popped up on the screen.

"Screw you!" Said Qwerty tossing his complimentary soda all over the ATM screen. He crumpled the styrofoam cup and threw that onto the floor as well. Gambling was losing its euphoric rush and he really needed a quick fix. *Heroine maybe?* No. Qwerty never did drugs. The security guard at the door couldn't help but giggle as he made his way out the door.

"I'm guessing it's gonna be a long ride back from Hollywood tonight aye Q?" Said the security guard sensing Qwerty's frustration.

Qwerty was in no mood for jokes and made up his mind he was going to take his business from now on at another casino.

"Whatever....get a real job you stupid rent-a-cop. Have something to

show for your parents college investment."

The giggling subsided as Qwerty made his way out the golden doors. That was Qwerty for ya. Silver tongue.

When he finally arrived at his cherry red Ford Escort a voice within his mind began to taunt him. *Really? Qwerty...It's like that? As powerful as you are you're just gonna let those people in there take your money like that? What about the big black guy you giggled reading about in the paper that brought an axe into the casino and went to town on the slot machines. Don't you always keep a big huge lollipop inside of your trunk?*

The area he had parked along side of the building was very dark. Qwerty looked around for cameras and didn't see any. He was still angry and frustrated with the Good Times Casino. He unlocked his passengers side door and groped around in the glove box until he found his black leather gloves. It took him a good two minutes just to squeeze the gloves onto his hands as he had purposely bought them very small in case in the event that one day he would feel the need to fool a very perplexed jury. The old adage....*"If the glove don't fit...You must acquit."* -Johnny Cochran.

Qwerty popped open his trunk and peeled back the blue baby blanket concealing his massive blueberry lollipop that he had just recently purchased from a truck stop down south. Just before he grasped onto it a small red tiny dot caught the peripheral vision of his left eye. He looked up and noticed the security cam mounted in the ceiling's corner of the garage. Qwerty re-wrapped the blue baby blanket around the massive lollipop and then shut the trunk.

That security guy wasn't worth bloodying up my lollipop Qwerty thought to himself, *Besides, I'm not even in my copper suit.*

CHAPTER 13

Name brand clothes went flying in every direction as Jeremy ransacked his own bedroom. *Think, think, think* He constantly reminded himself. The goal was to pack extremely lightly and he even intended to roll his own clothes so everything would fit neatly inside of the back pack. Jeremy was always prepared for emergencies. They would need money, cold hard cash, he was prepared for that as well too. He dug through his sock and underwear drawers until he finally came across his home made necklace that only he knew about. A personally stitched together necklace with 15 curled up hundred dollar bills secretly woven into it. Nobody would ever suspect. It even had a chiseled tiny wooden cross on the bottom of it to fool anyone into believing he was Catholic. If and when they would need money, Jeremy could unstitch a one hundred dollar bill at a time without any suspicious pan handler or as he liked to call them "bum rushers" ever noticing.

Hand guns could get you in a lot of trouble with the authorities so Jeremy packed an intimidating fishing knife should Nikki and him find themselves in a bad situation. Jeremy made sure that all of his t-shirts he was packing were devoid of any logos or anything that would help people from identifying him. Just as he was tightly rolling up a t-shirt military style Nikki barged into his room holding a black motorcycle helmet.

Jeremy was a bit startled. "Oh my gosh you are fast. Ever consider working for the fire company? How did you find your helmet already?"

Nikki smiled. "I know your house inside and out. Did you forget how many times I used to come over and help you clean your room?" She giggled, "Ooh lookee..... Rolling your own clothes....a military brat wannabe?" She bantered.

Jeremy didn't know how to respond. "Keeps the wrinkles out. Gives me more space."

Nikki shook her head no and opened up the inside of her Jensen back pack so he could peek inside. "Nope,nope,nope you fool....vacuum sealer!" She proudly showed him how many articles of vacuum sealed clothing she had stuffed in her back pack. "Plus if it rains? Guess who's staying dry?" She said all proudly.

A changing thought had entered Jeremy's mind. *ZIOD MPXL...how should they keep that safe?*

"What about ZIOD MPXL? Shouldn't I be the one to hold onto it?"

Nikki showed him the strong rope string around her neck that used to have a plastic whistle dangling from it. She now had ZIOD MPXL safely secured to it. "I'm a girl and I'm attractive. I'm less likely to get robbed because any convict is gonna know the consequences for attacking me are too great. ZIOD will be staying with me."

Jeremy could tell she was serious and he knew there was no time to argue. He immediately started groping around Nikki's pants. Nikki backed up. "What are you doing? You know there's no time for that!"

He felt the bulge of her smart phone and removed it from her Jean pocket. "We can't take these things with. Anyone can get our numbers. They'll find us for sure if we keep these things on us. Mark my words."

Nikki twitched her eyes from the confusion. "How will we communicate? What if we need to call for help?"

Jeremy just shrugged his shoulders. "Good old fashioned pay phones I guess. I'm not even gonna chance bringing my GPS. I've been studying maps. I know my way around Missouri."

With everything happening so fast their situation was starting to remind Nikki of the movie Jeremy and her had just watched in theater last week. *The East*. Doing a complete nose dive off the grid. Embarking on an endeavor based on own personal and political beliefs. ZIOD MPXL was

not safe in the hands of the government in Nikki's eyes. She had already made up her mind that ZIOD MPXL was specifically meant only for her and Jeremy as a dying China man had accentuated his concern over the direction this country was headed.

Jeremy had everything he was taking all rammed into his Ozark Trail back pack but was having trouble zipping it shut. She placed her hands on her hips from watching all of the entertainment while he continued to push down harder onto the bag. Suddenly a terrible thought entered her mind. *BunBun....Who would watch over BunBun?*

She grabbed Jeremy's arm to get his attention. "What about BunBun? Who will be watching over my rabbit?"

Jeremy rolled his eyes. "Come on now Nikki. Your parents are smart. They'll figure it out. I really don't have the extra room on my motorcycle."

There trip was looking to be full of promising adventure. Unfortunately BunBun would have to be left behind.

CHAPTER 14

The vibration between her legs was nowhere nearly as exciting as a Harley Davidson. Nikki was already making up for it by tickling Jeremy's belly button every time she felt he was going too fast. 500cc's thrusting between her legs made the Kawasaki feel like one big tease. Jeremy always assured her that the big Harley Fat boys defeated the whole purpose of a motorcycle as he was convinced a sedan could probably get better gas mileage. As they weaved between traffic on 70 Jeremy tried to shout out to her without spitting inside his helmet.

"Would you please stop tickling the inside of my belly button? It's getting annoying!"

Nikki tickled it once again for good measure as she clung onto his waist. She even managed to dig a fuzzy out with her finger nail.

"You need to slow down a little babe. I don't think we should be bringing any attention to ourselves. Off-The-Grid remember?"

Her safety reminder got no reply but Jeremy did slow down to proper speed. Nikki always seemed to be right about things and she was definitely smarter than other girls he knew. He still felt like ZIOD MPXL belonged around his neck but he gave her credit for securing it in a safe place and not a shallow pocket where it could fly out. He looked into his handle bar mirror and noticed a government looking black Navigator that continued to let off the gas every time he turned his head to check his mirror. *Odd?*

Jeremy started getting curious so he let off the gas substantially this time and patiently waited for the black Lincoln Navigator to pass him on the left. Instead it continued to increase its stopping distance and he noticed the man driving it continued to lower his head as if he didn't want to be seen.

Nikki sensed something was amiss. "What's going on?" She shouted through her helmet, "Why you keep looking back?"

Jeremy couldn't hear what she said through the rushing winds screaming through the visor on his helmet. It didn't matter. He knew what she was yelling.

"I think we're being followed. Hold on while I switch lanes."

Nikki wrapped her arms tight around his waist. She was done tickling the fuzzies in his navel. Jeremy careened far over into the right lane and slowed down. He was sure to leave his right turn signal on for all to see.

"Are we getting off?" She asked nearly choking on her own jet black

hair. Loose strands continued to dance around the inside of her helmet.

Jeremy shouted back to her. "No we are not so I need you to hold on super tight."

He started onto the exit ramp and glanced in his mirror. The black Navigator did the same but Jeremy noticed it gave no turn signal. Just at the very last second Jeremy pulled away and slithered back out onto the highway crossing well over the white lines. Jeremy did okay but the Navigator squeaked its brakes and stopped not able to follow him back out onto traffic.

Nikki was startled. "Oh my gosh did you see that? Why did that black SUV try to follow us?"

Jeremy was a bit rattled himself. "I dunno. We're stopping at the next rest stop. This is getting ridiculous."

All 500cc's continued to entertain Nikki as the Kawasaki continued to perform well. Jeremy played rock music on the radio but it was difficult to make out. They cruised down I-70 for another 45 miles before Jeremy finally decided to pull into a rest area. All the big vibrations between her legs was making Nikki want to use the rest room really bad. She imagined Jeremy might be wanting to go potty as well.

When they finally found parking in a well lit area Jeremy did a quick inspection on the motorcycle chain. The muffler continued to make small ping sounds like it always did once he shut it off. Nikki left her back pack on as she got off the bike.

"I'm gonna use the little ladies room a while I'll be back in 10 minutes."

She watched Jeremy wipe the grease from the chain onto his brand new Levi's. "Yeah. I'm gonna do the same in a bit."

Nikki was already heading off as Jeremy contemplated whether or not it

was safe to leave his helmet with the bike. Evidently Nikki had already left hers on the seat. Jeremy chanced it and left the black helmet right next to Nikki's. He was already doing the "pee dance" and it would be hard to hold two helmets at the same time. He whistled Mary had a little Lamb as he made his way to the men's room. He didn't see anyone around but the lighting from the light posts gave him comfort not to mention he spotted a camera near the vending machines.

As Jeremy made his way to the rest room's entrance he couldn't help but notice a strange looking man clad in.....*What on earth is that? Some sort of mesh copper body suit? Why was the stranger holding a massive lollipop ten times bigger than a frisbee?*

The stranger in the copper body suit hung out in the dark corner and didn't say a word. Jeremy was getting bad vibes from the mysterious man and already decided to hold it in and just wait for Nikki. Jeremy couldn't see copper man's face but he really got freaked out when he could make out an evil grin more sinister looking than the Joker on Batman. That's when Jeremy watched the stranger slowly show what was in his other hand. *Was that a dead man's switch?*

The last thing Jeremy saw was the copper boogie man's evil smile before there was loud shattering sounds of glass blasting from all directions. Myriad pieces of glass bulb shattered onto the concrete sounding like a mirror that had been destroyed.

That's when everything went black.

CHAPTER 15

Little shavings from the scratch off tickets covered a good part of his mattress. Trevor really didn't care. He wasn't even sure if he had any intentions of swiping them all onto the floor. \$40.00 worth of \$2.00 tickets piled up on his bed each and every one of them crumpled up. All losers. Trevor really didn't care, he had been losing all day long

anyways. He hadn't played scratch off tickets since he was 15 but he hadn't been heart broken since then either. He'd rather risk \$40.00 with a minute chance of something good happening for his day then live with his pains since the video clip. He was scratching away at the very last ticket when there was a knock at his bedroom door. Trevor didn't even care who it was.

"Go away...please!"

It was mother. "Trevor honey, you've been in there all day. Are you okay? Patricia is at the door. She says you haven't responded to her texts or calls all day."

Trevor felt the bile rising in his throat. He was just getting close to erasing her from his mind. "Just tell her I'm not here. Besides, my car is at the garage anyways so she won't believe I'm here."

Trevor's mother was respectful. Even though the door was closed she didn't barge in. She was one of the few mothers out there that firmly believed in the saying *What mother doesn't know can't hurt mother*. Besides, she liked bragging to her friends that she's never caught Trevor ever with a joint or any other drugs for that matter.

"Honey what do you want me to tell her? She's very concerned and confused. She says you two were supposed to go out tonight."

Trevor scratched away the last part of the scratch off. Straight loser. He already knew what his next stress move would be. Grand Theft Auto 3. As he sprung from his springy mattress a business card hopped out of his pocket and landed on the floor. Evidently Trevor had forgotten all about the business card and the mysterious confrontation with that weirdo jogging in a copper body suit. Trevor had seen all the commercials on television praising this new technology for athletes. But that was only for knee braces and socks. *An entire body suit?* Now that was just nuts. He picked up the business card from the flower shop and checked it closely once again.

He flipped it over. The card read *Never Trust Your Eyes*
What was the card supposed to mean? *Never Trust Your Eyes?* Who talks like that?

There was a loud knock at his bedroom door. It wasn't the usual light rat-tat-tat kind of knock that mother usually did. It was rude and obnoxious.

Trevor couldn't help himself. "Who is it?"

"It's Patricia. We need to talk."

CHAPTER 16

A euphoric rush permeated throughout Nikki's body when they passed the Big Arch in St.Louis and she caught a glimpse of Hopeville AKA "Tent City". The first thought that came to her mind was *Oh my gosh, Jeremy is a lot smarter than I thought he was.* Tent City was literally located within a triangle of two major highways. The chances of someone being able to creep up on you was literally zero. Unless of course....they were already there. Nikki had never seen anything like it but the fire damage she could see? Left her a little bit scared.

The motorcycle didn't stop
and now she thought Jeremy might be changing his mind. She yelled into the wind. "Isn't that it over there babe?"

Jeremy shouted through his helmet. "Yeah it is. But we are parking at a different location close to it." He slowed down a little bit and took a dirt road that led to a small stream. Eventually it turned into a gully. He cut the engine and drifted down towards the drainage system. Nikki was getting very confused.

"Please don't tell me that we are living inside of that pipe....you're crazy Jeremy...besides...it's blocked off by that metal cage."

This was the part where Jeremy got to show off. If Nikki thought Indiana Jones was cool she would really be up for this adventure.

"No it's not." Said Jeremy showing Nikki just how easy the metal drainage guard un-latched. He eased his crotch rocket into the nice dark tunnel. Nikki was impressed.

"Oh my gosh! How did you know that you could take that guard off?"

Jeremy smiled. "I've been here before. Long story. Helped my cousin out years ago once when he was on the lam."

The crotch rocket was low enough to the ground that Jeremy had no troubles easing it inside the dark cement tube. Nikki was enjoying the adventure so far but the movie *"IT"* by Stephen King was already coming into mind. She would not take it too well if a serial killer clown came out from the darkness of the pipe. She still had some important questions that she needed answered right away.

"So I'm guessing we're supposed to slip out here every time we need to get on the bike?"

Jeremy nodded his head. "Uh-huh."

Nikki was still confounded. "Why? Why not just take it to Tent City?"

Jeremy laughed. "Are you crazy? We're both gullible teenagers with all of our teeth. We would get bum rushed like crazy if we brought a piece of motorized equipment to Tent City. You think those people own cars?"

Nikki just shrugged her shoulders. "What if they see us picking up the motorcycle?"

Jeremy grinned all impish like and dug around inside his back pack. He pulled out two tiny CB hand radios. "Old school communication

sweetie. If we have to we'll learn morse code."

Nikki laughed then grabbed what was supposed to be "her" radio. "I think you should start with learning sign language first babe."

Jeremy chuckled as he set the kick stand. "I know what the middle finger is supposed to mean that's all I need to know. With that metal drainage guard nobody is gonna think to come snooping in here. This bike should be safe and they would need a key anyhow. Are you ready to do this? Are you ready to see Tent City?"

