The Streets

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Within Shadows

Sink down into soul
Feel it
Spread apart and engulf you
Entangle you in limbs of lunacy
Sedate
In hate
Radiate
Congregate courage
And call to fate
The flesh of your old self
Flakes, and falls, lifeless
Crumbles into the earth
Of your new birth
Fruitless
Fears
Facilitate this need
To paint flowers that bleed
Concede
To the new breed
Of this demon son
Family run,

From me
And this aftermath of atrocity
I can't bear to have you see
The claws that curl out from under
These hands that have held death
And these eyes that descend
And show of where my soul has been

thief of dreams

The Lost

Its night again, the day is long gone, just another endless bleakness in this world of the fallen. I made my way down the dark street. Searching the cars with unlocked doors for spare change amongst their floor mats, maybe tonight will be my lucky night and I'll find some careless souls wallet or purse. Hope is all I have left and even that is starting to evaporate as I try the door to an eighty something Nissan Sentra. The door pops open and I quickly reach in and pop the overhead light from the roof and yank the wires out, I'm encased in darkness as I begin my search for a homeless mans bounty. Homeless kid is more fitting, for I'm only fifteen years old. A run away that couldn't handle life with his father, a man so caught up in his own perfection, he can't bear to see his son so flawed.

I search the floor, under the seats, the glove compartment (full of registration and maps); on the back seat is a jacket that looks old and worn through, but I snatch it anyway. As I'm searching that small area between the two front seats something thumps against the passenger side window and I jump reflexively.

Pulling myself out of the car I look over the roof and see a man standing on the other side. Not sure what to do, I try explain-

ing to him, “Look man, I was just looking for change. I wasn’t gonna steal anything. I’m sorry.”

He looks at me with eyes that say he is either high or just completely out of it, then slowly his mouth moves and he says, “Not my car.”

Feeling a bit relieved I smile and step away from the door, “Then check it out bro, there isn’t much but the radio, and it looks generic. Have at it.”

He comes slowly around the front of the car and I’m trying to look as cool as I can when his hand comes up from his side and he takes a swing at me. I jump back and see that he has a knife in his hand as he turns slowly towards me with tears in his eyes and sweat streaking down his face.

Oh shit! I think as I side step and try to rationalize what is happening. The whole time my mind seems to take too long to tell me to run and he swings the knife at me again, this time I am prepared for it and step back out of the way.

Finally my brain kicks into gear and screams for me to run and I turn to do just that. I take one step before he catches the back of my shirt and spins me around, his face inches from mine, his breath that of a corpse.

“Have you seen god?” he asks, his voice just barely above a whisper. Raspy and slurred.

I can’t think of an answer and he turns me around so that I am facing away from him and asks me again if I have seen god as the hand with the knife comes around in front of me and rubs across my groin. His other arm wrapped tightly around my neck.

This can't be happening! It isn't happening!

Feeling my knees start to shake, prayers start to form in my mind and then disperse as the realization that god doesn't really exist sets in. without prayers I think of anything I can to arm myself. My arms come down from his arm that is wrapped around my throat and fall to my sides, my hand brushing the front of my pants pocket that holds the file that I forgot all about.

The file was an old worn down spike of metal that I had found behind some store nights ago. I carried it with me as the only form of self-defense I possessed. Strange that I would have forgotten about it until now, no matter, now I had to figure out a way to get it out of my pocket without drawing his attention to it.

As my mind searched frantically for a way to arm myself the man tightened his grip on my throat as though sensing something wasn't right. "Have you seen god?" asks the man, his lips brushing my ear.

"God?" I ask, "I don't know."

"God took away everything. Left me with nothing, told me I was nobody."

The knuckles of his knife hand rub against me and I try to squirm away but he holds me tight.

"Please." I say as I turn slightly in his grip, trying to turn so I can see him but also sliding my right hand down into my pants pocket, gripping the top of the file.

"God told me it felt good." He said as he relaxed his grip on me a little, his breathing took on a shuddering quality and I thought he might be sobbing.

As I inched the file out of my pocket I felt something wisp across my side, it felt like someone had ran an ice cube along my side, then the cold turned hot as I felt something like melting wax run down from where the ice had crossed my skin.

He cut me.

With my left hand I reached for his knife and at the same time pushed myself away from him, gripping the file in my right hand I jabbed it at him, hoping to scare him back but instead the file punched through his stomach. It felt like driving a blunt instrument into a waterbed, a slight hesitation before it sunk deep.

Shocked that I had actually done something like that, I almost caught the blade of his knife in my neck as he lunged for me. Luckily I wasn't too dazed and stepped back and to the side as the blade danced lightly across the side of my neck. I cried out and as a reflex I thrust the file at him again. He was already on his way down when the file slipped into his face, just below his left eye. It didn't go as far as before, something had stopped its entry as he crashed to the ground moaning.

I stumbled back and then took a quick look around, saw nobody on the street, no one standing at any lighted windows, no one at all. It seemed that the whole world had gone to sleep and left me alone with this psycho. I clutched my side and then raised my hand in the night and saw a dark stain spreading over my hand.

Dropping the file to the ground I clutched again at my side and ran. I ran as fast as I could down the street and then turned into the first alley I saw, slowing down to a walk I headed for the nearest back alley street lamp, which was nothing more than a

garage light. When I reached the light I looked again at my hand and nausea washed over me. This was my blood, and there seemed to be a lot of it. The coldness had completely gone from my wounds and my side and neck were on fire as sweat mixed with the blood and burned like coals in the heart of a fire.

I pulled my shirt up and looked at my side, then quickly turned to the side and threw up, seconds later blackness came rushing up at me from somewhere behind my eyes and I crumbled to the ground as unconsciousness came to claim me.

I woke up lying on the ground behind the garage; the sun had started to climb its way towards the heavens. I started to sit up then screamed out as pain flashed across my whole body then pulled to a point at my side. Lying on my back I raised my head and looked at my side, there was blood everywhere. My shirt was up around my armpit and blood had started to clot in some places, leaving patches of black along the lake of red and brown. Blood had begun to spread again when I tried to sit up. I laid my head back down and stared up at the sky, fear came to hold me in its embrace and a tear threatened to fall from my eye.

Then I heard the buzzing sound.

The buzzing of flies.

OH MY GOD!

The flies!

I sprang to my feet and swatted and brushed at my side, at the black spots that were not blood but swarms of flies. Then my mind closed up and I was again pushed down into unconsciousness.

I remember someone looking down at me saying something and their face had the most disgusted look on it I think I have ever seen, but I barely registered it at all before I blacked out again.

I woke up in a hospital bed; everything was so clean, so perfect. The air had an almost sweet smell to it because of the cleaners and bleach and medicine. The place was spotless except for me. And I was ran down and smelling like something that your cat wouldn't even bother to drag in. I sat up, and found that I was alone in a room made for two. No neighbor in the opposite bed. That was fine. I watched the people walking by the door to my room. I saw the TV but didn't know really if I should turn it on or not. I started to feel a little faint so I lay back down.

The lady who came in, (nurse, doctor?) she told me that I had a pretty good infection. And I would need to go get some antibiotics for that. She went on to tell me that I now had thirteen staples in my side. (Staples?) I thought… what they couldn't find any stitching stuff or something so they called the orderly in and let him go to town on me with a frigging stapler?

She must have read the look on my face and offered an explanation and reason for the staples over stitches. I don't remember why it was though.

"The flies?" I asked

"Flies? Oh well, if you mean your cut, there was some cleaning that had to be done prior to us closing it up. And any longer and we wouldn't have even been able to use staples at all. You really are lucky that you made it to the hospital in time."

"I didn't make it here. I was-"

She cut me off and kept right on talking, “Oh that’s right, you were dropped off by 2231. That would be Andy and Karen. They drive the ambulance that picked you up after some lady called the cops and the cops called us. Or them rather…” She trailed off, lost in some deeply seated nurse daydream.

“Who?”