Nikki cringed but then showed no fear. "From what I saw of it from the highway it looked like a good portion of it got burned. Could've been some system haters perhaps...you know there is a lot of middle class workers stuck at dead end jobs that carp on people collecting food stamps. Out in the suburbs they even sport dumb bumper stickers like "Welfare is not an Occupation". They'll bitch 24/7 but how often do you see those people throwing their jobs away just so they too can jump on the boat? If Welfare is so fun then why isn't everybody doing it?"

Jeremy grabbed Nikki's helmet and dangled it on the right side of the handle bar. He placed his own on the left. "There's no time to politick Nikki. I do love your theory though. Are you ready to walk up the hill?"

CHAPTER 17

Nikki constantly found herself slipping her hand between her breasts and feeling around for ZIOD MPXL. She knew that the thumb drive was secure around her neck but she could imagine what might happen if she lost it. As they trekked up the hill Jeremy couldn't help but notice Nikki's constant grabbing at herself. He eventually felt compelled to say something.

"They're gonna figure out your necklace has substantial value if you

keep grabbing at it. Don't you think maybe we should just bury it?"

She slowed down a bit and fondled the necklace once more. She didn't know how long they would be staying in "Tent City" and was already having concerns about her upcoming *Time Of The Month*. "Noway we can't bury it that would be risky and foolish. I still want to check out all the files and programs in it and we would have to keep digging it up. Not to mention dogs have good sniffers you know. This flash drive has our spoor all over it and who's to say a dog wouldn't dig it up?" Nikki went on..."And if we buried it wouldn't somebody notice the muddled pile of dirt? What if we needed it in a hurry? Would we have time to dig it up?"

Jeremy chewed on that one for a while. Nikki was the reason he had so little interest in American girls. Intelligence is sexy. Nikki's high intellect made her very sexy. Nikki suddenly stopped dead in her tracks and swung her arm out like a rail road crossing arm to stop Jeremy as well. She pulled out a pack of Marlboro red cigarettes. Jeremy was completely stunned.

"What are you doing! We don't smoke!"

Nikki just laughed and lit a cigarette. "If you want to get in you got to fit in. I'm not gonna inhale you dummy. I'm just gonna blow a bunch of smoke into my clothes. I think you should do the same. It's a known fact. Non-smokers tend to have more money than smokers. I don't know about you but I don't like getting bum rushed!"

Jeremy rolled his eyes. "I dunno cigarettes are expensive. I guess you're right though. It's cheaper to part with a 25 cent cigarette then to constantly get nagged for a couple bucks. You do know there's a good chance these people might ask for a cigarette every 5 minutes."

Nikki blew big puffs of Marlboro into her blue and white t-shirt. "I'm not worried about it. They'll leave us alone once they see them run out."

After Nikki convinced Jeremy to douse his clothes with Marlboro they finally made it to what they believed was the main entrance of Tent City. Nikki was surprised to see just as many spent gift cards lying on the ground as there was cigarettes. She could hear the hooting and hollering from the meth crowd playing craps in a well lit tent. She was filled with excitement and adventure but still couldn't help but wonder. She held Jeremy's hand and whispered into his ear.

"Are we going to fit in here? Don't we need a cover story? We are both young, healthy, and attractive. Won't they suspect we're running from something?"

Jeremy paused and looked her straight in the face. "I wouldn't smile much while we're here.....lemme see the inside of your mouth."

She hesitated for a bit but then dutifully opened up and showed him her pearly whites. Jeremy looked at her teeth that were whiter than peppermint chiclets.

"I thought so....they're more immaculate than a news anchor's. Try not to smile much when we're here....you want some black goop I picked up from a Halloween store to fit in better?"

Nikki giggled. "Nah, you're being paranoid. I'll try not to smile much. What is the old saying? Misery loves company? I imagine we'll be able to find some just everyday people down on their luck."

"Or disabled people." Corrected Jeremy, "They might not have family to take care of them. Ya can't get very far on an SSI check these days."

"Psst!" Hissed Nikki, "They all manage to cheat somehow. Bet the government would love to do away with untraceable cash these days. Guess the girls at the strip clubs wouldn't want paper cuts down their cracks from all the swiping of sharp plastic."

Her comment made Jeremy laugh as well. *Where was Nikki's sudden*

sense of humor coming from? Was she just that excited to be here?

suddenly he felt Nikki grab his arm as if she wanted him to protect her from sudden danger. It was dark outside and the little camp fires only provided so much light. Evidently there was stipulations on the size of the fires since just weeks ago Tent City had almost burnt down. A fat long haired man came stumbling out the tent to their right. It only took Nikki and Jeremy all but two seconds to detect alcohol on his breath. The man accosted them but in a non-threatening way. He talked to Jeremy first and tried to hand him a 40oz bottle concealed in a brown paper bag. Jeremy knew better than to accept the proffered bottle of malt liquor. It was so typical of the homeless to play this game. They usually did this to put a guilt trip on you when they ask you for a couple of bucks right after you have already imbibed some of their last supply of booze.

Jeremy pushed away the bottle. "I'm okay man. I'll get a terrible stomach ache and throw up if I drink that stuff. It interacts with my medication."

The portly fellow took a few steps back but had no qualms with hiding his hairy flubbery belly hanging out. "Oh understandable boss....hey...my mother is in the hospital up in Brooklyn and I'm trying to scrounge up some change for a bus ticket to go see her. I wouldn't suppose you have a nickel would you?"

Before Jeremy could do anything Nikki quickly reached into her Jean pocket and pulled out 67 cents worth of loose change. Both Jeremy and the homeless man gaped as they watched Nikki pull away not one but two nickels from the loose change. Jeremy pushed away at Nikki's arm and fished out three dollar bills from his pocket and handed it to the fat guy. It was gross just how greasy the man's hair was.

"She was a foreign exchange student when I first met her. Her parents died in a car crash and I took her under my wing. She's just a little confused that's all. Say hello to your mother for me."

And out came the next move. Jeremy had even anticipated it. "Aw

thanks man. You sure you don't want a few swigs of this? It's high content."

Jeremy pushed away the bottle once again. "I'm good man...I'm good...go take care of your mother."

CHAPTER 18

Mrs.Ballins liked having the entire house to herself. Ever since Jeremy has been spending all his time at Nikki's house she couldn't help but notice less trips to the grocery store. She wasn't the type to charge her boy rent for staying a "Momma's Boy" so there was never really any way to compensate herself for all the gallons of milk Jeremy had gone through. And of course the frequent depletion of food from all the TV dinners that always disappeared. And the only thing that stayed the same? Jeremy's laundry. Every professional peek-a-boo mother knew that there was no point in taking the risk of getting caught snooping around a teenager's bedroom. Dirty laundry left clues like no other. Mrs.Ballins was very much curious about the laundry shortage as she folded Jeremy's clothes.

SUDDENLY THE DOORBELL rang. It startled Mrs.Ballins as she had not heard anyone coming into the driveway. *Someone selling Girl Scout cookies?* She put down a pair of Levis that weren't completely dry yet and got up to answer the door. When she swung the door open she felt like she shrunk an entire foot as the two men dressed in black suits were very tall. Just being in their presence felt very intimidating as these two guys looked like they belonged in a Matrix movie. They even had the funky ear pieces.

"May I help you?" She finally spit out while still gawking awkwardly.

They both flashed shiny credentials but had no intentions of removing their dark sunglasses. The one on the left did all the talking.

"Mrs. Ballins we're from Washington and would like to have a word with you....it's about your son Jeremy....may we come inside?"

Mrs. Ballins cupped her mouth with her right hand and had a petrified look on her face. "Oh my gosh! This is about Jeremy??? Is he in trouble?"

This time the other secret service agent talked. "We hope not...may we just come inside and have a word with you?"

Mrs. Ballins had nothing to hide other than a fifth of vodka she always kept hidden inside the toilet receptacle. It was a brand new toilet and she knew nobody would ever have a reason to remove the lid and peek inside. "I was just folding laundry but you two are welcome to come inside and chat. Coffee?"

Agent Dreko pushed up on his sunglasses. "Oh no that's quite fine. We shouldn't be here too long. We just wanted to come in for a while and ask some questions."

"Oh sure, sure. Just have a seat wherever. You don't mind if I finish up folding while you guys fire away do you?"

The other agent, Agent Kolt grinned at her humor as the two Matrix look-a-likes took a seat on the sofa. They had no intentions of making her nervous with yellow legal pads. She was secretly being recorded so they could jot notes later on their own time. It wasn't very hard to use the voice memo apps on the smart phones these days and it was easy to slip in a shirt pocket undetected. Mrs. Ballins continued to fold clothes while they *"fired away"*

Agent Dreko started off while his partner struggled adjusting himself on the super squishy sofa. "Mrs. Ballins can you tell us how long Jeremy has been missing? We have been trying to call him on his cell and we also took notice his motorcycle is gone."

Mrs. Ballins hesitated and paused momentarily from flipping a sock that had been turned inside out. "My son Jeremy comes and goes as he pleases. He's a good kid but he's at that age now where it's typical for him to leave for a couple days without calling me. Especially now that he has that Chinese friend of his...oh what is her name....wait I remember now...Nikki"

Dreko continued. "So they're dating?"

She shook her head and unfurled a long white sock that had evidently become crunchy over time. "No!" She said while seeking its mate, "Jeremy says she has strict Chinese parents. They like him. But apparently she is not allowed to date....What is all this about? Is my son in trouble? There's no way he would be stupid enough to run off with that girl and I'm pretty sure she's over 18 anyways."

Agent Kolt cut in and raised his hand to settle her down. "Mam just to be candid the secret service doesn't devote time to chase down runaways. This is an issue concerning national security."

Mrs. Ballins cupped her mouth in shock. "Oh no, no, you have it all wrong. My son is not like one of those freaky trench coat mafia kids and he already gets plenty of attention. He's quite normal. The women chase him around at school. I assure you he's not involved in any terrorist activity."

Now it was Dreko's turn. "Mrs. Ballins were not accusing Jeremy of plotting any terrorism or running away to join ISIS or anything like that. We have reason to believe he has something extremely dangerous. Something that might not necessarily cause physical malice but could easily trigger any typical joe to engage in some serious detrimental malice."

Jeremy's mother was completely lost. "Huh?" Was all she could spit out.

Dreko droned on. "We have reason to believe Jeremy stole evidence from a crime scene. There's a missing flash drive or thumb drive whatever you want to call it but it is imperative that we get it back ASAP or your son's life could be in danger."

She stopped folding laundry altogether. "You must have the wrong Jeremy. My son never mentioned anything about being near a crime scene. His friends work at the Geek Squad. I'm guessing it would have to be white collar crime?"

Dreko brought her up to speed. "There are casualties mam. Four of them. All. Chinese."

Mrs. Ballins threw down a sock. "I knew it! Chinese! I'll bet that new friend of his had something to do with it. She sure looked Chinese!"

Kolt's turn. He slightly raised a hand from his lap. "It's okay mam...relax....nobody's been charged yet and nobody's in trouble... We just need to know where we can find Jeremy that's all. We're mostly concerned about his safety."

"His safety? I got one of those daredevil kids. Sure he has a nerdy side to him but I didn't raise him up as one of those fat dorky kids crying over fruit roll ups. Jeremy is fine wherever he is at....I've never seen him afraid of anything...why his safety?"

Agent Kolt reached into his shirt pocket and plucked out a photo of Qwerty in a full adult copper mesh body suit. The suit even covered the entire face so Qwerty couldn't be identified.

"Mrs Ballins, we have reason to believe that the flash drive belongs to this freak right here that we refer to as "Copper Man". He is extremely dangerous and wanted for questioning. He knows better than to leave Google paper trails and will find ways to hunt down your son. This guy we are after will chew 18 different types of gum and constantly change his spending patterns just to screw with our heads because he knows

we've been watching him for years now. We need to get to your son before that happens."

CHAPTER 19

The smell of sizzling bacon in the morning couldn't be any more relaxing. Jeremy hadn't brought a tent along for their trip and it wasn't because he had forgotten to do so. His plan was simple. Bounce around and keep moving. It was not safe for them to have any kind of address whatsoever. Not even a tent.

Mrs. Planico continued to flip strips of sinewy bacon as Nikki and Jeremy continued to pretend sleeping in the corner of her tent. This 8 man tent was all Mrs. Planico owned and it was waterproof. She had no problems letting Nikki and Jeremy spend the night and her people skills assured her they were both completely harmless. Mrs. Planico had absolutely nobody in life except for a social worker that visited her every two weeks to assure her that her name was inching up the waiting list for section 8 housing. She knew she had better take good care of Jeremy and Nikki as she predicted high earnings later in their lives which would contribute to the tax dollars she would need to bolster her free government housing. Life had been very difficult for Mrs. Planico, a Spanish lady that had experienced much adversity over the years through no fault of her own.

Nikki was the first to roll out of the fart sack. She adjusted her long black hair as she sat up from the sleeping bag. "Good morning Mrs. Planico, thank you so much for letting Jeremy and I spend the night."

Little spurts of hot grease bubbles flew from the pan slightly burning Mrs. Planico's hands. She had become inure to pain over the years. Mottled skin and pock marks like you wouldn't believe. There was no stopping old age and shoddy health care. "Oh it's no problem at all...you can stay here as long as you like...I never use up all my food stamps and

could really use the company."

Jeremy stirred around in the sleeping bag. He hadn't slept well. Not with the reoccurring nightmare of the China Man biting off his own thumb. He rubbed his eyes and looked over at the two of them. "I smell bacon.... I smell grease...are you da police?" He joked.

Mrs. Planico let out a boisterous laugh. "It's because of the "Poh-lice" that I'm in this mess. They took my son from me. He used to take wonderful care of me."

Nikki slid her butt a little closer to the old lady to console her. "Why? What did he do?"

Mrs. Planico got teary eyed at the thought. She was always trying to forget. "He was a good son...good provider too..just got tied up with the wrong people...he has nothing to be ashamed of." She pointed out.

Nikki was very intrigued. "Mrs. Planico, you don't mind talking about it do you? Some of my second cousins got caught up in some gang nonsense. The oldest one might be in there ten years!"

Mrs. Planico wiped away a rolling tear drop. "Ricardo is doing 8 years. I'm not even sure he will make it. They harass him every day." She pulled a wallet sized picture from her back pocket. "Just look at him! Look at the bruise marks under his eyes! Even that Ferguson cop didn't have bruise marks this bad!"

Nikki knew exactly what Mrs. Planico was referring to when she mentioned *Ferguson cop*. It had been on the news all week long leaving myriad opinions. People really wanted to understand. *Why couldn't a police officer manhandle an 18 year old? Where were the substantial contusions and lacerations? Where was the taser?* It all didn't make sense to Nikki. It all appeared to her as another pretty boy cop getting bailed out by the brotherhood. But she would not waste time politicking with Mrs. Planico about Ferguson. Plenty of trouble makers had

subsequently left quite a conflagration statement to pinch the white man's wallet just a bit.

Nikki patted Mrs. Planico's back to console her. "Well is there some way we could help maybe?"

The Spanish widow wiped her eye with a tissue while casting furtive glances at Jeremy. He was still running away morning eye buggars. "It's complicated you see. I got very sick and we needed money. Ricardo was only making \$8.00 an hour over at the furniture warehouse and my medical bills were piling up. He got recruited by the Mexican mafia to be a mule and smuggle in a kilo I think it was. They tried to give my boy twenty years if he didn't sing like a bird. Every day he has to switch cells now cuz the other inmates keep finding out he's hot."

Jeremy was eavesdropping. The smell of bacon still had his utmost attention but the conversation still piqued his interest. "Mrs. Planico... What do you mean by hot?"

"He squealed so he wouldn't have to do twenty...I'm sure at this point he might be wishing he could do a respectable twenty then an excruciating eight!"

Nikki cut in. "No Mrs. Planico you don't mean that."

Some sniffing. "But it's true! The inmates harass him everyday in there and the staff can't do anything about it. He tries lying about it but the inmates ask to see his paperwork! He's been through twenty cell mates and he says the first thing they ask is to see his paperwork!"

Jeremy was still confused. "Paper work? Why would he have paperwork in jail?"

Nikki explained it for Mrs. Planico so she could continue sobbing. "When they get arrested the government gives them papers describing the entire arrest and all the charges. The papers always list whether they

cooperated or not."

"You mean like ratted?" Jeremy asked.

"Yeah ratted. Snitched. The authorities encourage snitching then feed the rats to the wolves. It's not fair. The hot boys constantly have to look over their shoulder 24/7. That's no way to do time Jeremy. I suggest you stay away from drugs altogether."

Mrs. Planico cut in. "Oh I could tell right away you two don't do drugs. It's why I let you spend the night. Ricardo never did drugs either. He just did it for the money so he could help me out." She said burying her head and crying some more.

A light bulb went off in Nikki's head. *ZIOD MPXL*. *ZIOD MPXL* had an amazing photoshop program built into it. Mrs. Planico's son could mail those papers and Jeremy could doctor those papers in minutes making them look very, very, real.

She wrapped her arm around Mrs. Planico a little more snugly and gave Jeremy *The Look*. Jeremy just curtly nodded in approval.

"Mrs. Planico....what if I told you that there might be a way that we can help you and your son?"

She fumbled around her cleavage for the flash drive.

CHAPTER 20

"And I thank you again for your kindness sir." Said the bartender collecting the three dollar tip for the 12 ounce draft of Landshark beer. Qwerty carefully picked up the stein but the bartender quickly stopped him before he could turn around and walk away. Qwerty had always been known for being a big tipper but the English bar tender guy had

never seen him purchase beer like this.

"Sir, I must ask out of curiosity... This has to be at least your fifth trip up here tonight and I have yet to see you purchase a single beer for yourself. Would you like one on the house?"

Qwerty smiled. "I thank you but I don't drink. It interacts with my psychotropic medication. These Landsharks are for my brother...he's going through a divorce." Lied Qwerty.

The English bar tender quickly plucked a wash cloth and scrubbed the inside of a frothy mug. "Oh...I'm so sorry to hear that. Are you sure he should be drinking?"

Qwerty gave the bar tender the old used car salesman smile. The smile that usually made people nervous. His brother wasn't going through divorce. His brother worked for the FBI and Qwerty needed information. *Liquor loosens the tongue* It's why Qwerty never drank. He'd watched too many detective Dateline mystery shows over the years. It just seemed that there was too many episodes where the police would catch a break because the killer had one too many at the bar and couldn't keep himself from spilling the beans. People didn't have to know that over the years he had been secretly killing people with a massive ten pound lollipop. He promised himself to take that secret with him to the grave. He winked at the English bar tender.

"He'll be okay....he's with me."

The bar tender dipped the mug into some sanitizer. "Well I thank you once again sir...times are tough and you're awfully kind."

I do that so the peek-a-boo investigators will think I have classy style Qwerty thought to himself. He didn't have any friends but he always imagined in his mind that he was somehow a part of that Mickey Blue Eyes mafia shit. There were a lot of fantasies he tried to act out in his schizophrenic mind and he occasionally wore a fedora just to look cool.

Taking care of bell hops and bar tenders had always been a part of it. Qwerty had once left a fifty dollar tip to a guy just for parking his car when all he had in his bank account was \$200.00.

The smooth frosty Land Shark made Qwerty's left hand near soaking wet. Qwerty was very much right handed but he purposely walked towards his brother's table carrying it in his left. *Curveball* was what he liked to refer to his little power move by. He was always convinced that somebody was watching. If he ever looked up and saw a camera he always thought for sure it was being monitored 24/7 and constantly taking pictures of him. Qwerty even went as far as to purposely keep his wrist watch on his right hand when it felt more natural to keep it on his left. He had been like that since boyhood. Every child hood picture showed the watch on a different arm. *Never Leave A Pattern* was a perfect adage for every serial killer to live by.

Qwerty placed the frothy stein right in front of his brother.

"Oh thanks Q. You seem in a good mood today. You up in roulette again?"

"You bet!" Lied Qwerty. He took a seat next to his brother and noshed on some crinkle cut fries. He hated the crinkly kind but that was all the bar had. Fortunately he was able to doctor them up a bit with some old bay seasoning. The *"Breaking News"* headline on the television suddenly caught the two brothers eyes. Big red captions read *"Second shooting suspect identified in Chinese shootout."*

Agent Dreko (Qwerty's Brother) took a huge gulp from his Land Shark then wiped his mouth as he gawked at the television. "The whole thing stinks. We really have nothing to go on. I would love to know what's so bloody important on that flash drive that a bunch of crazy Chinkers would kill for."

Qwerty silenced his brother. "Shhhhh.... This ain't your typical red neck bar. Let's not say Chinkers."

Dreko rolled his eyes then took another big gulp. "Yeah whatever. I don't think anyone cares out here. I just wish they would tie up the loose ends on this whole Chinker case."

Q knew he could finally worm his way into some furtive prying. "Didn't you mention earlier they think some young kid stole the flash drive after the big shootout?"

Dreko's upper lip started to sweat. It was a sure sign he had too many. *Liquor loosens the tongue.* "Yeah they found a surveillance tape from a camera down the street of some Jeremy kid running pretty fast on foot....with jeans on so clearly he wasn't jogging...It's all circumstantial... We really have nothing concrete."

Qwerty pried a little more. "So you actually got to talk to this Jeremy kid then?"

Agent Dreko grunted. "Tried to. The little punk ran away on his motorcycle with some Chinese girl. My boss isn't too happy about the damage I left with the Navigator."

Qwerty was lost. "Huh?"

Dreko took another chug. "Yeah interviewed the mother. The whole story is a hoot. The next day after we interviewed the mother she called us to tell us about her son's cell phone she found. She went through his texts. Turns out the kid maybe struggles with paranoia a bit because in his texts he talks about actually believing that he is being stalked by movie celebrities...It's all weird...the kid believes in his teenage mind that he is actually being hunted by Hollywood!"

Qwerty couldn't help but chuckle. *Was he already considered a Hollywood celebrity? But how? Nobody but that one News Anchor really knew him!* He reached for another crinkle fry. "So what's all this got to do with damage to the company's Navigator?"

Dreko's beer was down to the dregs. "Humph! Tried to follow the little bastard on 70. Guess he figured it out and careened off the exit ramp at the last second like Evil Kneval. Crazy stuff! I nearly took out a big yellow sign."

Qwerty felt his next question slipping towards the very tip of his tongue. He was a professional so he had to ask the question just right as to be sure to not go overboard with the interest. He mulled for a while and then figured out how to ask it without being too direct. He really needed a solid lead but he also knew he couldn't take too long with asking. He took another bite of the French fry.

"Oh out on 70....what let me guess.... Happened near Indianapolis?"

Dreko pursed his frothy lips. "Nah... Spotted them further out west. Had to watch that crotch rocket of his slip right between the big arch. And I certainly don't mean McDonalds."

The Big Arch?

Then it dawned on Qwerty. St.Louis Missouri. Then he chewed on the thought of the crotch rocket slipping away between the big arch in St.Louis. *Where would some teenage kid probably with no money go to hide in a city like that?*

Everything started to sink in finally. Things were now starting to make sense to Copper Man. The answer was just so plain and simple. Where would a smart teenager hide in a big city with eyes?

TENT CITY

CHAPTER 21

The dilapidated charter bus donated by the city served quite a useful purpose. At least ten orange extension cords ran out from the windows of the bus and into the tents. One of those orange lines ran right into Mrs. Planico's tent. Jeremy needed it for the printer. He was printing out a brand new 36 page indictment for Mrs. Planico's son Ricardo. A new indictment that portrayed Ricardo as just another crack head that just so happened to get caught with drugs. NO CO-DEFENDANTS.

Mrs. Planico watched intently as warm papers spewed from the printer's mouth. She examined each one closely. "Oh my! How do you people do this it looks so real! You even have the prosecutor's signature on here!"

Jeremy looked over at Nikki. Nikki just gave him a look basically that said *Go Fish*.

"Oh it's nothing too difficult Mrs. Planico. Just using a newer edition of photoshop that's all. I've always been good with computers."

Mrs. Planico fondled the papers. They were still warm from the printer. "How will I get this to my son?"

Nikki cut in. "I would use registered mail not regular mail. They screen regular mail and might have some questions about it. Registered mail has to be open right in front of the inmates and the guards don't take the time to read it. They only check it for contraband."

Jeremy looked over at Nikki and gave her a quizzical look. *Jeez He thought to himself. Nikki sure knows way too much about jail. Isn't that kind of odd?*

Mrs. Planico was no stranger to playing the system. She wasn't about to use up the rest of her bus tokens to get into the city to mail Ricardo's new faux indictment. Not when she wasn't 100% sure that their plan would work.

"We do not have a post office here in Tent City. I do not know how to

send registered mail and it is painful for a disabled woman like myself to squeeze into a crowded bus. Is there some way you two could mail this to my son for me?"

Jeremy looked over at Nikki and nodded. It was time they got out for a while and took a break from Tent City for a while. Besides, Mrs. Planico had housed and fed them and they owed her a favor. Nikki pulled on her long jet black hair as she always did when she was deep in thought.

"Jeremy and I can actually do that today Mrs. Planico. With your son's situation I would imagine the sooner the better."

Mrs. Planico gave Nikki a hug to thank her. Nikki couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to have Mrs. Planico for a real mother. *Would she make her eat a carrot all the way down to the stubbly nubblly? Would every single kernel have to be eaten on an ear of corn?* Mrs. Planico finally let go and then dug around in her flowery satchel until a faint jingle sound could be heard. She plucked out two bus tokens and displayed them both in the palm of her hand.

"I have some spare bus tokens you can use. Here go on, take them."

Nikki slightly pushed her hand away. "Oh that's quite alright. Jeremy and I already have season bus passes. Save them so you can continue to visit your son." She lied. She had no intentions of admitting Jeremy had a motorcycle. She just didn't know Mrs. Planico all that well just yet.

Mrs. Planico placed the tokens back into her satchel and looked relieved. "Okay gracias, gracias!" Was all she could think to say.

Nikki took the 36pg faux indictment and placed it into her back pack and then motioned Jeremy to get up from off his can. "We're going into town to go get this done. Thank you for lunch Mrs. Planico. Is it okay if we come back later tonight?"

"Oh sure, sure, you two are welcome at any time. My friend Susan

might stop by but I think you guys will like her. She just needs to hide from her crazy knife wielding boyfriend for a while until he straightens himself out. She's a very nice lady. I think you will like being around her."

"Okay then." Said Jeremy unzipping the tent and poking his head out. *Crazy knife wielding boyfriend? Only in Tent City.*

Nikki followed Jeremy out of the tent while waving goodbye to Mrs. Planico. Jeremy already had a good lead on her and she had to vamoose a little just to catch up with him. "Shouldn't we maybe keep it down a little about ZIOD MPXL?" She suggested.

Jeremy led the way down the hill. "Ah...she doesn't have a clue. You can doctor any papers you want with today's photoshop aps. She's probably just guessing I'm good with computers. We just need to be sure to keep the doctored videos hush hush before the word slips out and Hollywood figures out where they can find us."

Nikki was now walking abreast of him. "You really believe that Hollywood stars are all in a tizzy over all of this? What if it is something else that is hunting us?"

"Aw come on Nikki don't be ridiculous. We don't have any enemies out there and it all makes sense...think about it... Those celebrities are all spoiled....ZIOD MPXL gives them all some serious competition. If ZIOD gets into the hands of the public it will be every screen writers dream. Do you think Hollywood likes paying millions to make those movies? And there's all the props and...and of course the waste on top... Deleted scenes...I mean hello... Hollywood don't want ZIOD released to the public. It would easily cut their pay in half!"

They slowly wended down the grassy hill towards the gully so they could get to the motorcycle. Nikki just wouldn't shut up. "So what's our plan then? Just keep running? How will we know when they have given up trying to find us?"

Jeremy had to think about it. "I dunno...I mean this flash drive we have... It's a lot like drugs...it can be used for both good and evil....can we really trust the American people with something that could easily destroy this country? In a weird way I almost feel like we are transporting a Weapon Of Mass Destruction."

At those words the thumb drive suddenly felt like ice between her breasts. *Did Jeremy just refer to ZIOD MPXL as a weapon of mass destruction?*

CHAPTER 22

It had been many,many years since the notorious "*CopperMan*" had gotten a taste of his own medicine. Just twenty seconds ago his big ten pound lollipop had been pushed right up against his neck and the big hardened piece of candy was getting rammed right into his rib cage. He was right on the verge of coughing up blood. The two burly hobos were nowhere close to relenting. The bigger one kept Qwerty's lollipop pushed right into his gut as he lay helplessly on the floor of their tent.

"You got a lot of explaining to do Popi! You come creeping around here in that funky body suit with this enormous lollipop? What you some creep trying to pick up little kids? We don't tolerate pedophiles around here. Where you get this big lollipop anyways? This thing big enough to kill someone!"

They slowly eased up on the lollipop's big stick so Qwerty could reply. He hadn't been roughed up in years and could barely catch his breath. "I ain't no pedophile man! I'm just bringing the lollipop to an old friend that's all. I ain't got no beef with you two."

The two homeless men looked at each other debating what to do next. They were both prior military service with chronic alcohol problems

which had led to their homelessness. Although they had been discharged years ago they still paraded around in their BDUs (Battle Dress Uniforms) that they had picked up at a military surplus store on the interstate. So many tours in Afghanistan had given them the ability to spot danger. They had already dubbed Qwerty a "potentially dangerous man". Something just didn't stick right with his *cute little story*.

The swarthy one continued poking Qwerty with the massive lollipop. "So then what's with the dumbass body suit? I ain't never seen anybody in one of those?"

Qwerty was at a loss for words. It had been many years since he had been jumped by anybody. He was always used to being the one with the upper hand. He hemmed and hawed until he could conjure up a legit excuse for his funky copper body suit. "Haven't you heard of the benefits always talked about on the television of the new product copper fit?"

The two Gi-Joe wannabes looked at each other then shook their heads. "No. We don't watch no TV around here. What's it supposed to do? Why are you wearing it?"

Qwerty was able to reply a lot quicker this time. "All the athletes now these days are wearing the new copper fit knee braces, elbow pads, etcetera. I have arthritis all over my entire body so I wear a copper body suit to feel a lot better. This copper technology really works. Keeps the pain away."

The other one still wasn't buying CopperMan's story. He towered over Qwerty as he still lay helplessly in the corner of the tent. "Ain't nobody gonna come out here to the badlands just to deliver a lollipop. I not buy your story poppa. We just roughed you up and you didn't try to cry for help. I seen people like you before. You hiding from something. How much money you got on you Mr.CopperMan?"

The mentioning of "money" miraculously caused Qwerty to come up

with a second wind. So many times in life people had always "short chumped" him. Even the cute little college bound girls momentarily working at Mickey D's had a way of ringing up his bill a bit "funky" like. The electrons in his brain fired around at the speed of electrolytes and he was experiencing flashbacks. He hadn't exercised in over a year but used to run marathons. Muscle had memory and that probably meant that wind had memory too. He could easily spring out like a rabbit and outrun these crazy drunks.