I don’t think she heard me. This lady was on a one-way road to talk her down and she went on. “Oh my… I used to think Andy was so cute, you know? But Karen is a good woman and I wouldn’t…” (I just closed my eyes and drifted off)… “Your dads on his way.” And she turned and was gone.

(You’re dads on his way!!)

“My dads on his way?”

Oh this wasn’t going to be good. Not good at all. I needed to get out of there. And fast. But I couldn’t, whatever they had me on had my head submerged and when ever I looked around it felt like I was looking through a little glass aquarium or something. And what happened to my clothes? I pressed the blue button on the side of the bed with the nurse thing on it. Nothing. I pressed it again. And again.

Finally the nurse came in, “Can I get you something?”

“My clothes.”

“Oh well hun, they cut your shirt off in the ambulance and we put your pants, shoes, and socks in a bag for you. But you should be fine. It’s natural for a person to want to get out of that gown but we advise against it. You should wait till your father-“

“I can’t wait for my dad! I have to leave!”

"Hun, is something wrong?"

"Yes! No. I just need my clothes. Please?"

"Just wait, your father should be here shortly."

The sudden anxiety and feeling of loss was too much and I felt like throwing up, so I lay back down and I must have fallen asleep. I woke to see my dad standing against the wall. Anger pulling his brow down.

"What the fuck happened to you?" He asked.

"I got cut."

"Fucking little drug addict." He came closer and grabbed me by my hair. Pulled my head up off the pillow.

"No dad. I'm not-"

"You little ungrateful mother fucker! Fucking bandage on your neck! Is that where you shoot up?"

"No dad, I'm not on dru-"

"Stupid little mother fucker! What the fuck am I supposed to do with you?"

(Love me?)

"Dad, I just-"

He reached out and slapped me hard. "You're not my son."

"Dad please." I started to cry.

"Fucking sorry little piece of shit. You're not my son."

Again I passed out, or just blocked it from memory. I don't know which. The next thing I knew I was alone in my hospital bed again. But I felt better than I had, physically anyway. I sat up and eased myself to the end of the bed and stood. My side shouted

against it but it was time to go. I didn't want to wait around for my dad to come back.

I shuffled to the bathroom and sat down on the toilet. Thinking. How can I get out of here? Can I just leave? I didn't know.

I searched the little cabinets in my room until I found the sack with my clothes, what was left of them. They were filthy. I had forgotten about how dirty you can get when you don't have the time to wash your clothes and no shower. I had been going to McDonalds and locking myself in the bathroom. Stripping down and washing as best I could. But it wasn't very good. I felt lousy.

I pulled my pants on and tried to put my socks on but my side flared and I had to lean back. Catch my breath. Then I tried it again. It took a long time but finally I had my socks and shoes on. I found a medicine supply cabinet type deal that held among other things scissors, and cut my gown a little below the waste and tucked it in, being careful not to touch my side too much. I ran water through my hair and with my hands made it look reasonable. Then I peeked outside and saw the nurses down at the end of the hall. No one saw me. I stepped out into the hall and walked as best I could past them.

They never even looked up to see who I was. I walked down and pressed the button for the elevator, waiting for them to realize who I was and come running. But they never did. I got in and pressed the button marked lobby and then walked out of the hospital with its clean smell and bright lights. Back into the night. Back to the streets. It would be a long walk back to the apartments

where I sleep on the roof. But I walked from Mercy hospital back to my home. My only home I had left. The rooftop. The streets.

Company of Strangers

It had been three days sense I left the hospital. My side hurt like nothing I had ever felt before. But I managed to do some pan handling at the bus station any way.

I had eleven dollars... not bad for two days work. The first day I just sat atop the rooftop. Trying to pull myself together and think of what I could do to get my life in order. The next day I was asking strangers for spare change. So much for plans.

It never occurred to me to try an leave this place. I had everything I needed, a familiar town, a place to sleep where I didn't have to worry about people messing with me. My third day of begging brought me to a kid named Sam. He was only a couple years older than me. Seventeen I believe. He had been on the streets for two years now. While I was asking for change, he was doing the same but I didn't see him. I really didn't see anyone. But he saw me and casually made his way over to me.

"Hey, you trying to move in on my snatch-&-go?" He asked with a grin.

"You're what?"

"My pan handling paradise." He smiled, lifting an arm and sweeping it around like some car salesman.

"No, I just needed to try an get some money."

"Well this is the best place. Strangers with bus tickets and spare change. I usually set up next to the coke machines. People see you and don't think much until they pull out a big pocket full of change, buy a soda, and then I hit them up. And they can't refuse cause they know I just saw the change in their hands." He smiled again. Always that damn smile, it almost was enough to piss me off if my side didn't hurt so badly.

"Nice." I said then winced at the pain in my side.

"Hey you all right? Look a little out of it."

"I got cut a couple days ago."

"No shit? Well, did you get them back?"

"I don't know. Why do you care?"

"Hey man, I'm just making conversation. Take it easy. You want something to eat?"

"No I'm fine."

"Well shit man, it isn't everyday you meet someone out here who isn't out to rob you. And you don't exactly look like too much of a threat. My name's Sam." He offered his hand.

I shook his hand, "Mines Tristan."

We talked for quite some time. Neither one of us was giving our reasons for being here.

Finally Sam stood up, "Well my friend, you got a place or something? I got a little apartment of sorts. It's old and abandoned but nobody else has moved in. and get this. Running water," he laughed. "Can you believe it, running water? It's almost as nice as a condo on the beach."

"That's nice. What do you do? Sit around in the dark and pretend to wash dishes?"

He just smiled that million-dollar smile and asked if I needed a place to crash.

"No I'm good, I got my own set up not far away."

"Well shit man, come by anytime. I'm usually down here until around ten at night. That's when the wrong people start coming out."

"Cool. Hey thanks for the conversation."

"No problem, don't be a strange stranger." And with a smile he turned and left.

I made my way back to my home and for once, actually had something to sit and think about that I could smile about. As I lay down to sleep I offered a goodnight to the stars, and a small prayer for Sam.

The next day I found Sam wearing a Hawaiian shirt, white pants, and the ever-popular beach sandals. It was March. The clouds were an angry gray, threatening rain. But to look at Sam, you would almost find yourself reaching for a pair of sunglasses. The kid had style.

"Hey Ginsu! What's up man?"

Smiling at his clothes I said, "Well apparently the surf. Did anyone ever explain the nearest beach is about two and a half hours away?"

He just stared at me dumbfounded and in utter shock. "What? No?"

"Yea I hear the circus is looking for you again."

He laughed then reached into his backpack. “Got something for ya.”

“Oh wow… My own Little Wet Willie. Can I keep him mom? Please?” I joked.

Sam pulled out a roll of bandage and some Neosporin.

“Hey man, how much do I owe you for this?”

“No charge my man. No charge.”

“Uh, well. Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it, but don’t forget about it at Christmas either.” He smiled.

“No really. Thanks.”

“Hey come on its nothing. Forget about it.”

He gave me a nod as if to shut up, so I did. I picked up and transported myself to the bathroom and tried the best I could to take my bandage off and leave some sign of skin. It wasn’t easy going. The cut had torn a little and I had popped two staples. The blood and some other stuff had seeped out and glued the bandage to my skin. As I pulled the old bandage off the smell hit me. Not a pretty smell either. The smell of rotting flesh and infection. I pulled the staples that had popped out all the way out, they took with them some skin and some pain, sadly the pain would come back and the skin would too. I wadded up some paper towels and dabbed at my battle wound, thinking that maybe I could tell someone it was an old Vietnam wound. I took eight rounds of shrapnel in the G-3S section of Saigon, in ’71. Maybe I’d get a metal or something. Oh wait. I wasn’t even alive in 71. Damn.

The cleaning went very slow. Very, very slow. I dabbed and rubbed. I flaked off the old blood and new blood rose in its place. I ran my finger along the train track of staples a few times. But every time I did that I got chills. It's strange to have foreign metal objects be a part of you. Count me out for the 2005 cyber-robotics club.

Finally I rubbed some good old Neosporin on it and used clean bandages to mop and patch it up. I was as good as a half dead dog. Better than a dead one though. Depending on whom you ask first.

Sam was busy admiring some poor marks luggage. Who I found out later just happened to have misplaced a wallet somewhere. He swore he put it in his suitcases side pocket. He remembers seeing it bulging. Well it was apparently bulging its way into Sam's pocket. I found out about this little bit of information later. It would come as not so quite a shock that my new friend Sam was a thief. But hey, who was I to judge? It's like the pot calling the kettle black. (Whatever the hell that means).

After a few hours of begging, pleading, and slight of hand threatening, we loaded up our stock portfolios and rounded out to Sam's apartment. Not a bad place by our means. Two bedroom one bath, small kitchen, living room. The sign outside said free cable, but I guess they don't cover your electricity. But I'll be damned if there wasn't running water. Someone was going to get their ass chewed out for this one when they figured out someone was getting free water.

Sam had a butane stove that he sparked to life and sat a pan on top of. “You hungry?”

“Well. What do you got?”

“Steak, eggs, milk, salmon… What do you mean, ‘what do I got?’ I got some canned spam smart ass. You want some or not?”

“Nah I’ll pass. Thanks though.”

“Don’t. No seriously, don’t mention it. Please.” Sam laughed.

“Do you have a shower here?” I asked.

“Uh well, kind of.”

“Kind of?”

“Its permanently out of service, some one plugged it and it won’t drain.”

“What about the other apartments?”

“They are all tore up and wrecked, this is the cream of the crop.”

I pulled up a bucket and sat down. Best chairs in the world are five gallon buckets turned up side down. Or if you have no toilet near by and you must go. Um well, that’s another story. Ok so back to the matter at hand.

Sam never ran away from his home but his family ran away from him when he was fifteen. While Sam was away at camp KEEP as a counselor to sixth graders his parents packed up and moved to New York. When he came back he found out.

A neighbor told him that his family just said they were going to New York. And that was that. He stayed in his house for a little while but soon the house was locked up and he was told that if

he stayed he would be arrested for trespassing. He didn't have any family to turn to and his friends couldn't let him stay with them. So he hit the streets.

We talked a while longer, and then he told me that he was going to be leaving soon. I asked where to, and he just said he had something coming up that would allow him to get out of this place and into something normal.

The next day I went down to the bus station but Sam was nowhere to be found. I figured he had other places to pan handle and thought he might show up. But around eight I still hadn't seen him. I closed down my begging for the night and went home.

The next day there still wasn't any sign of Sam, so I walked over to his apartment and found a note.

"Dear Filet Friend.

I'm sorry I couldn't tell you bye, but it has to be this way. I'm moving on. I hope you can do the same.

Sam"

And that was it. I still have the note to this day, but no idea where Sam went off to.

Welcomed Darkness

I was a little upset over Sam leaving so mysteriously. I figured he was going to stick around for a while. And I felt hurt. Like I had lost a long time best friend. But I got over it. I thought about moving into his apartment but decided against it for two reasons.

One was it wasn't that safe. Rust, rot, and rats. And the other reason was because it wasn't safe. Thugs, drug addicts, and the likes would come roaming around every once in a while. Sam had told me that he had to fend them off a couple times but they didn't bother him that much. Well good for him, but I prefer to steer clear of confrontation whenever possible.

He left all his stuff behind. Clothes which were in fairly good condition but too small for me. His stove, but I didn't want it. It was cheaper just to grab a couple burgers then buy food and then have to cook it and fill the butane bottle. Also left behind were his collections of chess pieces. He had taken them from his home before he hit the streets. Why would he leave them? I decided to take those. If he ever came back he could find me and I would return them. But I didn't think he would be coming back. It had been almost two weeks sense he left. I found a couple of books with the covers torn off. Just fiction, Stephen King, Richard Laymon, and some others. But I didn't like the thought of reading. It seemed

like a waste of time. I pitched one of them aside and went about searching his things. I didn't turn up much else. But when I turned to look back over everything I found that a ten-dollar bill was peeking out from the book I had tossed to the side. Money? Surely he wouldn't leave without his money? Maybe he forgot about it. I picked up the book and slipped the ten into my pocket. What surprised me was that in between the pages there was more money, ones, five's, tens, even a couple twenty's. I thumbed through the other books and found more. I stashed the money in the bottom of my socks; put my shoes back on and left. Making sure no one saw me. I got back to my rooftop and counted the money.

Two hundred and fourteen dollars? Oh my god… is it real I wondered? No way, it couldn't be. I looked over each bill but could find no tell tale sign of it being counterfeit. My friend had left me with a fortune. But why?

I sat and thought of a thousand questions, but found no answers. Why would he continue to pan handle if he had so much? Why the hell would he leave it? He surely couldn't have forgotten it. No way. Money was life on the streets. Money was everything. I couldn't figure it out. I fell asleep wondering about the money, Sam, and where he might have disappeared to.

The next day I went back to the bus station and looked for Sam. He had to be around, but I never saw him. I called a cab from the bus station and took it to Motel 6; it was the cheapest place I could think of. I took about an hour-long shower and re bandaged my side. I didn't know if I needed to or not, but I felt that maybe I should. The wound was closing up pretty good. And I didn't know

when I should pull the staples out. I figured I would later that night.

I walked across the parking lot to a McDonalds. But when I got there I noticed the Denny's next to it and decided what the hell, its time to treat myself like a king. So I ate there. The waitress kept looking over at me and at first I couldn't figure why but then I realized. Though I was clean, my clothes were not.

After dinner I hiked to a laundry mat and washed my clothes. I felt almost normal. Like someone just doing his or her laundry. It felt good.

I lay around and watched TV. Took another shower. Watched some more TV. Then took another shower. I loved it. I could shower as often as I wanted. I could watch TV god damn it! I felt rich.

But that all came crashing down when I took the staples out of my side. Oh god how that was just completely unprepared for. I pulled the first one out and almost passed out. It wasn't that it hurt really. Just felt like I was pulling my intestines out or something. I don't know how to explain it. But it made me light headed and nauseous.

I finally managed to get them all out. I had little spots of blood where the staples had been and it looked raw. But the wound didn't open up. But I knew I would have to take it easy for the time being. I lounged around in my motel room. Cranked the air conditioner up even though it wasn't hot. Climbed under the covers and slept like a baby with the TV on.

The lady who cleans the rooms woke me up. She said check out was an hour ago. I apologized and thought for a minute then decided one more night couldn't hurt. Besides I was nursing a wound. I needed the time out. So I went into the office to pay for another night.

"Drivers license please?"

"Huh? I don't have one, I stayed here last night." I said to the guy behind the counter.

"Well its policy that we have a valid ID to rent our rooms out."

"I don't understand. The lady last night didn't ask for any ID."

"Well she should have. How old are you? We don't rent rooms to anyone under twenty one."

I felt like ripping his snotty little throat out. "Look man, I'm… I'm 23 ok? I stayed here last night, and I just wanted to stay one more night. I have cash."

"Well I am sorry but we just can't do that, now can we?"

"Prick."

"What did you say?" His face took on an almost mean look. But on him it only looked pathetic.

"I called you a fucking prick! What? Mom didn't ever tell you what that means?"

I stormed out while he was trying to think of an answer and collected my stuff from the room. And some of their stuff too. Towels, little soaps, shampoo, almost took the remote to the TV but it was bolted to the nightstand. One little thing of rebellion I took

part of was to turn the TV all the way up and break the key off in the lock. 'Fuck them' I thought. I dropped the little plastic key identifier and the head of the key on the ground and left. I walked a few blocks and called another cab to take me back downtown.

Back home. But on the way I started thinking of how much I hated it out on the streets.

Over the next couple of days I started thinking of ways to get off the streets. My mom's family was an option but I'm sure my dad would be looking for me plus they couldn't be trusted not to call him. I could try to get a job. But I was fifteen and didn't know how to do anything and most places didn't hire you unless you were sixteen. I felt like I was about forty years old. I ran down the lists of things that had happened to me on the streets so far.