"If you pull that lollipop out of my gut I suppose I could reach in my pocket and check. I think I'm good for a couple of hundred."

The big massive lollipop slowly eased up away from his gut and Qwerty slowly got to his feet so he could comfortably grope around deep into his right pocket. He was now standing and digging deep into his pocket. He could feel plenty of hundred dollar bills but had no intentions of parting with any of them. Instead Qwerty pulled the ultimate power move. When he pulled his right hand from his pocket he was displaying his middle finger. A big smile jumped on his face.

"Oops...guess I ain't got no money but I got this!" He said proudly flashing them both *The Bird*.

The power move completely shocked both men as evidently they had underestimated his brazenness. The power move gave Qwerty just the edge he needed to escape. He sprung wildly like a kangaroo leaping past the two men and exiting the tent. The two men weren't quick enough for him and tripped on the tent's cable line leading to a stake in the ground.

The BDU's were no match for Qwerty's copper suit and he already had a commanding lead on him. The swarthy one got back up from the ground and hollered out some parting words for the so called "CopperMan".

"Stay away from Tent City you crazy little Freak! We see you back here we will kill you!"

Qwerty paid no attention to the homeless man's parting words and

continued sprinting without ever looking back. He hadn't had to run this fast in many years. The copper suit really did somehow manage to alleviate the pain from his body. Nobody could keep up with him and he knew it. It was exciting knowing that he was running completely "Off-The-Grid". Today's visit to Tent City could not backfire on him. He finally slowed down when he made it back out onto the street where nobody could toss him in a tent and beat him down.

As he wiped away the sweat dripping down his chin a thought occurred to him as he realized the massive lollipop had been left behind.

Guess I'm gonna have to come up with another 30\$ for another lollipop
He thought to himself, *Those teenagers are really gonna pay for this!*

CHAPTER 23

Mrs. Ballins was putting to use the oldest trick in the book for just about any cheapskate. Spaghetti and meatballs. Minus the meatballs of course because that would actually cost her some money. She loaded Trevor's plate with another serving then suddenly remembered she was out of Parmesan cheese. She walked over to the refrigerator and rooted around until she found some shredded mozzarella in a ziplock bag.

"Trevor I am so sorry. I don't have any Parmesan for your spaghetti but will mozzarella work okay?"

Trevor poked his freshly made spaghetti with his fork hoping to find a little bit of hidden cheese that maybe she had already put in there and just forgot about. "Yes Mrs. Ballins that will be fine. I thank you once again for having me over for dinner so we can have this talk. I hope your son is okay. I just need some answers to some things. I hope we can work this out."

Mrs. Ballins was delighted to have a teenage basketball player in her

house. It did seem like this "Trevor" guy would be a suitable friend for her son to hang out with. She did wonder why Jeremy had never mentioned him. She peppered Trevor's spaghetti with some mozzarella and then took her seat at the end of the dining room table. She was not a religious woman so there was no need to do the whole "*blessing*" thing.

Trevor paused from poking at the spaghetti and looked up at Mrs. Ballins. "So it's just you and your son Jeremy that live here?"

Mrs. Ballins tried to hide a sullen look at the thought of her deceased husband. "Yuppers, just me and Jeremy. Lost my husband in the Afghanistan war. He was a good man and a good provider."

Trevor was good with his words and knew exactly what to say next. "I'm sure Jeremy will be as well Mrs. Ballins. This is excellent spaghetti by the way." He watched her fold up her napkin and then sneeze into it. A part of him was hoping she wouldn't get all maudlin on him with not knowing where Jeremy was.

Mrs. Ballins then raised her index finger. "So do you have any idea where my son might be hanging out?"

Trevor shrugged his shoulders. "I was hoping that he would show up back with you at home. We go to the same school but I barely know the guy. I just don't understand what I ever did to him to cause him to send me that nasty video clip of my girlfriend. How was he able to do that by the way?"

Jeremy's mom raised an eyebrow. "I dunno. Maybe it has something to do with some flash drive the Secret Service keeps accusing him of taking."

Trevor couldn't help but drop his fork at the words "*Secret Service*". "Woah! Did you just say Secret Service??? Good Golly he's in hot water then! A flash drive? I'm still lost Mrs. Ballins. Please explain it to me again how you were able to find me so I can figure out if I can be of any

help. It sounds like Jeremy is in a lot of trouble. I'm very sorry for you Mrs.Ballins."

"Well...he left his cellphone here which is extremely unlike him. Thankfully you kept shooting him reply texts from the video he allegedly sent you so I could hear the buzzing and track down his phone. I'm just as clueless as you are why he would send you a video of your girlfriend making out with another basketball player....are you positive that the making out never happened? I mean it's just that....it looks so real!"

Trevor almost choked on his spaghetti just replaying the video in his mind. "It's scary is what it is Mrs.Ballins. Maybe he tinkers on that computer just a bit too much. I mean it was her real voice and everything. It's more than a harmless prank Mrs.Ballins. My mind is fooled into believing it really happened because I saw and heard it with my own eyes. It's no different from watching the news footage of 9/11 with the planes flying into the twin towers. I wasn't there but I believe it because my eyes watched it on TV. I'm emotionally scarred from the video...it's...it's like I'm traumatized by something that never happened. I will always see her cheating in my mind!"

Jeremy's mom was at a loss for words. *What on God's green Earth was on that flash drive that the authorities had accused him of taking? Could it make people actually do things they never did and say things that they never said? Who would invent such a thing?* She stood up from the table and put more spaghetti on his plate to help him cope. She had spent all morning chopping up the garlic and seasoning. Had even gone as far as making home made garlic bread which was always Jeremy's favorite.

"Oh thank you that's plenty. Jeez...I wish I could get my own mom to cook like this. My mother even has my seven year old brother do his own laundry."

Mrs.Ballins giggled. "Oh I always insist on doing Jeremy's laundry. It's my only source of espionage that he's never pieced together. I find

receipts, wafting odors of perfume...not everyone knows this...but a person's dirty laundry can tell an entire story! I never need to sneak through his room to know what he's been up to."

Trevor's mood lightened up a bit as well. The mentioning of laundry reminded him of what he had from the other day still left in his pocket. He plucked out the business card and handed it to Jeremy's mom.

"I'm running out of time Mrs.Ballins but I'd like to warn you about a strange jogger around here that dresses in a copper bodysuit. He may of tried to help me but I think he's tied into all of this somehow."

Mrs.Ballins looked at the business card. "Oh how cute! I didn't know you work at Pinky's flower shop!" She said excitedly.

Trevor had a stern look. "I don't Mrs.Ballins. This card was thrown at me by some weirdo in a copper suit sprinting past me. Flip the card over and check out his psycho penmanship."

Jeremy's mom reluctantly flipped the card over as if it might possibly blow up in her face somehow.

Never Trust Your Eyes

CHAPTER 24

It completely surprised him that inhaling the smoke from the cigarette hadn't caused him to cough not even once. Jeremy knew that his dad used to smoke but his father at least had a good excuse for the dirty habit. War. And that's exactly why Jeremy had stepped out of the tent tonight to light up one of Nikki's smokes. War. War with Hollywood. The very spoiled well heeled people trying to hunt down two innocent teenagers.

The cigarette was a bit strong for his liking but it was nice to get a little bit of just "Jeremy" time. Besides, there was always so much exciting things to see at this hour of the night in Tent City. He couldn't believe just how Tent City almost resembles one big flea market. Everybody always had something for sale. Always.

Jeremy continued to meander about Tent City in the darkness of the night and take his time with the cigarette. It was fun to be on an adventure with a girl he really liked but he was starting to question the danger they were in. Being hunted by Hollywood celebrities could lead to a very creative demise for the both of them. He could only imagine what it would be like if ZIOD MPXL were released to the common public and listed for sale. Jeremy didn't follow politics much but he could still remember what John McCain had once stated in his debate while running for president and discussing oil policies. *"Anytime there is a surplus of something the price will drop...and that is a fact"*. Mr. McCain had told his potential voters hoping to win more votes by suggesting off shore drilling was quite alright.

The fact of the matter is that Jeremy deeply believed that if ZIOD MPXL got into the hands of everyone Hollywood would be facing some serious competition that they wouldn't be prepared to deal with. *And who would know the movies were fake?* Millions of people living along the east coast would more than likely never get to meet their favorite Hollywood star in their life time anyways. With ZIOD MPXL screen writers could make all the movies their hearts so desired without spending millions on over paid actors and actresses. EXPENSIVE props going to waste and getting blown up all for the sake of a good action movie. There was no doubt in Jeremy's mind. ZIOD MPXL was the biggest threat to any Hollywood star and they would have to take pay cuts that might have them living on less than a hundred thousand a year and maybe even less. Yep, ZIOD MPXL was a weapon of mass destruction built by a crazy homeless German man with intent to twist people's minds and completely put Hollywood out of business. And Nikki has the entire WMD right between her breasts!

Jeremy flipped up the bottom of his Nike shoe and used the bottom of his sole to put the cigarette out. Perhaps he was brooding just a bit too much tonight. He then curdled up the butt and placed it into his fifth pocket of his Levis. A part of him was a nature freak and leaving the opportunity for a bird to choke on his spent cigarette would give him qualms. It was getting late and his "Jeremy Time" had been long enough.

The campfires waned as Jeremy tried his best not to trip on anything as he walked back to the tent. He didn't worry much about tripping on broken glass as he figured beer more than likely sold a lot cheaper in a can. Unless these crackheads out here could only drum up enough change for a 40 which might be half the cost of a six pack. There were no big luminous parking lights and there sure was a lot of tents that appeared to look the same. *Which one was it again that belonged to Mrs. Planico?*

His confusion dropped when he could hear some Spanish language emanating from a tent that he was pretty sure was the one he had been staying in. Nikki knew he was only going out for a smoke and it wasn't really like you could knock on a tent anyways. When he reached the tent it only took him a second to unzip the front entrance and get inside. It took him all of two seconds to realize that he had walked into the wrong tent! He was greeted by the "Gangri" brothers both crossing their arms and giving him the angry stare down.

"What you think you doin' barging in here cabrone!!!" Shouted the taller one.

The strong odor of bleach alone was nearly enough to cause Jeremy to pass out. Evidently he had walked into something he definitely wasn't supposed to see. There must have been at least 30 empty plastic gallons of bleach piled up. On top of that was a clothes line running through the tent with.....*was that bleached dollar bills hanging on them? What was going on in here?* He then looked over to the left and literally saw the printer spitting out a freshly printed counterfeit bill. Jeremy then closed his eyes. *Oh shit...oh shit...I have a feeling that I'm not supposed to be*

seeing this! He thought to himself.

The Gangri brothers did their best to stand in front of him blocking his view. They looked like they were so irate they almost had thoughts of eating him alive. Jeremy took a few steps back towards the tent's entrance and did his best not to stare at their counterfeiting operation.

"Oh I'm so sorry fellas. Wrong tent...I'll leave."

The other Gangri brother was still on an uproar. "Wrong tent? What you drunk or something? Who sent you over here?" He demanded.

Jeremy already looked scared. They had too many muscles for their age and that was a sign that they may have done some serious time in the pen. The teardrop tattoos were also a dead giveaway. "I....nobody sent me...it was an honest mistake....I thought this tent belonged to Mrs.Planico...I'm sorry...I'm leaving now...sorry to bother you two."

The name "Mrs.Planico" rung a bell. "Eh hold up a minute punk...you say Planico? She have a son in jail? I think I heard of a Planico. A rat ass Mother "F"er. Put one of my homeboys away for ten years."

Jeremy kept his hands up while inching ever so slowly towards the entrance flaps. He had one plan. Get the heck out of here.

"I uh...I just met the woman...don't know if she has a son...jeez fellas I'm sorry...I really must go now."

The moment he felt his heel touch the grass he did a quick 360 and fled from the tent immediately. They didn't bother to chase him in the least bit. Unfortunately there was still one thing that bothered Jeremy Ballins.

He had witnessed some serious criminal activity on a FEDERAL level.
And what made matters worse?

They knew what he looked like.

CHAPTER 25

The next morning was very quiet in Mrs. Planico's tent. Mrs. Planico made a simple breakfast of bananas smushed into some cinnamon spice oatmeal. It was so easy for her to part with her healthy food as she had decided to save the expensive applewood bacon for another day.

Mrs. Planico made a point of giving Jeremy the most amount of oatmeal. She still felt sorry for him and the rough night he encountered last night. Nikki still seemed a bit worried about Jeremy's safety. She couldn't help but notice that the whole going into the wrong tent thing last night hadn't phased Jeremy much. Jeremy had just somehow "*shrugged off*" the entire incident.

"Mrs. Planico....you said that you know a lot about the Gangri brothers?" Nikki said between mouthfuls of cinnamon oatmeal.

Mrs. Planico handed Jeremy another serving. "Those brothers have been nothing but trouble since they were teenagers. Broken home. No father figure. Their mother sold her ooh-oohs all across town just to support her crack habit."

Nikki wanted to know more. "So how did they end up in Tent City?"

Mrs. Planico wiped away some oatmeal sticking between her fingers that had escaped. "From what I hear they used to live in hotels but I think they got fed up with the towel lady in the morning always trying to peek in at their shady operations. People here are afraid of the Gangri brothers and respect their privacy. They usually spend most of their time at the horsey tracks gambling."

"With the counterfeit money?" Asked Jeremy butting in.

Mrs. Planico continued. "I guess that's how they launder their money.

They have too many strikes to carry on with violent crimes. They know the system well. If their counterfeit operation ever folds they'll just end up in softy camps and get to conspire with other white collar criminals. I don't think they have any fear of the Bernie Madoff style softy camps which is where they incarcerate white collar criminals. They carry themselves well."

Nikki was still curious. "If they're career criminals with no education how are they learning to print money?"

Her comment got her to laugh. "Poor people been counterfeiting for a long time. Not much to it considering the high quality printers we have these days. All those thugs do is bleach the ones or fives I think and them trump them up. The little strip piece stuck inside the bills make it hard so they circumvent by using bills from the early 90's which didn't have the little strips inside of them."

Nikki was still fascinated. "So I'm guessing they have lots of money?"

Mrs. Planico just laughed. "I guess that depends on what you consider lots of money...millions? No. Close to a hundred thousand? Possibly. The bail bondsman probably gets whatever is leftover from the ponies. The Gangri brothers are some serious dangerous dudes."

This time Nikki giggled too. "I guess it's probably pretty hard for them to hide all their cash in the walls of their tent huh?"

They both looked over at Jeremy for his opinion on the matter. There was a moments silence as something else had Jeremy's attention. Everybody suddenly got quiet out of curiosity. There was a strange noise coming from under Jeremy's sleeping bag.

Sssss Sssss* Sssss*

That's when Jeremy felt something slimy rub up against his leg. "Yikeeeee!!!" He said springing up from the sleeping bag and curling up

in the corner of the tent from fear and pointing at the big fat sinister looking snake hissing away.

"Oh my gosh...Oh my gosh!!!!" Snapped Mrs.Planico curling up in the corner of the tent with Jeremy. The 36" cottonmouth snake kept both Jeremy and Mrs.Planico pinned up in the back corner of the tent. It raised its head high above the ground and showed its razor sharp teeth.

Ironically Nikki stayed completely calm throughout the whole thing. It almost seemed as if she was amused by Tough guy Jeremy's trepidation. She took over the entire situation.

"Relax guys. The best thing you guys need to do right now is relax before that cottonmouth gets aggressive."