Cold

Hungry

Dirty

Beat up

Cut

Not to mention the emotional weight that being on the streets hangs on you. This is more than most realize. It's like being hunted by things that can sense your fear.

Now what have I gained in the positive light?

Self-awareness

Defensive actions and thoughts

Hate

The realization that not everyone is cold hearted. That some of the best people on earth are the ones with nothing. They are the

ones who will offer to share with you their one can of soda even if they haven't had anything to drink in three days.

The flip side of that coin is the ones who have nothing to lose. Who would rather kill you for a dime than try and ask for it.

Hate I posted, as a positive thing and I know that it really isn't. But all my life I have been picked on and beat up, molested, verbally assaulted. Among other things. And I am tired of it, hate bred life into me. It was a way to lash back at anything or anyone who looked at me wrong. I turned inward and took my soul into that dark part of our minds and made my home there. I turned into a demon.

But I was at war with myself, I hated the demon, but I loved the self-esteem that it had. I knew it was wrong to hate but I loved the flow of blood that coursed through my veins when I unleashed the hate. Even if I knew that later that night I would curl up and cry myself to sleep over it. Begging god to help me. Please god. Just one fucking time will you help me? The answer I got was, 'Help yourself.'

I felt like god had turned his back on me. Yet I knew that he was crying for me. Wanting to reach down and lift me up and say, 'Son, I love you. Please get away from this. Better yourself my son. I can't help you yet.' And that tore me up.

I would curse god, then apologize and weep for his forgiveness. I was losing myself in the battle of my soul. I started prowling the streets instead of walking them. I would follow someone who was drunk into an alley and beat them with a board or pipe. Take

their money and for the life of me I would try and take their soul as well. Then I would cry my forgiveness.

I spent a few months like this. Hunting my own prey. Waiting for someone to hunt me.

Once these two guys saw me and started following me. I noticed them right off. I smiled to myself and started limping. Letting my right arm sort of hang at my side, my jacket covering my hand that held the knife. I walked into an alley that I knew was dark and deserted. Letting them follow me. I walked into the shadows and turned. They spread out a little and one looked behind them to make sure we were alone.

"Hey, what's up?" Asked the one on the right. Six foot tall, a hundred and eighty pounds, dark hair, thin lips, and broad nose. I took this all in. he stands with his legs too close together. No balance there for fighting. Easy take.

The other one had light hair, thin lips like his friend and a crooked nose (broken before?) a hundred ninety, a hundred ninety five pounds. Five eleven. Solid built. Shoulders squared, feet the same. Knees bent. The fighter of the two no doubt.

"Eh, got a some change man?" I asked. Letting my speech slur a little.

The one on the right didn't hesitate. He came straight at me. Gonna try an tackle me? I waited till he slammed into me and pushed back with the heels of my feet, throwing myself away from him. But bringing the knife up and into his stomach. We slammed against the ground and I rolled him. Sliced the knife across his chest and pushed off of him, trying at the same time to spin around

and see the other one. Dumb move. Rookie move. I spun off balance and he was on me. I spun right into a fist. I stumbled back, tried to catch my balance but fell anyway. I rolled with the fall and shot to my feet. The fucker was already there. Damn. He is good. No hesitation. He ducked his head and swung at me. I ducked back just in time and brought the knife straight out. Aiming for his chest. But he turned with the punch and the knife slipped into his side. He twisted with a grunt and ripped the knife out of my hand. I thought (shit) right before he hit me with his left fist.

But the power was gone. Just a soft slap really. I rammed into him and we went down. I brought my elbows in and rammed down as we hit the ground. Trying to crush his chest in with my elbows. He let out a huge breath and I rolled off of him. Looked at his friend who was just now starting to scream. And trying to pull his self up a wall. I stood and kicked him in the face. He dropped with only a small yelp. I knelt over the light hair one and hit him in the face, once, twice, five, ten times, I don't know. I stopped when my knuckles couldn't take any more. The knife was on the ground. It must not have gone very deep. I picked it up and thought about cutting their throats. I thought about scalping them. I thought about taking their eyes. Instead I took their wallets and keys. The dark hared one had a pocketknife and I took that too. I ran back to my home via many alleys and stayed off the streets as much as I could.

I had blood all over my jacket and pants, my arms; I could even feel it on my neck. But I felt alive and scared. Excited and

tormented. Jealous too. I wanted in a way to be them. Lying back there. Hopefully dead. I hoped to die.

I was alive and dead already.

I was the breath of death. The triggerman for rage. And still I was haunted by what I was doing. I was scared for my sanity. Was I going insane? How does a person really go insane? Do they relinquish control to the darker side of themselves? Is there a way back?

I told myself it was only self-defense. But I knew better. I could have easily lost them in the alleys or made my way to the busy streets. I could have. But I didn't.

The thrill of the fight was like a drug to me. Pulling me in. holding on. Never letting go. Tearing me apart.

Beginning of an End

July came and brought the heat of hell with it. I had about eighty dollars from people I had taken it from. I no longer pan handled and begged. I no longer stayed on the roof. I slept on the streets, in the alleys. In the park. My only fear was the fear of myself. I could destroy anyone who thought twice about me. No one could hurt me. Even if they killed me. God turned his back on me, so I took it upon myself to become my own god. I was having nightmares; I would find myself talking to myself during the day. Wondering why I would do that. Then realizing I just asked myself that out loud and well so let me tell myself the answer out loud. Who cares what anyone over hears me say. I'll burn them down. It was me, only me. And I could rip this world apart if I chose to.

I couldn’t tell you how long it had been sense I had a shower. Or even when I last cleaned myself up any. I didn’t have any clothes anymore. All I had was what I wore and my knife. And the money. Blood money. The only money there was. It was mine.

I was god!

But false gods only live for a short time before they are ripped down from their throne and put back in place. I was sleeping in the park. On the grass. Cozy in my invincibility. Then I was raped.

They grabbed me and beat me with a stick. They ripped my clothes off of me and threw me down. Pushed my face into the grass. Spread my legs but I lashed out with my feet and tried to close my legs. That's when one of them cut my ankle. Told me to lie still or they were going to cut me up real good. Keep my ears and take my nose. Keep my dick so they could have some fun with it. They were saying things but I couldn't hear them. It was all just a mumble of words for the most part.

I didn't want to cry out. I couldn't even cry. No tears came to my eyes. Only hate. Anger. Rage. I would kill these men. How many of them were there? I don't know. I didn't care. I just knew that this was going to be death for them. They raped me and came inside me. Came on my back. Rubbed it in my face. The whole time beating me. But I never cried out. I never felt one sob come to my chest.

They beat me unconscious, dragged me down behind a fence and left me.

I woke and felt like I had been in a bomb blast. I felt sticky blood, dried blood, and broken bones. I felt like they had torn me in to a million pieces and sewn me back up. I couldn't move. I just laid there. Wondering if someone would find me? Not really caring if they did. Let me die.

Pretty soon my hate drained away. I cried. And it hurt to cry. Every time a sob came I would cry out in pain too. I realized that I wanted to go home. Not to the streets. But home. Wherever that was.

Turning Over a Dark Leaf

I woke in a hospital room again. But this time I didn't notice the smell or the cleanliness of the place. I didn't feel safe. I felt dirty, scared, and alone.

I couldn't open my right eye, my body felt like some one else. It was a detached pain. I drifted in and out of consciousness, never seeing a doctor or nurse. Never seeing any one at all.

Then from the smog of my mind I awoke to a nurse standing by my bed with tears in her eyes. I remember hating the way she looked at me. Wanting to tell her to go away.

I remember someone asking me who I was. I didn't answer.

The cops had come and gone, left a card and a number to call when I could. When I felt like it? When I wanted to? Probably hoping that someone lost the card before I got it. Hoping that I would never call no doubt.

I had two broken ribs; my left arm was broken three times. My ankle was cut but it didn't cut the tendon. I had four toes broken. My pelvic bone had been fractured. My face was a mess. Broken nose fractured the bone below my right eye. Two fingers were smashed on my left hand. Mashed together. I had a concussion (No shit doc). Multiple cuts and bruises (gee you think?). I was tore where they raped me, needed stitches all over the place.

Amazingly no staples this time (what is it with stitches and staples? Do they just pick and choose or what?)

I felt like I needed a body cast. (Just shoot me doc, will ya? Come on be a pall. Put this old horse down for good). I never did tell them who I was.

Where were the cops? In the movies they stick around till the victim wakes up and can point them in the direction of the bad people right? What the hell? I got a card. Oh big fucking deal. It didn't even say 'get well'. Sorry bastards.

I must have told them who I was eventually. That's when the nurse came in with a concerned scowl on her face and proceeded to tell me that the person I said was my father said he didn't have a son.

I gave them my aunt's phone number. Boy did she come running. No sooner had they told me they had called her than she came bursting into the hospital room without a care as to my condition she wrapped me in her arms and cried. As did I.

I think I first cried because of the flash of pain that went soaring through my body but then after a few minutes I realized I was crying because I loved her. And I was sorry that I had worried her. All my hate and hostility gave way to sorrow.

A week and a half later she took me home. HOME! Her home. My home now? My cousin had come to visit me in the hospital but now all we did was cry together. I was home, among family. I was alive. I swore that I would never think of dying again.

Months went by and I got better, I was so alive. Yet inside me the darkness was calling from the back of my mind. I had

nightmares. But I wasn't talking to myself that much anymore which I took as a good sign cause it seemed to scare the shit out of my family. My dad never came around.

I had asked my aunt and my cousin to keep this all between us. And I believe they have. I never told them all of what happened. But I think my aunt knew. She had talked at length with the doctor. She never asked though, thank god.

I didn't go to school or anything as normal as that. But I got stronger, and the darkness came clawing back at me. I would wake up at night sweating, my hands clasped tightly into fists, pounding at myself. Some nights I would wake everyone up screaming in my sleep. My aunt didn't know what to do. She didn't have a job, she was on methadone. Synthetic heroin given to heroin addicts by the government to try and wing them off of heroin and on to something taxable. She got welfare from the state and food stamps. We lived cheap but to me I felt like we were living like royalty.

Microwave recipes, wow. Ice cream? I could only laugh.

I held the darkness at bay, keeping a tight rein on it. Trying to never let it slip off its leash. But sometimes it did. I got into fights. Many fights before I realized where I was heading. I was heading back to the streets. That thought cooled me off quick. Even though it was a little enticing.

Revenge was a thought that kept me active. But revenge against who? Myself? It's the only one I had to blame. So I crashed into depression. Headfirst baby, all the way to the bottom. Suicide sprang back into my life like a ten year old on a pogo stick.

Back, gone, back, gone, here it comes again. Hold it back, nope here it comes. Damn.

I fought with myself. Torn between leaving and staying, getting better or getting worse. But which went with what? I didn't know. I couldn't know. I should have known.

I was wrecked. Worn out and tired of fighting myself.

But an answer soon came to me in the form of drugs. My cousin's boyfriend sold drugs. How hard could it be? I knew the basics, how to weigh it, cut it, prices. Oh yea. I could do this easy. So I asked if I could get in with him. He shot me down. Nope, not a chance. So I did the only reasonable thing, I stole the drugs. Went my own way and started selling. I would only take like a half pound of weed, couple eighths of crank. A sheet or two of acid at a time.

Big Man Without a Gun

Soon I was in the money. Amazingly cost effective when you aren't buying them to begin with. Twenty dollars here, fifty here, sixty, a hundred, hundred twenty, two hundred. I was soaring high. I even had my own dealers. Paid them in drugs. Ha, fucking morons. Serves them right. I watched some Cheech and Chong movie and decided to try cutting the crank with Ajax. Bad idea. I lost a whole batch of crank thanks to those assholes. But live and learn.

I had new clothes, two hundred dollar shoes; I even had Nike socks for crying out loud. I was living at the top. Then my cousin's boyfriend figured out what was going on.

I was walking down the street to a dealer's house when the car pulled up and he jacked a shell into the shotgun and told me to get in.

"What's with the fucking gun man?" I asked, acting like I knew nothing. 'Deny everything and admit nothing' that's what my mom used to tell me.

"You have a problem." He said.

"Me? What?"

"Shut up and give me whatever money you have on you."

My first thought was to run, run like hell. To where though? How far away from a shotgun could I get in time? I pulled a roll of cash out of my pocket; I knew the game was up.

"How much?" He asked.

"Two six." Meaning two thousand six hundred dollars.

"Where's the rest?" He didn't even count the money, just stuck it in his pocket.

"I don't have it." I said with a shrug.

"You have one hour to get it."

"One hour? Fuck you. I couldn't get it if I wanted to."

"Fuck me huh? Listen; if you don't get it I will kill you. Do you understand?"

"How much do I owe you?" Just curious now. I knew I couldn't get but maybe a grand more.

"Thirty two." Meaning, yea you got it. Thirty two thousand.

"No fucking way man!" I knew better than that shit. He was pulling me.

"Well believe it. It's thirty-two or your life now. And the debt carries over to your family."

"I swear to god, I will kill you myself. Gun or no fucking gun."

"You now have fifty five minutes."

I opened the door and walked away. What is this? A bad fucking cop movie? Fifty-five minutes. Yea ok. Let me clap my hands, click my heels three times and shit your money out right here on the street. I had another roll of money in my sock. About eleven hundred. Enough for what I would need. I walked past the

dealer's house and over two streets to a house that had a sign in the window that said 'Never mind the dog, beware of owner.' And a revolver under the words.

A revolver under the words.

A revolver.

I knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" Came the call from inside.

"Its granny fucking goose and I'm tired of laying eggs, open the fucking door."

Unbelievable as it is, 'granny' is the code word to gain entrance. I suppose he figured ATF and the FBI would actually stop when he told them that. 'Open the door, ATF!' wasn't the right password.

He opened the door a crack, peered at me then let the door swing open as he went back to reading a magazine. No doubt Cosmopolitan. He didn't believe in reading Guns & Ammo because the cops tag all purchases of that magazine and could trace him. But he believed that by taking the compatibility tests in Cosmo he might be able to make a girl happy. Hey don't question the crazy people.

"What you want?" He asked as he leafed through looking for where he left off.

"I need a gun." I said flatly.

"I don't sale guns. I am in the business of restoring antique firearms for collectors."

Oh give me a fucking break already. Where are Denzel and Tom Hanks? Are they here?

Instead of saying that I tossed the roll of money at him. “I need a gun.”

He took the rubber band of the money and counted it out. Then looked at me. “You here before? You look kind of familiar” He asked.

“I came with Frankie a couple times.” Frankie was his nephew. He sold weed for me. Or used to.

“What you looking for?”

“What do you have?” I asked.

He stood and motioned for me to follow him. We walked through his mess of a house and into one of the back bedrooms. He pulled up the carpet in a corner and opened a door set in the ground. I just knew it would be a bomb shelter. It wasn’t. It was a sort of safe with no lock.

“See anything you like?”

I walked over and looked in. the man had enough guns to stockpile for World War Three.

I pointed at one that caught my eye. “What’s that?”

“Elephant gun.”

Jesus Christ.

I found one I liked and picked it up out of the foam cut out it was lying in. before I could say anything he offered, “Browning 9mm.”

“I’ll take it. How much?”

He scratched his head and said, “A thou.”

“No way. I’ll give you six. And I need shells.”

“The fucking gun costs seven five off the store shelf.”

"Well we aint exactly in a store right now, and this fucker is stolen. I'll give you five fifty."

"Six it is then."

Damn right six it is.

He went to the closet and looked over a few boxes then handed me one.

"You know how to load that thing?" He asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Yea Boss Hog, Scooter showed me once at the Duke's shop when we were working on the General Lee."

He didn't seem amused, or he didn't know I was being a sarcastic little prick. Either way I pushed some shells into the clip, slammed the clip home and jacket a shell into the chamber. I tried to figure the best way to carry this fucker; finally I tucked it behind my back in my pants, took some extra shells in my pockets and walked out of the house into the sunlight.