Jeremy curled up in a ball barely able to speak as the big cottonmouth flourished it's scary looking fangs at him. "Save yourself Nikki and run! Find somebody with a shovel....hurry now go!"

Nikki remained calm. "I got this....just please don't aggravate it." She said slowly creeping up behind the snake and extending an arm towards the head of the snake. Evidently the snake didn't realize Nikki's hand was only inches from it. In one swift motion she scooped it up from its neck and handled it as if it was a pet. The snake didn't appear threatened and actually lovingly twirled itself around Nikki's wrists. She held the snake up calmly for them but they were too afraid to look.

"Gangri brothers trying to send us a message I suppose?"

CHAPTER 26

Jeremy's mother was desperately yearning for some laundry to fold with hopes it would divert the two agents from honing in on her peculiar idiosyncrasies. Agent Dreko and agent Kolt still had questions. It didn't

even appear as if they had changed their suits from their last visit. They both kept their sunglasses perched above their long pointy noses to better hide their own personal opinions. They did seem to be quite comfy sitting on Mrs. Ballins fine silky upholstery.

Agent Dreko handed her some photos for her to look at. They were only head shots with all of their body parts blurred out.

Mrs. Ballins gaped. "These are children! Please don't tell me that flash drive contains pictures of naked kids. Jeremy gets girls his own age. He would never take interest in this."

Dreko calmed her down. "These images are not on the flash drive mam or so we don't believe. These photographs were intercepted in China but we believe they tie in somehow."

Mrs. Ballins flipped through the pictures of the Tweens. "Ok I'm lost. I thank you for blotting out the nudity but why the pics of little kids and what does this have to do with Jeremy?"

Dreko pushed the photographs back towards her. "Mam can you just study their faces up close for a second. Recognize any of them?"

Mrs. Ballins studied their faces up close. "I've never seen these kids before. Don't you guys have technology now where you can use facial recognition to identify them?"

Agent Kolt cut in. "We do mam. Won't do us much good."

Jeremy's mom was still confused. "Why not?"

Dreko took over the conversation once again. "That's because these children don't exist."

Mrs. Ballins was still confounded. "They died?"

Dreko shook his head no. "They never were even born. These kids were digitally created by ZIOD MPXL. The flash drive we believe your son still has. A Chinese Judge was using ZIOD to create kitty porn. Now you understand why we need to get back that thumb drive?"

She cupped her mouth as she fathomed the detriment ZIOD MPXL was capable of causing. *Realistic looking kitty porn?* "Oh that's horrible....that Chinese judge has been taken to jail I presume?"

Dreko sullenly shook his head no. "We tried to prosecute him but got absolutely nowhere with it. He lawyered up. Found himself a good Jew. His attorney argued that the kitty porn had to be classified as art until somebody could prove that the images actually belonged to tangible human beings. The judge got off Scott free and then started a sick and twisted company known as TEXI."

"What's TEXI?"

"Taking Extra Images"...."That sick China man made a fortune capitalizing by skirting the laws to feed the perverts. His company created a scanner the size of a loaf of bread that takes images that are scrambled and puts them back together so the perverts can safely hide their porn habits. It's sick and twisted and he's making a fortune. We have to give back the reams of scrambled printed images as we have no way of proving anything. These sick old men get addicted to this kind of stuff to the point where they take a trip out to Thailand to take out their sexual urges. Now do you understand why we have to retrieve ZIOD MPXL Mrs.Ballins?"

Jeremy's mom was traumatized. *Was ZIOD MPXL capable of creating countless kitty porn? Was Jeremy aware of the dangers of that flash drive?*

Mrs.Ballins was still at a loss for words. "That Chinese girl he's been hanging out with all the time....I knew she was no good....Have you spoken at all to her parents about this yet?"

CHAPTER 27

It was ashame that Mrs.Planico's emergency poop bucket had to be used to contain a cottonmouth snake. The hissing sounds were driving Jeremy crazy so he opted to go out for some "Jeremy Time" to a local grocery store and fetch them some groceries while Mrs.Planico and Nikki stayed back at the tent debating what to do with the snake. To make matters worse Mrs.Planico had invited over her homeless friend "Susan" and Jeremy didn't care much for Susan's personality.

Mrs.Planico introduced her homeless friend Susan to Nikki and Nikki gladly shook the older woman's hand. "I'm Nikki...Mrs.Planico's friend."

Susan had a harried look on her face that made her appear 20 years older than what she really was. The years of being homeless had taken a great toll on her body. Just looking at Susan put shivers down your back as the look on her face told a long story of many, many, unfortunate adversities.

Susan pulled back on her graying hair. Some of it even fell out. She was only 54 but looked 80. "Hi Nikki...it's nice to meet you. I usually come around every month. I'm not Mrs.Planico's social worker. Ironically I used to be a social worker myself. The pay was never that great. It did nothing for my retirement and now I have been living on the streets for the past 3 years."

Nikki was confused. "Can't you just go on disability?"

Susan snorted a laugh. "Wrong complexion for the connection sister....besides....do you know just how many times I have ripped off the system and cheated on my unemployment? They all correspond ya know. Those bitches hate me in there."

Nikki could only smile at Susan's humor. "So what brings you here?"

"I'm taking a break from Richard again. He's a knife wielding moron when he drinks...see these scars" She said pulling up her sleeve. The shorter scar looked pretty fresh.

Mrs.Planico cut in. "Susan is no saint herself but she has a good heart. Every cop knows her by name now. She's been to jail more times than I can count on my fingers."

"For what?" Nikki asked out of curiosity.

Both old ladies giggled together. "Mostly for just being Susan! Hey....Susan...tell Nikki about bathing in the river and how you used to stand on top of the toilet seat of grocery stores when you got real hungry." Mrs.Planico continued looking at Nikki, "Susan recently lost her mother you know....she's got nobody."

"Richard?" Asked Nikki.

Both old ladies rolled their eyes. Mrs.Planico looked back at Susan. "Go on...tell Nikki how a homeless woman grocery shops."

Nikki's eyes widened as she prepared for a good story from Susan. Susan seemed like such a kind hearted woman. *How did she end up homeless?*

Susan was not ashamed to tell her grocery shopping adventure. "Well....I had used up my food stamps selling baby formula to pay on some old fines for my third DUI and was extremely hungry one day while shopping at Gyant foods. I knew what time they closed so I got the bright idea to stand on top of the toilet seat right before closing and it worked."

"So what did you take?"

Susan giggled without remorse. "A whole lot of Seafood! Some cigarettes for Richard as well!"

Nikki was getting into the story. "So if it worked then how did they catch you?"

Susan suddenly stopped smiling. "One of the cops immediately recognized me on the security tape. They got the cigarettes back but I ate up all the seafood though. They won't let us buy energy drinks with food stamps any more. Those used to sell pretty good."

The girls meeting was abruptly interrupted by a loud hissing sound. Susan looked pretty freaked out. "Oh my gosh!! Is that a snake I'm hearing?"

Mrs. Planico pointed to the bucket. "Our friend Nikki here managed to capture a snake that we believe the Gangri brothers planted in our tent."

Fear spread all over Susan's face. "The Gangri brothers? The notorious never-get-caught murderers that have been known to extort people? Please tell me your friend Nikki didn't get caught up with those two dangerous thugs? It won't be good for her!" Warned Susan.

Nikki cut in. "Excuse me...did you say murderers? I thought they only print counterfeit bills."

Susan was even more wound up. "Holy shit dear! Please don't tell me you looked inside their tent! Everybody knows that those two brothers have been known to make people disappear. They even have the power to green light people that think they're safe in jail!"

Nikki almost stuttered. "Green light? Green light as in put a hit on somebody?"

Susan nodded. "Yeah...if you pissed those guys off my best advice to you is to run. Run and stay far away from Tent City!"

Nikki looked over at Mrs. Planico. Mrs. Planico could only shrug her weakened shoulders.

"Mrs. Planico are you hearing all of this? I don't like what I'm hearing of the Angry Gangri brothers....I can't lose Jeremy and it's starting to sound to me like we need to devise a plan to keep Jeremy safe."

Susan reached deep into her Jean pocket and fished out a prescription bottle filled with tiny red Haldol pills her shrink had given her. "I think I have just the solution for your friend Jeremy....a few of these Haldol pills might lead him to drooling but will also make him very, very tired. I think I may have a good idea for a place we can put him to keep him safe."

Nikki was not relishing the thought of not having Jeremy around. "I would never stick him in jail just to keep him safe. Besides....remember you said that the Gangri brothers can green light people in jail?"

Susan shook her head. "You have no idea where I'm going with this do you? We're not putting him in jail. He's too pretty anyways and would never make it in there...hmpf....unless he knew how to always stand with his back to the wall to keep it exit only back there....your boy will be quite safe in the lunny bin....it's air conditioned in those places and sometimes the meals are good....it may be the only option we have...I mean...a snake in the tent?....clearly the Gangri brothers are trying to drive him out."

CHAPTER 28

The stories just went on and on. Nikki was extremely enthralled by all of Susan's homelessness stories. Jeremy on the other hand was getting extremely annoyed by all of Susan's incessant chatter. It was starting to make sense to him what might have evoked Susan's ex-husband into

becoming violent in the first place. There were a lot of men that had short fuses and became fussy at times. Too much chatter on the other end could easily exacerbate a drunkard.

When eight O clock rolled around Jeremy finally stood up from inside the tent. "I hate to interrupt ladies but it's getting late and I need a little "Jeremy Time". I'm going out for a smoke....be back in about 15."

Susan slid her stinky butt over so Jeremy could slide past her. Lucky for her the split pea soup Mrs.Planico was preparing was strong enough to drown out the smell of her stinky butt. Everybody in Tent City had to deal with the treacherous *swamp ass* because the tents had no air conditioning.

"I think our friend Susan might want you to bring back a six pack." Joked Nikki, "We'll be boozn' with Susan!"

The lively tent giggled as Jeremy exited the tent. *Who says you can't have good times in Tent City? Did Obama care include free air conditioning?*

"Make sure you come back to the right tent this time!" Shouted out Susan. She was just getting ready to tell her listeners about her friend from Bible college *Diana*. Diana the penny pincher. Diana the one that sat on her glorious throne and dictated a family of five without ever once having to step outside of the house and clock in somewhere. Wouldn't even know how to fire up a lawn mower but her yard was always perfectly mowed. *How was she able to do it?*

Mrs.Planico silently counted to ten immediately after Jeremy stepped outside the tent. She then peeped her head outside to make sure he walked away and couldn't hear them.

"Susan I hate to interrupt your entertaining stories but if we're gonna do what we're gonna do we really need to get moving on this."

Susan curtailed her degrading of her college friend Diana. "Oh sure, sure...is Nikki going to be okay with this? If I have to go back to jail I won't be getting a bottom bunk."

Nikki was lost. "Do what? What is it that we're doing?"

Mrs. Planico looked at her with serious motherly-concerned-eyes. "Honey we weren't joking about Jeremy being in imminent danger. He can't stay here. It puts us all at risk. Susan here has a very good plan. We need you to go along with it."

Nikki looked shocked. "You mean the lunny bin plan? We're really gonna put my man in the lunny bin just for the sake of his own protection?"

Susan cut in. "Honey we can't put him in jail. He's too pretty he'll never make it. I don't think he has the hair on his ass to survive in a county jail. He needs to go someplace safe and fast!"

Nikki was still confused. "So what are we doing then? How we gonna get him in the lunny bin?"

Mrs. Planico smiled impishly as she stirred the split pea soup that had big chunks of yummy ham. Nikki then looked over at Susan who then jiggled the prescription of Haldol. "It shouldn't take long to crush these little pills sweetie. I'm glad you've opted to go along with our story. Mrs. Planico can't afford to have her tent burned down. The waiting list is longer than you think for section 8 housing."

Nikki hemmed and hawed then began biting her lower lip. "Oh, I think I get it. It's not going to poison him will it? What is that stuff anyways?"

Susan laughed. "It's zombie medication sister! He gonna be sleeping and drooling for very long time!"

Nikki smiled at her humor but didn't relish her Chinese lingo sarcasm. "Ok so what's the plan then after we poison his soup?"

Mrs. Planico cut in. "He'll be all dopey and tired, possibly fall into a deep slumber. One of us will then have to call the police because police hospital admissions will guarantee at least an 8 day stay at the hospital. That will give us the time we need to decide what to do to keep him safe. He'll be okay in there. At least it's air conditioned."

Nikki was still worried. "So what are we gonna tell the police then?"

Susan jumped in all excitedly like she had perhaps gone through this drill before. "We're gonna rehearse our stories first and then we're all gonna lie! It will be fun!"

"We'll what could we possibly say?"

Susan went on. "It will be easy. We'll say he hasn't been eating much and we think he might be dope sick. Mrs. Planico will say Jeremy has had much talk of suicide. The mentioning of suicide will have him admitted in no time. We'll also throw into the story that he's a runaway and evicted for habitual drug use. They'll buy it. I'm certain of it. Would bet my split pea soup on it."

The women immediately shut up when they heard the sounds of Jeremy coughing outside the tent. Susan poured a handsome serving of crushed up Haldol into Jeremy's bowl of split pea soup.

It was going to be a very long night for Jeremy.

CHAPTER 29 (2am Kennedy Hospital)

Everything was getting blurry and the temperature had dropped quite a bit. The itchy sleeping bag now felt like a rubbery mattress. Beeping noises could be heard in every direction and was that an IV bag hanging to his left? Jeremy was confused. *Where was he? How did he get here?*

Why had he been drooling so much? Did he almost die? If so from what? Had he picked up the wrong pack of cigarettes and inadvertently picked up somebody's pack of left handed cigarettes? Maybe laced with PCP? Could be possible at Tent City

A nurse with strawberry blond hair leaned over top of him not minding the cleavage she was showing. She knew it would be all the entertainment he would get for the next week or so. She started to tilt a white plastic bottle towards his mouth. Jeremy pulled away when he saw what looked like a quart of lighter fluid coming towards his mouth. It even had the cherry red plastic cap.

Jeremy cringed. "Mam please get that quart of lighter fluid away from my face. I'm in no mood to play games. I think I may have accidentally smoked somebody else's laced cigarettes."

The nurse chuckled. "You did a lot more than that Hun.....here...I need you to drink this charcoal....we need to flush you out."

Jeremy reluctantly took a sip of the black liquid. If this place was anything like a dentist office it would at least have some sort of strawberry taste.

He pulled away at the second sip. "Yuk! It's nasty...do I really need to drink this?"

The nurse rolled her eyes. "We can always pump your stomach if you want that instead. Like tubes shoved down your throat?"

It shut Jeremy up. He grabbed the charcoal liquid with his own palsied hands and chugged away. *What had happened? Where was Nikki?*

There was nothing he could do. Chunks of ham and mushy peas shot in every direction. It left him feeling very confused. *Was there something wrong with the split pea soup?*

A nurse came over to pull away the sheet he had puked on. The older nurse with glasses immediately came over and slapped a white plastic bracelet on his wrist. Jeremy tried to use his teeth to rip it off. The nurse flailed her arms and came rushing back over.

"Oh no, no, don't take it off...you're getting admitted."

"Admitted? Admitted for what? I threw up...I feel a lot better now."

The nurse lady shook her head no. "You need to undergo psychiatric care first. The hospital can't let you leave until you get cleared first by a doctor."

Jeremy felt his blood pressure go up. "Well can you please call the doctor over here so I can get cleared? I'm ready to go home."

The nurse lady with the glasses rolled her eyes. It was cool watching them roll under magnification. "No, no, it doesn't work like that sweetie. You can't see the doctor until the morning."

The pillow cover felt rubbery and the temperature was far colder than what he was used to. Jeremy was too young to even think about the bills that would ensue afterwards. It didn't matter anyways because laws were different in St.Louis and the government was already used to picking up the tab. Not to mention Jeremy's mother still had him covered under her insurance plan. Because the hospital had already dubbed Jeremy a homeless waif, they would not be offering him any ice cream. That usually remained kept for the patients with Blue Cross Blue Shield health insurance. The best of the best.

Within three hours Jeremy was placed in an observation room. It was his first time incarcerated but he was somehow managing to hold up pretty well. Every two hours a staff worker tossed him a pack of saltine crackers and a styrofoam cup of ginger ale. The hospital had stripped him of his underwear and insisted he don a polka dot gown thinner than a Kleenex. The air conditioning was set too cold and he was not

relishing having "*the jones*" becoming exposed every time he moved in a peculiar position. It was the first time in his life he had ever wore anything that even remotely resembled a dress.

A few more hours passed and an overtly hairy man dressed in a baby blue security guard uniform stood in front of the observation room and accosted Jeremy.

"Hey bud...Got good news for ya...they got a bed for you but your getting a roommate. He's a quiet one don't worry he won't bother you." The security dude chuckled a bit, "We know that cuz he's a regular here. Just checked in an hour ago. His name is Qwerty....I think you'll get along with him."

CHAPTER 30

It didn't take Jeremy very long to figure out that this was not Qwerty's first rodeo. Jeremy was surprised to see that Qwerty knew all of the staff members by name. He tried not to giggle as he watched his roommate in action going straight to work at harassing the staff. They continued to warn him that he was permitted to vent but they didn't want him leaning over the counter of the service station. Qwerty continued to lean over the counter anyways to show them up close his problem. Evidently they really didn't want him shoving a roll of toilet paper in their faces. They warned him once more.

"Knock it off now Qwerty....we're gonna count to ten and then we're calling security."

Qwerty was still irate. "According to the Patient Bill Of Rights you people have to give me an official roll of toilet paper that's not defective....this roll is a misprint....there are three squares in this roll that have no perforation. The Patient Bill Of Rights demands my proper treatment! Fix it!" He barked leaning over the counter.

The college girl in purple scrubs was not threatened in the least bit. His medical records could fill at least 8 file cabinets but he never had a history of being violent. She pointed her long freshly polished finger nail right towards the bridge of his nose.

"I'm not playing Qwerty.....Down! Now! Off my counter!"

Qwerty listened but didn't like being pushed around. He used his big massive brain to demonstrate his retaliation. A big evil smile jumped onto his face as he took his roll of toilet paper and headed over to the water fountain. He removed the cardboard roll and heavily immersed the toilet paper with water from the fountain. By the time he was done immersing he had one big sticky wad of soaking wet TP. Legions of demons filled his pupils as he proudly displayed one gooey wad in the air.

"Ha,ha,ha!!! You guys have your pathetic games to piss me off and....guess what...sweetheart...that's right...I have mine!"

The college nurse girl knew exactly what he was up to. She berated at the top of her lungs. "Don't do it Qwerty! I'll see to it you get a time out for sure if you do it!"

But it was too late. His evil smile had already given it away. He stretched his arm back and wound up like a major league pitcher. Even paused for a second to get more reaction out of her. As if he was reveling in the teasing.

"Don't do it Qwerty! We're not cleaning that shit up! Second shift is soon coming in and they're gonna freak out!"

But it was too late. Qwerty slung the wet TP towards the ceiling and it stuck like wet clay. He whipped it up there so hard that particles of water shot in every direction ruining all the papers tossed helter-skelter along the desk. He even topped it off with a serial killers ruthless laugh.

"Hahaha bitch! We used to do this shit all the time in jail when they cranked up the heat too high in our cells to block off the vents on the ceilings we could never reach...sticks like glue....how do you like those apples?"

The button on her hand radio had already been pushed and security was on their way. It didn't seem to phase Qwerty in the least bit as he knew first hand how the game was played. After his twelve hours in observation he'd be back in his room counting the holes in the vent to make sure there was still 1221. It's how Qwerty had spent a lot of his life. Counting. He had days in his life where he would stick his face just inches away from a bugger on the wall and count as many colors to it as he could. He had an excellent photographic memory. For years he purposely baffled psychiatrists by letting his intelligence waffle like a duck surrounded by a circle of bread crumbs. He never felt comfortable letting anyone know just how intelligent he really was.

A big fat old man in a baby blue security outfit showed up to escort Qwerty to the observation room. Qwerty felt extremely insulted by the lack of security responding to the call. He made sure to point his finger right back at the Queen B chicky momma that was giving him the 12 hour time out. He made sure to shout at her as he was being escorted away.

"You think I don't know...but I know! I'm IN THE KNOW! Next time I catch a poopy pants moment like this there had better be an ARMY showing up to put me away! You people insult me! It'll take more than a retired old man to settle me down!"

His comment drew a smile from the nurse in the purple scrubs. She just couldn't help herself so she picked up a paperback book and pretended to read just for good measure. Just to rub it in his face. Just to show she wasn't scared. She waved her pinky behind the book so he couldn't see but her gut told her he knew what she was doing.

"Your poopy pants moment has expired Qwerty...enjoy your time out."
She said behind the paperback.

Qwerty dutifully followed the security guard towards the fish tank as they like to call it. He grinned when he made sure nobody was watching his face. *Like I'm gonna enjoy this IPod Nano that I boofed before I came in* He thought to himself, *Hope your Grandma doesn't freak out when she sees a picture of you bruised, bloody, and dead in a car accident*

The plan had worked so well. Stuffing a 3"X1" IPod Nano into a roll of toilet paper and making a tiny pinhole just for the camera's eye. He had pulled the IPod out just before he doused away at the toilet paper using the water fountain. His plan had worked flawlessly.

CHAPTER 31

(Keep Your Friends Close And Your Enemies Closer)

"Weird" and "strange" were the first two words that came into Jeremy's mind when he thought of his roommate Qwerty. He found his behavior so bizarre that he was already looking forward to his return just so he could study him to have a good story for Nikki. Just the thought of Nikki was making him feel nostalgic and he was feeling a great resentment towards Susan. *Why did Susan do this to him? Was she trying to drive him out for bed space in the tent? Why didn't Nikki figure out what Susan had done to him?* Jeremy really was starting to miss Nikki and he was extremely concerned for her safety. *But what could he possibly do? Did all patients have to stay at least 72 hours before discharge?*

Jeremy didn't like how they kept it so cold inside of the hospital. The food was edible but some of the other patients needed special extra attention and felt compelled to yell at staff over senseless nonsense. Jeremy liked that Qwerty was at least entertaining and didn't walk around like a zombie all day driving the staff nuts by trying to go in

everyone else's room but their own. The hospital even had some cool crayon artwork that previous patients had left behind. It was fun to go inside their head and look at their drawings in crayon. Jeremy could easily deduce which patients were most likely border line retarded because when they colored their pictures they were nowhere close to staying in between the lines. In fact, not only were they a good two inches away from the outlines of the image, they also tend to use only one color when coloring.

Jeremy Ballins stopped in the middle of the hallway to closely scrutinize some poor crayon coloring work somebody had done on Goofy from the cartoon Mickey Mouse. He found it rather disturbing that somebody had purposely used their finger to rip out the face on Goofy leaving him with only his body and his very long ears. Suddenly Jeremy felt somebody place a hand on his shoulder. It made him jump. It was only a male staff member in white scrubs.

"Pretty weird huh? Your roommate did that one just to be an ass. Qwerty has never been violent but he vents in other strange ways. There's been times the psychiatrists have had to confiscate his pencils."

"I see he's all over the place. I wonder why he colored all of goofy in red?"

The staff dude lowered his hand from Jeremy's shoulder. "Cuz he's a smart ass. He's been that way since age 17. Maybe even before but that is as far back as his medical records go. He probably thinks he's intimidating us by ripping Goofy's head off and then coloring him in all blood."

"And he chose Goofy over Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse." Pointed out Jeremy.

The staff dude chuckled. "Yeah he probably was hoping the doctor would sign him off for a nut check."

"What's that?" Asked Jeremy.

"A disability check. Most people feel guilty or ashamed and only take government money cuz they need it. Qwerty wanted it for bragging rights. He blew it all purposely at the casino and then laughed about it. That's how the Queen B lady over at the Social Security Office finally figured out he's the real deal. Qwerty actually *IS* nuts. The casino had live footage of him doing some crazy rain dance after losing thousand dollar hands at the casino. He gets delirious like crazy. He gets mad when he wins and happy when he loses. Qwerty stands in front of the roulette wheel singing "We flushed it down the potty and round and round it goes" because the twirling of the roulette wheel to him resembles the inside of a flushing toilet."

"That's odd." Said Jeremy, "Something just doesn't add up."

"Like what?"

Jeremy surmised and deduced. "Maybe he never needed the money in the first place. Maybe he just wanted to show some substantial gambling losses to the tax man for a better refund."

Staff dude shook his head no. "Nah....I think he flushed away his disability to convince the government that it was gone. I meet crafty criminals all the time. A wise man once quoted something about the authorities that's very true. "If you can convince them that you don't have it....they won't ever bother to look for it....but if they ever suspect you have it....they won't stop looking until they find it."

Jeremy scratched his chin as he put the pieces together. "I think I got it now...I think I get what your saying...Qwerty is acting just like Napoleon Dynamite.....He already ate his lunch....but just when he was sure nobody was looking....he stuffs a few tator tots in his pocket."

The 30 year old staff dude slapped Jeremy on the shoulder.

"Eggsactly....I think you figured it out my good man....were just hoping

they were greasy tator tots and not golden little nuggets.....so lemme ask you....are you ready to go take a pee test?"

"Huh? I just took one yesterday!" Protested Jeremy.

The staff dude reached into his white smock and pulled out a ziplock bag. Inside it was a balloon that had been cut mixed with some toilet paper stuffing. The balloon was covered in petroleum jelly. Qwerty had used toilet paper stuffing around his iPod Nano and the balloon to create his homemade mock device of the iPod tampon he had boofed to smuggle in the iPod Nano. There was even some excrement glitter encompassing the balloon which made the whole thing gross to look at. A real eyesore to say the least.

Staff dude patted Jeremy's shoulder. "Gotta take another one bud...they found this under your mattress. They think you swallowed some balloons full of drugs so you could poop them out later or maybe just shoved them up your butt."

Jeremy crossed his arms. "It's not mine..." He protested.. "Qwerty must have left it."

Staff dude shook his head no. "Your roommate might be a nut but guess what?....Qwerty has never failed a drug test in his entire life....your here for overdosing....now come on let's go."

CHAPTER 32

By the time bed time rolled around Qwerty had finally been released from the observation room or "*Time Out*" room as the staff called it. Qwerty had always referred to it as the "*Fish Tank*". Jeremy didn't talk much to his roommate about the busted balloon that had been purportedly "*boofed*" according to the staff. Evidently the term "*boof*" was supposed to mean shoved up the butt the staff had told him. Jeremy

tried to read a boring paperback novel on his bed while Qwerty carried on with his what he called "*studies*".

Jeremy finally couldn't help himself as he watched Qwerty using the edge of the paper to draw with a pencil his own grid paper. "Dude you're really hoping for a nut check aren't you?" Asked Jeremy.

Qwerty grunted. "Hmph....I'm already well off thank you and I already know from experience that it's not enough to live off of anyways...I can't be bossed around by an employer so I became a contract killer for hire."

Jeremy chuckled as he sized up Qwerty. "Huh,huh...funny...my gut tells me that you've been hospitalized so many times that they wont let you purchase a gun...so what do you use? That little pencil?" Joked Jeremy.

Qwerty's face turned flush red. Jeremy was in fact correct. The state would never let him buy a gun or even a BB gun on a good day. "I can make my own gun if I really wanted to thank you...don't need a gun to kill people and the bang hurts my ears. Besides... Remember what that guy in the *Departed* movie said? Doesn't make your prick bigger and it carries a life sentence. It's a lot more fun to whack a dude over the head with a big enormous lollipop. Plus women smile when I can look at them with a straight face and tell them I have a big lollipop."

There was a long moment of silence. *Was Qwerty being serious? Didn't the security dude say Qwerty was harmless?*

Qwerty continued to shade in squares with his pencil as he carefully scrawled his own "QR" codes. Jeremy couldn't help but wonder about all the homemade written bar codes.

"Dude why all the barcodes? You just bored?"

"I'm communicating with aliens right now so I need you to be quiet. Aliens telepathically tell me how to draw these codes and I plan to scan them later after the hospital releases me."

Jeremy was slightly intrigued. "Those are QR codes the kind you scan with smart phones?"

"Yeah, once scanned they take me to a top secret government website where I can access everybody in this country's phone conversations going back years ago."

Jeremy was lost but curious. He sat up better in his hospital bed. "Huh?"

"You didn't know that every phone call made in this country gets stored digitally? With today's technology we can store what would normally fit into twenty filing cabinets all into a tiny flash drive the size of a thumb. Even DVDs are going to become obsolete in the future as they can get scratched and take up too much space."

"Why would you want a bunch of old phone conversations that maybe the CIA keeps record of?"

Qwerty sprung up from the bed almost enraged. "Don't you get it? We are not safe in this country because of the overpopulation! The government is planning to digitally clone us, kidnap us, and then convince the others we were abducted by aliens!"

Jeremy was giggling now. Qwerty was definitely a nut job. All of a sudden his laughter subsided as he recalled Qwerty mentioning digital cloning. His heart beat faster than a rabbit's. *Was it possible that Qwerty wasn't lying just for the extra attention? Was Qwerty the one who had stalked him at the rest stop with a copper body suit and a massive ten pound lollipop?*

Was Qwerty CopperMan?

CHAPTER 33

It was 3am and Jeremy couldn't sleep if he wanted to. Qwerty was not a snorer and there was no stertorous sounds to assure him that His nutty roommate was sleeping. It was the talk that they had earlier that had him on edge. *Contract Killer? A big lollipop to whack people over the head with? Did he eat the lollipop after he killed them? Why would Qwerty openly confess to admitting he was a serial killer. Why had the security guard accentuated that Qwerty wasn't violent?* None of it made any sense and now Jeremy was afraid to rise up from the bed and use the toilet. Qwerty would eavesdrop for sure. It was evident Qwerty knew how to calculate and Jeremy wanted him asleep first so he could twinkle twinkle little star and not have Qwerty expecting Niagra Falls landing in the toilet just because he was skinny and tall. Qwerty would question the little twinkle twinkly sounds for sure.

Jeremy continued to hold it in as he lay in the hospital bed thinking about Nikki. They were only friends but there was something special about her. Every time he would stand close to her he felt a euphoric rush. Maybe it was her Victoria perfume or maybe it was just because she was so hot. He was replaying the kiss in his mind from when they had put together the faux make out video for Trevor. That poor boy Trevor. He should have known better than to toy with Nikki's heart. Chinese people have been known to be very vindictive. It was not wise to screw with Nikki's heart. *Weren't they supposed to know Karate?*

Finally he could take it no more. The cold room temperature had induced his bladder enough to the point he was pretty sure he could let out Niagra Falls. He'd even be sure to curtail it right at the end before his bladder had finally depleted so Qwerty wouldn't assume he just had to go really bad and was pushing hard to get it out fast. Jeremy quietly slid out from the covers and made his way to the toilet. It appeared that Qwerty might be a bad shot cuz the yellow pee stains were definitely not his. He imagined his using the restroom more than likely awakened Qwerty so he let out a good "ahhhh.." For good measure like a cocky barfly would do.