"Shut the fucking door!"

Oops, I stepped back and closed it.

Arrangements

Turning around I saw my cousin's boyfriend stop in front of the house. He flagged me over. I turned and walked the other way. I got to the street and he pulled up beside me.

"Get in the car."

"I don't have it all yet." I said than realized I shouldn't have.

"How much do you still need to get?"

Shit. Not math. How much did he say I owed him? Damn. I can't think.

"I only got a couple hundred just now. I'm working on it."

"Give it to me."

I handed him the rest of what I had.

"Get in we need to talk again." He said

I couldn't though, I had a gun in the back of my pants, and I wasn't about to sit down and blow my own ass off.

"I still got time. I have to go." I said and squeezed my eyes shut as I turned away.

"You got thirty minutes."

Thirty minutes? What the hell happened to fifty-five? Damn. I had to come up with something fast. Before I could think of anything he spun his tires and drove away.

Thirty minutes? I began thinking of a plan.

I walked to another house and walked in. no one knocks on some of these doors. A couple people looked up but didn't say anything. This was a shoot up house. Drugs not guns. I walked to a back bedroom that was empty and closed the door. I sat and came up with my plan. As flaky as it was it was all I could think of.

With five minutes left I went outside the gun now stuck in the waistband of my pants but on my right side. I made sure I could sit without it digging in too bad and I could get it out fairly easy.

He saw me as I was walking down the street and pulled up next to me.

"How much?" He asked.

Jesus, this guy has a very limited vocabulary.

I didn't answer; I just opened the passenger side door and got in.

"How much do you have?" he asked again.

"I got some. About a thousand." I lied.

"Let me have it."

Acting like I was reaching into my pocket I tried to get the gun. It was stuck. I couldn't lean back far enough. Shit. I hit the seat release lever and pushed the seat back and down as I slipped the gun free and shoved it into his side.

His eyes said he was pissed. He was supposed to be scared.

"Don't even fucking breathe!" I said as coldly as I could.

I'd like to thank my parents, my family, my friends for always standing by me, and the director of this great film.

"What is there to talk about?" He asked, turning towards me a little in his seat.

"Look man, I don't want my family to get hurt, and I don't want to kill you. I can't think of anything else right now."

Um, hello? Stupid here. This isn't the plan. You're supposed to be yelling, cussing, and spitting fire right now. Chewing razor blades for breakfast.

"There has got to be a way we can work this out. You and me." I said

"Maybe."

"No maybes, there has to be."

He just looked at me and smiled. Then he turned, put the car in drive and we drove away.

The back of my seat was laying flat against the back seat. So I had to try and level myself up with my left elbow, because I was twisted around so I could shove the gun into his side with my right hand. I looked pretty much like one of those people who try to fold themselves up and stuff their body in a two by two foot box. Well more like a candy cane. Argh, I don't know. You get the picture. It wasn't very comfortable.

"Put the gun away, I'm not gonna kill you." He said.

Who has a gun in their side asshole?

Instead of saying that I just tucked the gun in between my legs. Realizing the safety was still on anyway. Then righted my seat and stared ahead.

We drove back to my aunt's house. He told me to come back into the room with him. My cousin was pissed because she didn't know what was going on and he wouldn't let her in the room.

He took a video camera from the closet and popped the tape into the VCR. Clear as day there I was, snagging a stash.

Not that there wasn't any more left. He usually kept at least ten pounds of weed and an assortment of other stuff. I would just crumble off a couple of handfuls at a time. But he did keep track of how much he had. Now I do realize that I wasn't the only one skimming off of him. My cousin would take a little as well as my aunt. And I'm sure when my uncle was around he did the same. But I got popped for it. I got caught with my hand in the cookie jar. So the debt fell on me.

He showed me his books and how much was missing and everything else and I admit I'm sure I took a lot. But nowhere near as much as he said. But hey what could I do?

He told me that he always liked me. Said it would be a shame if we couldn't work something out. I asked what he had in mind.

"You tack me onto your buyers. I sell to them. Anyone asks, they get it through you."

"That's it? But I got buyers and sellers out there. Dealers and drug addicts. Some of whom are a little of both." I explained.

"We just keep it going. I'll start you on the books and you can run with it. Though you pay me. And I take ninety percent until we get this debt paid off." He said.

Now I do realize that I had a fairly good network going but I didn't think he would want it. but seeing as to how it will all be through me he doesn't have to see anyone or meet anyone. It sounded good to me. Ten percent wasn't a lot, but it wasn't nothing

either. Besides he was a businessman. To him this was business. He didn't take any of the drugs he sold. Actually he didn't do any drugs. And neither did I.

Compromise

So we set it up. He filled me a book out and gave me some drugs and I was gone. Back to the streets. Though a different breed of streets. A dealer's world. A new market of pain and sorrow.

I ran good books too. I showed up sooner than he expected for more. Of course this time the money went to him and I only got a couple hundred too keep. But I was rolling. I set up a few more sellers on the prowl and took in a little more business. I only dealt with about eleven people off and on. Some would come strolling back every day. Some only once a month or so. But they kept coming back none the less.

A had a few unexpected things along the way. OD's. People getting busted by the cops. But my name was never mentioned. The people I dealt with told no one where they got it and they knew that in my eyes I would just as soon as do away with them as take a fall. I had my close calls with renegade addicts and other dealers. But I always walked away. Sometimes they didn't. So my reputation grew in the circle of people I kept.

I won't call them friends because they were not friends. They would just as soon see me get busted once they made a pick up so they could make some extra money on the drugs I fronted them. But they wouldn't be the ones to drop my name to a cop.

The Ties That Destroy

It was March again. I was a year older and my cousin's boyfriend called me in. He had only called me in a few times before to make a run to Mexico with him so I figured this was going to be one of those times. I was wrong.

He closed the bedroom door and stood in front of me.

"Are you ripping me off?" he asked calmly.

"No." I answered flatly.

"You sure? Don't lie to me."

"No man, I'm positive. Why what's up?"

"I'm missing some things. You know who it is?"

Where's your video camera now dick?

"No man, I don't. What's up? How much?"

"Never mind. Forget about it," He let his eyes drop from mine.

"Bullshit 'forget about it.' Tell me what's going on." I pushed.

"I think your cousin is stealing from me." He said with a sigh.

"No way. Bullshit. She wouldn't do that. Let me talk to her." I stood but he just put his hand on my shoulder and said let it go.

He told me that he loved her and always hoped this wouldn't happen but that he had to deal with it.

My eyes flared with a fiery warning.

"No, no. Not like that. No. I will move out. That's all.'

My heart sank back down into my chest and I let my breath out, without realizing I was holding it in.

"You sure it couldn't be a mistake or something? You know a few times you have made mistake in the books."

"No I'm sure of it. I'll be leaving tonight. And hey, your debt is clear now."

Without another word he walked out of the room. I just sat there. Not sure what to do. I felt like leaping up and screaming and doing a little happy dance that my debt was clear. But I felt bad because I knew he loved my cousin and they had a daughter together. I had to talk to her and find out what was going on.

Later I caught my cousin alone in her room and came in and closed the door, I wanted to know if she had been stealing the drugs.

She said no. But I could see the truth in her eyes. You don't spend time on the streets without learning how to read people.

I begged her to just tell me, to tell him and apologize. But she wouldn't give in. I asked her to come to me if she needed money or something. But she still wouldn't give in. we went back and forth for a couple hours and never got anywhere.

I was upset that she didn't trust me. Hurt that she wouldn't confide in me. But I finally stood and walked out of the room and down the hall.

When I got to the living room I stopped in mid step. I felt like someone had just hit me with a pipe and knocked all the wind out of me. My father stood just inside the door.

Tears threatened to drop from my eyes but I held them back. They were not tears of joy. They were tears of rage, hurt, and pain.

I couldn't move, I couldn't trust myself to talk so I just stood there. He did the same. No smile. No tears. No look of any kind of expression on his face. Nothing. Blank, emotionless.

I have no idea what my eyes and face were telling him but after about three minutes of what felt like an hour, he turned, said thank you to my aunt and left.

I looked at my aunt who had wrenched open the water works and was free flowing with tears. She just stared at me with a look of shock on her face.

"What did he want?" I asked

"Just to see you. To see that you were all right." She said around sobs.

It was the only time in my life my father ever showed that he cared for me. The only time. I was 16 years old and could not remember one hug that I had ever gotten from the man. Not one.

My cousin came out of the room and asked what was going on.

"Nothing." I said. Then walked to the window to watch my father drive off. He never looked back.

After an hour I got my stuff together and went out to the bus stop and waited for the bus that would take me clear across town to my money spot.

It was payday after all. My debt was clear. Everything I got I could keep for my own. I sat at a friend's house and thought of what I was going to do next. My father lived only a couple blocks over. But I didn't think I wanted to go see him. Not yet. Though I knew now that it was in the works.

I talked to my friend for a while about what I was going to do. She just nodded and said ok a few times. I then placed a few calls and told everyone that my drug selling days was over. I was out of it. Any drugs they still had or money, keep it.

Do I have to mention that no one said no wait a minute ill bring it back to you? Cause no one did. Do I also have to mention that I was back selling drugs two weeks later? Because that's the way life works sometimes.

I worked up the courage and with tears in my eyes I started walking towards my father's house. I didn't have a clue what I was going to say. I just knew that I would get a hug from him. Even if I had to beat it out of him.

I walked towards my childhood home, tears streaming down my cheeks. People standing in their yards, staring at me. Not sure whether they should call the police or an ambulance or SPCA. They just didn't know what was going on behind my eyes.

What was going on behind my eyes was a storm. A fierce storm. Clouds of thought rolled on top of one another and collided, throwing spider webs of lightening cascading through my brain.

Pain, torment, and fear rained down, slipping through as tears. My world shook violently, my legs quivered and threatened to drop me at any moment and I couldn't do anything with my hands except hold them together and pray that they would quit shaking.

How do you feel about going home? Does it make you smile when you think of last Christmas dinner with good old Uncle Bob, running around a little drunk trying to tell your dad how he should invest his stocks next semester? While mom and aunt are cooking up a few last minute pies in the kitchen? Does it bring warmth to your heart? Yes? Good. Now imagine that that family was ripped from you, all the coldness and sorrow you would feel from their loss, well take it, turn it darker, and paint it a little angrier. Multiply it by about a hundred and you would be some where in the vicinity of the horror that I called home.

Going Home

My father? Worked hard all his life, got into trouble all his life, fights, drinking, drugs. Thought that he would be a hell of a better father to his son than his father was to him. Though I have a half sister somewhere up in Northern Oregon or Northern Idaho, I guess back then he wasn't as great of a guy. His word was rule. It didn't matter that he was a hypocrite. If you didn't obey every syllable to the full glory of his excruciating command, then it was your ass, face, sides, back. Whatever. He wasn't too picky about where he hit you. He sure liked to grab a fist full of hair though, jerk you around a little, slap you around then hit you a few times. 'Bet you don't do that again.' Pops famous words. And hey, he was right.

Too bad I wasn't a military trainee in boot camp and he the drill instructor. Or even a convict in prison and him the warden or corrections officer. But I was a six-year-old kid who didn't know what it meant to get allowance or gifts for Christmas. I was lucky to have the ripped jeans and the shirt with holes in it. And I better pray my thanks to god every night for the food I had to eat that night. He provided for his family, and I damn well better be grateful. I did, and I was.

Did you ever call your father ‘daddy’? I tried once when I was seven and got a broken nose, black eye and bruised ribs for it. (Fell off the swing). We didn’t have a swing set.

My mom chose to keep violent boyfriends

For some unknown reason she fell in love with these guys all the time. So as a child I had to sit and watch, as my mom got beat. Feeling guilty because I would pray he wouldn’t beat me this time too. Guilt. Oh yes guilt. What a fucked up thing guilt is. But anyhow, I saw my mom go through a lot. And she saw me go through a lot, sometimes though she wasn’t awake when her ‘lovely boyfriend’ decided he might take a little trip down the hall and see if little boys turned him on. Amazingly, she some how seemed to pick the ones who were attracted to little boys. So yea, it happened more than once or twice. Not to mention some little neighbor kid who decided I could keep a secret.

My mom was an awesome person though, even though on occasion she liked to party and sometimes didn’t come home. I remember one of the times when I was living with her I tried my hardest to wait for her to come home from work at the bar. I passed out around five am. My parents had split up when I was pretty young, around five or six I think. And a lot of people thought that for some fucked up reason my mom didn’t love me. Well they were wrong, I know she loves me; hell she is the only family I have that I don’t despise in some way. The only true friend I ever had growing up. Whether she was by my side or smiling in my thoughts, I knew she loved me. Nothing will ever be able to take that away from me.

Ok so enough history on the not so Brady Bunch family of mine. Let's skip forward a few years to me walking towards my dad's house, storm raging through me and all that.

As I approached I could see that there were a few cars in the driveway and parked along the road in front of the house. The neighborhood didn't have sidewalks and curbs like others. Ha, it didn't even have streetlights. Go figure. Anyhow so here I am walking up to the house, wiping the tears and trying to dry my face as much as possible. Can I go right in? Don't kid yourself. I knocked.

"Come in.," my pops voice boomed from inside. I swear the windows rattled.

I opened the door and stepped inside.

"Well, there's my boy." Said my ever-loving father as he got off the couch and walked to the kitchen.

A few of my dad's friends were there. People I knew. They said hi, how's it going? Things like that. I tried but couldn't say anything. Everything seemed so normal. Like I had never left this place. It was a shock. I don't know what I expected. Some heart wrenching welcome from my father. Some show of appreciation that I was here. A pissed off pop who told me to leave and never come back. Something. I didn't expect anything. And that's what I got. Nothing.

I started to walk towards the kitchen about the time my pops came around the corner, we almost walked right into one another.

He just stood there looking at me. I lost it; tears shot from my eyes and could have easily cleared three feet before they hit the floor. I sobbed, held my arms out and asked if I could have a hug.

Now ok wait. Hold on a minute. You have to understand that my dad was not one to show affection, privately or especially publicly or in front of people. He just stared at me like; what the fuck is this?

I was ready to drop my arms and walk out of his life forever when I felt his hand on my back and he pulled me into his arms. It felt so strange. Kind of like the way you expect a Grizzly Bear to hold you right before he sinks his claws in you.

The New Tales Of The Streets

It was a warm summer night; the smell of alcohol and adolescence was in the air. Five of us were hanging out in front of a friend's house, the house was dark inside and out, because the electricity had been shut off a few weeks ago. There was no running water either and foreclosure was soon to come knocking.

This was one of our hang out spots, a drug addict's house. It was just another night out in the neighbor hood for us all. Five kids with nothing to lose, not even our child hoods. Ages ran and varied in our little clique, depending on who was in lock down at any given time. I was now sixteen, although a lot had happened; I was still selling drugs a little and mostly just hanging out in Rexland Acres. Home. These were our streets, we ran them, and we ruled them with an iron fist. The Nazi revolution wasn't over entirely, the 'Woods' ruled like titans. Family. Brothers. Safety.

We stood and sat around the trash pile, which stood five feet high. Trash collection becomes a mute point in this place.

We talked and laughed, told stories and lies. Some of which were obvious. We all knew each other; all pretty much grew up together.

About two in the morning Ryan rode up on his bicycle with the flashlight strapped to the handlebars.

"Hey bro, what's up?" I asked, holding up an empty beer bottle in offering.

"Oh shit, you guys! Something bad. Mike's dad is going off again." He said around gasps.

"His dad is always going off. What did he do this time?" Seeing as to how he wasn't reaching for a beer I tossed the empty bottle aside and reached into the box for another.

"No no! He was hitting him with a bat this time. I guess Mike left it in the front yard with his glove and stuff." Ryan's eyes were darting back and forth, looking for an answer from one of us.