And that's when all of a sudden a big black spider dangling from a piece of web landed right in front of his face causing him to spring back and miss the potty as well. Jeremy tried to catch his breath when he suddenly realized it wasn't a big black spider but rather a rectangular black piece of plastic tied to a fishing line. Jeremy looked up and could hear Nikki giggling from above the ceiling tile. He managed to shake twice and put Padre away just as she quietly slid the ceiling tile still trying desperately to stifle her giggles.

"Having fun in there Jeremy?" She whispered.

Jeremy was in complete shock that Nikki had figured out how to sneak into a lunny bin to rescue him. He cupped his left hand over his mouth and whispered loud enough for her to hear. "He's here!"

Nikki lowered a big fat rope with knots in it so he could climb his way up through the ceiling. She was in a hurry to break him out before they could get caught.

"Who's here? Don't tell me that they got you all doped up on meds. I'm gonna need you to climb up this rope. Ocean 11 style if you know what I mean."

Jeremy took the rope with knots in it and pulled on it. It was definitely secured well enough. "Remember the restroom stalker in the copper body suit? He's here!"

Nikki was in shock. "They bunked you up with CopperMan? Oh my gosh come on let's get you out of here!"

Suddenly they heard a shout from Qwerty who had wakened up. "Hey if your in there crowning King Richard they need to up your meds...what's going on in there Jeremy? Ain't no gettn money in my bathroom you sicko! You worm wrestling in there?"

Jeremy's adrenaline kicked in and he felt himself climbing the rope a

little faster.

Qwerty wouldn't settle down. He was now beating on the bathroom door. "Hey man what gives? What's all that noise in there? You manage to sneak a hooker in here or something? I'm coming in there if you don't say something."

Jeremy had no time to reply. He had just one more leg to squeeze through the hole in the ceiling. That's when Qwerty kicked in the bathroom door scaring them both. He immediately reached up on Jeremy's foot and tried to pull him down. It almost worked but Jeremy kicked really hard almost knocking Qwerty in the face.

"Let go of my foot you weirdo! Go play with your grid paper!"

And with that Jeremy was freed and safely made it through the hole in the ceiling. Nikki grabbed his arm and turned on a flashlight so they could run away. They made it ten steps through the hospital's ceiling before Nikki stopped dead in her tracks.

"Oh shit Jeremy...did you remember to pull up the rope?"

The look on his face said no so Nikki quickly planted a buss on his lips then turned around to go fetch the rope. Just before she reached the lighted hole she realized it was too late.

Qwerty's bulbous head was now poking up blocking the light from the bathroom and staring right at them both. He looked at them both and laughed really hard.

"Hope you guys can run really fast. You'll never find my big lollipop I keep hidden up there and guess what?.....I run all the time. You'll never outrun me!"

CHAPTER 34

Jeremy and Nikki raced through the hospital's ceiling as fast as they could. They had a very good lead on Qwerty and also a better advantage because Nikki had a flashlight. They could still hear Qwerty's profanity as he stumbled over the rafters in the dark while still looming in the distance.

"Keep moving and don't look back!" Advised Nikki, "He can't see a bloody thing back there. He's not gonna be able to catch us."

Jeremy moved pretty fast but refused to take the lead. Nikki was just too cute and pretty for him to allow the risk of that heinous monster Qwerty getting a chance to catch up to her. Even though Qwerty's vulgar language was waning in the distance Jeremy and Nikki refused to slow down to catch their breath. Once they made it to the rooftop of the hospital Nikki immediately raced over to yet another rope with knots in it. The knots made it easier for climbing up and down and Jeremy was quite impressed by Nikki's ingenuity. It was securely tied to a big fat pipe jutting from the rooftop.

Nikki tossed the rope to Jeremy. "Here you go down first I'm not 100 percent sure the rope can hold both of our weight at the same time."

Jeremy was still worried Qwerty was catching up. "But Qwerty, I can't leave you here with that lunatic!"

Nikki looked just like a dark shadow. She was dressed in skin tight jet black clothes making her look just like a ninja warrior.

"You weigh more than I do so you need to go down first so that I don't burn up the strength of the rope. I can handle myself now go...go now Jeremy!" She commanded.

Profanity could be heard once again looming in the distance and Jeremy knew they were running out of time. He dutifully grabbed the knotted

rope and slung it over the building so he could climb down it. He managed to descend down 6 stories in under a minute. He tugged on the rope when he reached the bottom to let Nikki know it was her turn. Nikki managed to slink down the rope a lot faster and quieter. Evidently she had been hiding her ninja skills from Jeremy for a long time. Or maybe it was just because she was Chinese and gifted in these areas.

Jeremy freaked out when he looked up and saw Qwerty also trying to make his way down the rope. He pointed up to show Nikki. "Look he's coming after us! We forgot to cut the rope!"

Nikki's reflexes were a lot more faster than Jeremy's when it came to dealing with emergencies. She reached into her pocket and plucked out a lighter.

"Problem solved!" She said lighting the frays at the end of the rope. The rope caught fire and slowly the flames climbed up the rope creeping their way towards Qwerty.

"Let's go!" Said Nikki pulling on Jeremy's arm, "The crotch rocket is parked in the back."

"You stole my crotch rocket?" Asked Jeremy.

Nikki didn't respond as there was no extra time to chit chat. By the time they reached the Kawasaki they could already hear sirens. Somebody obviously figured out what was going on and phoned the police. Jeremy was in complete shock when he watched Nikki jump on the crotch rocket and fire it up before he could even spit out "Jack Russell". He got very confused when Nikki didn't slide her butt a few feet back to give him the drivers seat.

"What's this I can't even steer my own motorcycle?"

"I'm driving babe...you're all doped up on psych meds."

Jeremy didn't like where this was going. Sirens were wailing and they had to act quickly. Qwerty was most likely on fire at this point. "I'm in a hospital gown are you crazy! It's gonna be windy and I need to be seated in the front so I'm not exposing myself."

Just the thought of it turned Nikki on. She loved spontaneous adventures and this was all fun to her. It was just like an action movie. She got off the bike and planted a big sloppy kiss on Jeremy's lips. They hugged. They embraced. Nikki even went as far as to give him a little squeeze back there to grasp his attention as she pulled herself close to him. She whispered into his ear. "I'm driving big boy...suck it up...stop worrying about a little bare ass hanging out the tailpipe....this is St.Louis....anything goes."

Jeremy planted one last quick kiss on Nikki's lips. "Fine then. You drive. It'll be my turn to grope around your belly button for any loose fuzzies left by your shirt."

Nikki revved up the crotch rocket and then put her helmet on. The sirens were getting closer and they needed to get out of dodge. Nikki kicked it up into first gear and almost did a wheelie. Jeremy slid his cold hands under her shirt and held on for the ride of his life. *Were they going back to Tent City?*

CHAPTER 35

Mrs.Ballins nearly fainted when Nikki and Jeremy showed up at her doorstep. Jeremy of course, only wearing a hospital gown. She quickly embraced her son giving him a long warm hug while crooking her neck and giving Nikki a dirty look. *What had Nikki done to her son? Why was he in a hospital gown? Where had they been all this time?* So many questions raced through Mrs.Ballins head. She thought it would be a good idea if everyone took a seat in the living room to discuss what was going on. Needless to say Mrs.Ballins couldn't wait to do Jeremy's

laundry. She escorted them both into the living room and insisted they take a seat on the sofa.

Mrs. Ballins grilled her son first. "Please don't tell me you escaped from a mental ward...what's with the hospital gown?"

Jeremy hemmed and hawed for a second fishing for something to say. Nikki quickly butted in. "I had to rescue your son Mrs. Ballins he was in imminent danger."

Jeremy's mom was still a bit perplexed. "You mean to tell me he wasn't properly discharged? Does he have to go back?"

Jeremy and Nikki both looked at each other and Nikki looked completely lost. *Could they take you back as a patient if you escaped from their hospital?* Nikki really didn't know but she quickly tried to conjure up a reply.

"I'm sure once we explain everything to them they won't make Jeremy come back."

It didn't sit well with Mrs. Ballins. "The police are looking for you both. The secret service, FBI, or whoever they are has already spoken with me. Whatever it is that you guys stole you're definitely gonna have to give back."

Jeremy cut in. "We didn't steal anything mom....somebody gave me something and Nikki doesn't think the government should be allowed to have it."

Mrs. Ballins still wasn't too fond of Nikki. She still felt that Nikki was fully responsible for the trouble Jeremy was in. "Agent Dreko and Agent Kolt have interviewed me twice. I somewhat know what's going on not to mention some guy named Trevor that apparently you guys know and sent a video to."

Nikki manned up. "That whole Trevor thing was on me Mrs. Ballins. Trevor is my ex-boyfriend that was verbally abusive towards me. The whole thing was my idea. Jeremy had nothing to do with it. It was only a harmless prank."

Jeremy's mom immediately sprung up from her chair. "Harmless prank? Apparently you two haven't been watching the news lately." She said fumbling around under the television for a VHS tape that she had recorded yesterday from the six O clock news. Nikki looked over at Jeremy. All Jeremy could do was shrug his shoulders. Mrs. Ballins put the 42 inch television on channel 3 so they could watch the tape.

"I want you kids to take a good look at what you consider a harmless prank."

Both Trevor and his girlfriend Patricia popped up on the screen. They were sitting on a black leather sofa being interviewed by some blond haired lady in a red dress. Nikki had to stifle a giggle when she picked up on Trevor's feigned look of traumatization. He was always such a good actor. The lady in the red dress conducting the interview started talking.

"So Trevor tell us again about the impact that these fake videos sent to your smartphone has had on your relationship with your girlfriend."

Trevor's acting was paying off. Nikki was not surprised by how well Trevor could convince people to gravitate towards his opinion.

"It affects me everyday....I mean the video clip looks so real and it is Patricia's voice. No matter how hard I try I can't get the images out of my mind...this video clip of the love of my life making out with another man will haunt me for life!"

The camera focused back on the lady doing the interview. "What about you Patricia? What are your thoughts on this?"

Trevor's girlfriend pulled back on her hair. "It's mean and immature. This ZIOD MPXL just seems dangerous and scary...I mean what if ISIS or other terrorists use this technology to infiltrate communication with our military? I mean this kind of stuff is really scary. How can we possibly convince the public not to trust their own eyes?"

The Barbera Walters-look-a-like lady did the ole twitching of the eyes with a cringe look as if to say *why haven't the authorities dealt with this? Why is it taking them so long to destroy ZIOD MPXL?*

Jeremy's mom got up from the sofa and shut off the television. "Do you kids see what I'm talking about now? Whatever it is you guys have it's no joke. Trevor is traumatized and his mind is still tricked into believing that Patricia made out with a big black basketball player."

Jeremy didn't really have anything to say. He mostly seemed too occupied pulling on his hospital gown to prevent his mother from running into a peep show as his underwear was still sitting in the property room back at the hospital. It had been one heck of a ride on the motorcycle for sure. Nikki knew by the look on Mrs. Ballins face that it was time to tell her what she needed to hear. There was no point in telling her that ZIOD MPXL had some good uses too. Good uses like retiring news anchors could still report the news looking fresh and young as they withered away with old age. Good uses like Mrs. Planico's son behind bars could finally do the remainder of his time peacefully because they had photoshopped his paperwork making him no longer a confidential informant. Or "*rat*" as the inmates like to call it.

Nikki pulled on the necklace around her neck that had ZIOD MPXL hanging from it. She showed it to Jeremy's mother.

"Mrs. Ballins Jeremy and I have decided to give this piece of crime evidence back to the police...isn't that right Jeremy?" She said giving Jeremy "*the look*".

Jeremy was quick to pick up what was going on and nodded to concur.

They both watched as Mrs. Ballins clasped her hands together as if to show relief. She even let out a nice long sigh.

"That's great! When are you planning on doing this?"

Nikki had already married Jeremy 100 times in her mind over the weeks. She was learning quick how to impress what she hoped would one day be her future mother-in-law.

"How about right now Mrs. Ballins? How about we do it now?"

CHAPTER 36

The state trooper had absolutely no idea that he was being recorded. Officer Henkle was in his mid 30's and very quick with reading people. It took him all of maybe ten seconds to deduce that Jeremy would be very compliant and not a threat. As for Nikki? The trooper sensed a "*wild child*" personality in her but he would never let her know that he could see it in her. He was mostly elated that they had turned themselves in before things escalated even worse. He nodded to Jeremy sitting across his desk.

"I like that Hookies ball cap...my brother used to play for them."
Commented Officer Henkle. He really liked Jeremy's ball cap.

"Thanks....Christmas gift...I really don't follow the team much though.."
Said Jeremy desperately hoping the state trooper would not stare any longer at his ball cap. Underneath it was a 9volt battery wired to a wireless micro mini cam with the lens a size of a pinhole that had been concealed. It gave Mrs. Ballins sitting outside in the car the ability to record everything going on. Nikki had insisted that they record everything for their own protection as she accentuated it is never wise to trust the police. Even if the camera in Jeremy's hat was discovered it would do the police no good to confiscate it as Jeremy's mother secretly

waited in the car recording them turning themselves in. The mini cam provided a wireless feed. Jeremy had yanked it out of a toy helicopter for them to use for this event.

There was an eerie silence as officer Henkle scrutinized both Jeremy and Nikki. It almost appeared as if the officer was jealous of all their *Bounces* that they would be experiencing at their young ages of 18 and 19. He could remember the thrill of experimenting with alcohol and how much funner it was not yet being of age to drink legally. Jeremy interrupted the officer's deviation of thought when he reached into his pocket and pulled out a tiny red iPod Nano no longer than the size of a thumb.

"That's ZIOD MPXL?" Asked the trooper. He knew very little about computer accessories.

Jeremy slid it across the desk. "No...that's Qwerty's confession. He doesn't know I found his red iPod and secretly recorded him confessing to all the serial killings. He somehow managed to sneak it into the hospital."

Henkle grunted. "Hmph! Something that small? Probably boofed it. Hospitals aren't allowed full cavity searches like prisons are. Citizens would be outraged if they had to squat naked and cough."

Nikki chuckled at the thought. The trooper couldn't help but stare at her cleavage that seemed a bit *"poofy"* for an Asian girl. He couldn't help but wonder if she was doing silicon like everyone else these days.

"Oh so anyways....ZIOD MPXL...I'm assuming you have it with you?"
Asked the trooper.

Nikki smiled so innocent like. She pulled the necklace up from between her breasts and handed ZIOD MPXL over to the officer. "I'm still a bit confused officer Henkle..this thumb drive can wreak havoc...why is it again that it is so imperative that the police confiscate it? How are we to

know what it is you people intend to do with it?"

The officer furrowed his eyebrows not wanting to tell Nikki the truth. "It's just evidence to a crime scene that's all. We do intend to destroy it later."

Nikki was still confused. "If it's getting destroyed then why do you even need it? Why not just destroy it right here right now?"

Officer Henkle was getting frustrated. He grasped ZIOD MPXL into the palm of his hand and stood up. "Can you two wait here for a few minutes? I'll be right back."

Both Jeremy and Nikki nodded and the officer left the room. Jeremy was completely shocked.

"He doesn't seem to have much interest in Qwerty's nano? Why?" Asked Jeremy.

Nikki smiled. "Maybe the court systems are finally realizing how easy it is to doctor recordings and it won't hold any weight in the judicial system."

Jeremy droned on. "I had to risk a lot to get that. Qwerty is still probably wondering how I found it inside his slipper."

"Let's just hope they catch him soon before he kills again." Said Nikki, "Hey I wonder what's taking officer Henkle so long back there." She commented.

With that the door swung open and the state trooper came barging in with a pale face like he had seen a ghost. "There's...there's nothing at all on this flashdrive!" He exclaimed.

The officer still had no clue that everything was being recorded from underneath Jeremy's ball cap. Even the officer showing little to no

interest in Qwerty's little red IPod with the confessions of the killings. An impish smile jumped on Nikki's face as she reached into her purse and pulled out a ball point hammer and a black flashdrive with tiny lettering that said "ZIOD MPXL". That's when Nikki suddenly turned into a rebellious Beiber-wanna-be.

"Ya know officer.....Jeremy and I have been through a lot with this whole ZIOD mess...I think I'm just gonna destroy it right now instead of waiting for your people to do it."

Before the officer could stop her Nikki took the hammer and smashed down on the plastic flashdrive. She pummeled it a few more times for good measure and half of it shattered to pieces. Jeremy purposely lowered his head to be sure everything was being recorded.

The officer pulled on his dark brown hair. "What are you doing???"
That's police evidence!!!!"

Nikki laughed not being phased in the least bit. "And I'm making sure this weapon of mass destruction gets destroyed!!" She said excitedly, "George Bush would be so proud!" She smashed on it a few more times with the hammer as if she was wailing crabs with a mallet. Jeremy was getting amped up and turned on at the same time. Nikki's *power moves* always got him to like her more. Maybe she would work her way up the political ladder and pan out to be one of those cool politician ladies. The kind that bust a cool power move right in a meeting and dump glitter all over some crooked politician. American girls were nowhere near as fun as Nikki.

Nikki wasn't done her little show just yet. She didn't trust the forensic experts that might manage to salvage ZIOD MPXL and piece it back together. She reached into her purse once again and pulled out a very small portable blow torch. She went straight to work on melting what was left of ZIOD MPXL. She left really bad black burn marks on the officer's desk.

The state trooper became enraged. "Okay little miss young lady....now you've gone to far!" He skirted around the desk and pulled Nikki up from her chair and placed her arms behind her back. Jeremy didn't realize it but his stealthy wireless mini cam stopped recording when the officer read Nikki her Miranda.

CHAPTER 37

The news anchor lady was named Marlene Jones. She felt extremely uncomfortable toting the streets of Las Vegas with \$40,000.00 cash. All in a Manila envelope just as Qwerty had requested. The only thing that gave her comfort strutting the freaky streets of Vegas was the eyes. Las Vegas was a hot spot for tourists and there were eyes everywhere. She knew that her plan today would be simple. *Get in, pay, and get out.* She was a big fan of Qwerty's work but she couldn't trust him more than she could trust a fox with a chicken. His brilliance was attractive but his personality was straight up psychotic. It made perfect sense to her why every female walking past him got the heebie-jeebies and made a point of folding up their cleavage to prevent evoking what they believed was a terrorist in the making. *A quiet weirdo like Qwerty? No doubt about it.*

By the time Marlene reached the Coney Island Cafe she sensed something was out of kilter. She observed the man seated at the outside table and right away knew it was Qwerty. "*CopperMan*" she always liked to call him. His skin tight copper body suit glistened in the sun. It was all starting to make sense now why Qwerty insisted that they meet in Vegas. Freaks everywhere. A man in a copper body suit wouldn't draw much attention in a place like Vegas. *But wasn't it so unlike CopperMan to be waiting on her first? Didn't he usually prefer popping out from behind a bush and catching her by surprise like last meeting?* Odd.

Marlene carefully undid the zipper on her black leather purse as she approached the table where CopperMan was seated drinking a tall Latte. *Get in and get out* She reminded herself. She would feel a lot better if

she could see CopperMan's face from under the Head-To-Toe mesh copper body suit.

CopperMan motioned for her to take a seat across from him on the outside patio.

"Please, please news lady...please have a seat and sit down."

Marlene didn't know what to say. She really hoped this wouldn't take long. \$40,000.00 was a lot of money but she really needed ZIOD MPXL.

"You look good in the copper suit!" Was all she could spit out. She was already sweating at the brow.

"You have the money?" Asked CopperMan.

She patted her purse. "It's right in here. Forty thousand cash as you requested. You have ZIOD? I thought you said you weren't able to duplicate it?"

CopperMan chuckled. "Found the blue prints in my closet and was able to make another one. I don't have much time...they're onto me already...lets do this...lemme see the money."

That's when all hell broke loose. Agents clad in dark suits sprang out from every direction. The tourists on the sidewalk below then scattered away like dancing chickens when the agents brandished their hand guns. One agent tackled CopperMan to the ground and the other tackled Marlene the news anchor. CopperMan said nothing but Marlene screamed.

"I haven't done anything wrong!" She barked, "I don't even know this man!" She danced around like a freshly caught fish as the agents subdued her.

CopperMan on the other hand reacted to the take down like a veteran. He didn't say a bloody word and made sure that no resisting arrest charges would ensue afterwards. He was no dummy. Prison healthcare sucked and he certainly had no plans of going in there with a broken jaw for flopping around like a fish as Marlene was doing. She'd be okay. She was a pretty woman with lots of money. More than likely this was her first rodeo so they would be careful not to break **HER** jaw. They had no choice but to put up with her shenanigans.

They peppered CopperMan with questions as they put the cuffs on him but he said not a word. Nothing at all. Nothing that could possibly be used against him in court.

Marlene Jones continued screaming and throwing a fit. There was much rubbernecking from the crowd an earshot away. "You can't arrest me I'm Marlene Jones from channel 12! My husband is gonna sue you guys!" She screamed. The nosy crowd seemed highly amused by her hissy fit. Many of them were homeless and down on their luck. They seemed to enjoy watching the high and mighty fall.

"Now you really have something to report!" Shouted a man in a tawdry Star Wars costume. The other half of the crowd was mostly curious about the man in the copper suit not saying a word. *Had he been arrested plenty of times before? Who was this man?*

CopperMan could finally catch his breath from the hot sun when they threw him into the back of a black SUV. Tinted windows of course. The Feds wouldn't have it any other way. It was even nicely air conditioned to a temperature low enough a penguin would feel a breeze. As the big black Chevy Tahoe nosed away from the crowd Special agent Dreko let out a boisterous laugh.

"You did an excellent job CopperMan. It delights us to no end catching the person responsible for aiding and abetting the notorious CopperMan."

Trevor ripped away at the mesh copper body suit itching his face. "Where do you think Qwerty really is anyways? I'd really like to see him caught. Can I have my money now? How much of that \$40,000.00 do I get? You promised me \$20,000.00 but I didn't know she had 40."

CHAPTER 38

The dank air in the basement didn't bother Qwerty one bit. It was just like living in an underground cave and Qwerty liked the cooler temperature. It was almost like getting air conditioning for free. Sure his clothes smelled like mildew. Sure he sat in the green leather chair for so long until moss transpired around the edges. But Qwerty liked it. He was like a vampire and could hole up in the dark for months. Isolation never bothered Qwerty and he never seemed to get bored too easily. The only thing interrupting his perpetual solace was the strong smell of bleach. That would eventually go away unless he felt compelled to recycle and print more trumped up money.

The door swung open and startled him like a hunted rabbit. Usually his brother had the decency to knock first as agent Dreko preferred not to catch Qwerty in the act of anything he would have to lie about later.

Qwerty threw a blanket over the laser printer. "Is that you bro? Ever heard of knocking?"

Agent Dreko barged down the steps with a big shitty grin on his face. "It worked Qwerty! You're a genius!" He said holding up a Manila envelope full of cash.

Qwerty laughed. "Gotta launder this money somehow. So Trevor really played right into it huh? What's going to happen after Trevor finally figures out you did the ole switch-a-roo? I'm not even sure he'll ever figure it out this fake bleached out money looks good to me!"

Dreko tossed Qwerty the Manila envelope so he could count all the cash. "Plenty of Hollywood money in there to keep you busy at the casinos for a while."

Qwerty grunted. "Hmph....One big Charles Barkley hand maybe. There's not even enough here to make a respectable celebrity bet."

His brother corrected him. "You're not a celebrity Qwerty. You got your fame from negative publicity."

Qwerty felt compelled to correct his only brother. "Negative publicity is still publicity. It's more fans than you get Mr.Special Agent Dreko." Joked Qwerty.

"So where did you learn how to counterfeit money anyways? I know your smart enough not to google it and leave a search history for the alphabet boys to play with."

Qwerty was proud of his work. He pulled a ten dollar bill out from the printer. "Look closely....used to be a five...bleached it first...your entire washing machine is full of em!" He joked.

"You didn't answer my question...where or who taught you how?"

Qwerty hated revealing secrets to his brother. Due to the circumstances that he was now living under his roof he knew it was not wise to keep secrets at this time.

"Jeremy taught me how when we were roommates in the lunny bin. He's okay but his Chinese girlfriend is a real witch....just check out these hideous burn marks on my arm...that little witch tried to light me on fire!! Wicker Man style! Gave them a good scare though."

Agent Dreko grunted. "That little witch just got released this morning. Her mother bailed her out. Neither one of them are getting charged and the state trooper says those two teenagers are now two love birds."

Qwerty pulled his sleeves back down to conceal the burn marks.
"Jeremy is German by the way...I bet he'll make a good engineer some day."

Dreko almost sneezed from the strong smell of bleach in his basement. He would feel more comfortable with his brother counting all the little tiny squares on his computer one by one like he used to do as a kid. Qwerty was weird and never had any friends growing up. You could put a brick in front of his face and it would entertain him for hours. A day or two later and he could tell you exactly how many pours he had counted inside of the brick. Qwerty hated television. Referred to it as the "*Idiot Box*".

Dreko plucked the little red iPod Nano out of his pocket and showed it to his brother now living in his basement.

"Well that little German boy you are so fond of gave this to us yesterday....evidently he found this in your slipper and recorded you bragging about your alleged killing sprees...look familiar Qwerty? You're getting sloppy Q...you're getting sloppy."

The End

Epilogue

Radio controlled robots spun razor sharp saws and little hatchets at each other. The crowd roared as the smaller battle bot pinned the bigger one up against the time delayed blow torch. Wires melted. Battery powered motors screamed as wires to the robots fried and smoked. Nikki clapped and cheered the little robot on from outside the cage. She was joined by a larger crowd now standing and clapping as well. They all seemed to be rooting for the smaller robot.

Nikki shouted into Mrs.Planico's ear above the hubbub so she could hear. "St.Louis doesn't have this kind of entertainment like we have out here in Marxton Virginia does it Mrs.Planico?"

Mrs.Planico shouted back above the roaring crowd. "You suburb people have too much money to be able to invest in hobbies like this but this is quite entertaining....what's this show called again?"

Nikki cupped her hand to be heard better. "Battle Bots! Jeremy and I have purchased some stock in it. Your right Mrs.Planico...there's money out here...our Goodwill stores have more to offer too."

Nikki was glad that she could take Mrs.Planico out for some fun for once. The social systems were a lot better and faster in Marxton Virginia. Nikki knew a lot of people and had connections. Because Mrs.Planico was a single widowed nice old lady they had moved her up the waiting list for special assistant housing. She could bathe when she needed to. She didn't smoke which was also a plus as the land lords didn't relish the thought of deterioration of their property. Nikki had even started a flower garden right out front of Mrs.Planico's apartment. Jeremy had set up something for her television so she could get free channels. It was quite a lovely abode she had going for her.

Mrs.Planico leaned over once more to communicate with Nikki overtop of the din. "Ricardo is doing really well thanks to you guys...the inmates don't harass him anymore and he is making friends now."

Nikki couldn't help herself. "Is he gonna squeal on them too?"

Mrs. Planico couldn't tell Nikki was joking. She cringed at the off-the-wall remark. Nikki put her hand on Mrs. Planico's knee. "I'm joking Mrs. Planico....I'm glad to hear your son is doing well."

The hand on her knee seemed to lift her spirits back up. After all, Nikki and Jeremy had done a lot for her. Maybe the Chinese just liked to joke a lot. "They're even talking about early release because of his good behavior...I got a letter from him...he's even completing drug rehab classes."

Nikki suddenly felt the vibration in her pants. *Was it Jeremy? Was he done his workout at the gym already?*

She smiled when a little bubble popped up on her smart phone and she recognized a picture of Jeremy in his work out clothes. Nike attire of course. There was a triangle pointing sideways and she knew Jeremy had sent her a cute little video clip. They did this to each other a lot and it burned up less Internet than face time. Nikki was so excited to get a video text from Jeremy she didn't even notice that the video text had come from a strange number.

She pushed the play triangle on the bubble of her screen and plugged in ear phones so only she could hear.

Nikki was in tears within the next thirty seconds. Jeremy was making out with a tall Irish red haired girl with boobs the size of Texas! *Why would Jeremy send a video text like this? What about the engagement they were always talking about? What was happening?*

Tears raced down her face creating a salty cesspool at the end of her chin. Mrs. Planico could tell something was wrong. The Battle Bots crowd continued to cheer and pretended not to notice. Nikki felt like she wanted to throw up. When she finally had the nerve to look up she was

shocked when she noticed a familiar face on the other side of the crowd. It was Trevor!!

He gave her a big shitty grin as if he knew everything that was going through her head right now. Her 20/20 vision spotted him picking up his smart phone and typing something into it. After he did so he looked right at her from across the crowd and smiled victoriously right at her. Trevor hit the send button. A text message popped up on Nikki's phone from the same strange number.

The message read.....*"Now we're even."*

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About The Author

Blake Steidler was born in Lancaster County PA. Blake has never married and has no children. He has published many different genres of books including *When Nightmares Become Dreams* which has once made the top ten list. By the time he reached the age of 17 he has been taunted by mysterious hallucinations that would not make sense to the average Joe. Chemical imbalances, racing thoughts, and delirium have all played a major role in Mr. Steidler's life. Now soon to be the age of 34 he is now considered to be God's gift to employers as they try their best to gravitate his mind away from "story time" to "work time". He is now an Over The Road truck driver with a trucker's belly big enough it would make a really good pillow to sleep on. Blake is a Billy Big Rigger at heart but he hopes one day his stories will make it big enough that he can finally hang up the keys and go back to handling his business at the Penn National Race Course.

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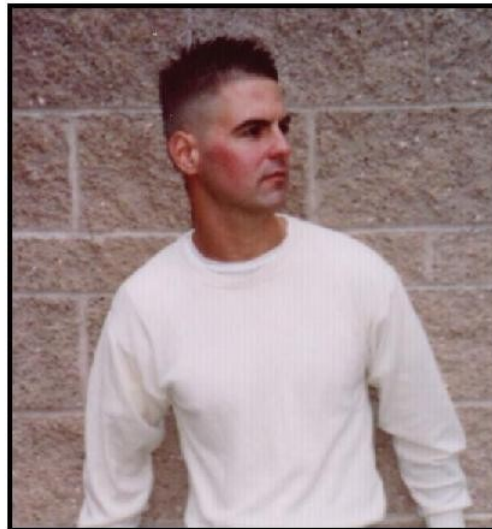
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"It's about time Steidler finally comes up with an exclusive biography heard he's got some magnificent photoshop skills"

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" If you can live a lie then there's no reason why you can't live a dream"

- Blake Steidler -



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