Scott stood up and said, "Shit."

Danny also stood up and tossed his half empty beer bottle into the pile.

"Ah fuck." I said and drained as much of my beer as I could before tossing it.

Ricky and Robert were eager to go with us but they were only thirteen so we told them to just hang around and watch the beer. We'd be back.

This sort of thing is fairly common, get a poor neighborhood, with alcoholics and drug addicts having kids they don't want and can't afford around their habits and presto! Instant ghetto. Except none of us were Jewish.

We set off on foot, the four of us. Ryan and Danny were both eighteen, Scott was my age, sixteen.

This was a rescue mission of sorts. Go to Mike's house, climb through his bedroom window and see how bad he was then

drag him back to another house where we could check him out better and try to help out with his wounds if any.

Cops, ambulance, hospitals are all pretty much out of the question. If someone's hurt too bad we may have to call an ambulance but then they take him or her away, treat them, and then the state steps in and puts them in a foster home and stuff. No one wants to go through that. We are all family out here and we try to take care of our own.

We got to Mike's house and could hear his dad shouting and yelling from the street outside. It didn't sound like he was yelling at anyone in particular so we made our way around the side and to Mike's window.

Scott pushed the window open and looked in, "I don't see him."

"You don't see him, or it's too dark to see him?" I asked. Sometimes these guys need a little help figuring things out.

"I don't see him, he isn't here."

We all sort of looked at each other, the rule is after something like this you go to your room, and wait for us.

I looked at Ryan, "He knew you were here and saw it?"

"Yea, we were both coming back from the park. When we got here, his dad came out of the front door and began screaming. I told Mike I'd go get the guys. When I was leaving I saw his dad drag him inside and start yelling about the bat and stuff and then he started hitting him with it. I could see through the window."

I looked at the others, not sure what to do. Danny suggested, "Smash?"

Smash to most is slang for leave, but to us it had a darker meaning. 'Smash' was when we would kick in the front, and back doors of a heroin addict's house, and rob them.

I shrugged my shoulders and looked at Ryan and Scott.

Ryan took off walking around to the back door and Scott followed.

"I guess we get front." I said to Danny and started for the front door.

We searched the ground for any kind of weapons along our way but didn't find any. The house was in poor shape as were most in this area, the front window was broken and had cardboard hanging from one corner. The paint was peeling off of the front door and the roof looked like it was about ready to fall in.

I looked at Danny, and we locked arms side by side. Danny tapped his foot slowly, one, two, three times and we both kicked the door.

It imploded inward and we rushed in after it. As in every smash, the basic concept is surprise.

Mike's dad was standing in front of us, half way out of the kitchen, his eyes glistened with rage.

"You mother fuckers! What the fuck- the back door crashing in stopped him from finishing his question.

Scott ran for Mike's dad and caught him around the waist, taking him down, while Ryan slammed a board down across his face.

I turned and looked around, Mike was lying on the floor next to the couch, and Danny was already heading for him. I

reached them and crouched down; Danny was shaking Mike's shoulder and calling his name.

Around sobs, Mike looked up at us and said, "Help."

"We got ya bro, take it easy. Can you walk?" I asked

"I don't know."

While Danny and I picked Mike up and helped him out the front door we heard Scott and Ryan going through the other rooms to see if anyone else was in the house.

We carried Mike between us, his arms around our necks and us holding his hands and keeping him upright; we headed back towards the hang out. We got a couple streets down before Ryan and Scott caught up with us.

"How is he?" asked Ryan.

"I think he'll be ok." I said

"Need us to carry him for a while?" Asked Scott.

"No we got him."

Back at the house we stripped Mike down to his boxers and looked him over using borrowed flashlights. Not the best of light, but its all we had.

Bruises where already forming. On his left side, one of his ribs was broken, the skin was dark purple and you could feel the bone sticking up. It hadn't punctured through the skin though.

We laid him out on a bed, the best we could do.

We expected his dad to come around sooner or later but couldn't really help that. He didn't know where we took Mike but he knew the general hangouts. All we could do was wait.

The Smash

I can't recall all the smash's I was a part of but a couple are glued forever in my memory. This is one of them.

It was raining and lightening pulsed across the skies, eerily illuminating everything for a heartbeat before plummeting us back into darkness.

Devin stood to my left, our arms locked together for better leverage. We waited for the sound of Trevor and Scott kicking in the front door. We were at the back door.

I was scared and shaking, "Fucking cold." I whispered to Devin as we waited.

"Yea." He said.

A flash of lightening and then the roll of thunder. I didn't even hear the front door, but I heard Devin say, "Go!"

When you're on the back door you don't get the standard three counts as when you're at the front door. You just step back together and kick forward. The quicker the better. I never understood why we didn't just do it this way at the front too, but I wasn't going to be the idiot who asks the horse why he threw him off.

The door exploded in and we followed, me first, Devin right behind me, one hand on my back. The second man has the bigger job of the two, he scans the area as soon as we go in and if anyone

is there or coming at us he pushes with his hand and you know to go down quick. The first man, who is me this time, just runs through the door and takes the first person he sees down.

The kitchen was dark, but not empty. I saw someone standing next to the table, a silhouette actually, but still a person, so I rushed him.

I lowered my shoulder and plowed into him, snapping the breath out of him and sending him toppling ass over teakettle. I lost my balance when he went over the chair so easily and almost fell with him but caught myself on the table and remained standing.

Devin slapped my shoulder, signaling that all was clear as he headed for the front room. I stalled just long enough to smash my fist into the mans face as he lay sprawled on the ground then I followed.

When I stepped into the front room all was silent and still. Devin was standing directly in front of me and I stepped around him to see Trevor and Scott standing just inside the front door, I started to ask what was up when a shotgun barrel was pushed into my stomach and a voice said, “Don’t fucking move.”

The man who held the shotgun was sitting on the floor, a bag of dope next to him with his equipment (a spoon, burned almost completely black, a nylon strap and a little blizzard lighter, a box of Q-tips and syringe.

If we were in a cartoon my jaw would have hit my shoe and my tongue would have rolled out and bounced against the mans

foot before coming to a stop. But as life would have it we weren't in a cartoon.

The mans eyes looked strange, like someone had coated his eyeballs with plastic wrap. I was about to wet my pants when Trevor kicked the gun away from me and pounced on the guy like a defensive lineman going after a quarterback. Devin was quick to lend a hand but as for myself, I was still trying not to lose my bladder, so I just stood there, looking like a stone statue.

Some how, I have no idea how exactly but Trevor and Devin were able to wrestle the gun away from the man without anyone getting shot but I didn't know this until Scott put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Come on."

That's when I opened my eyes. Didn't know I had closed them, but I guess I did. Scott was heading for the bedrooms and bathrooms to check them and I followed.

See the deal is, you take the front, you take the back, then you search for other people in the bedrooms and bathrooms, and a locked door is a gold mine, not a problem.

Movies get it all wrong when the thieves have to use crow bars and stuff to gain entrance to a locked room. I've seen dead bolts, metal latches with master locks on them, even steel bars locked into place that were easily accessible with a few well placed kicks.

Anyway, after you search for people you round them up, or beat them up, the ladder usually wins over unless its women or kids. But some of these guys don't care if its women or kids. When you're doing a smash sometimes you have to take the guys who just

got out of lock up, or who just aren't good people. Not that we kick it with these people, but when rushing into a house full of drugs and sometimes guns, it doesn't hurt to have crazy idiots on your side. Regardless of how they handle business.

Scott and I found two people in one room; a guy and a girl who was so messed up she might as well have been in a coma. Scott and I both took the liberty to beat the guy to a pulp, because from what we saw, he was in the process of stripping the girl. Now I say this like we are noble or something but truth is, it could have been his girlfriend, it could have been his sister and he was just getting her ready for bed. But in this life, sugarcoating things don't taste as sweet. So we called it a rape and beat his ass.

Scott searched his pockets and I searched the room. Under the bed, drawers, top of the closet, bottom of the closet. But I didn't find anything except some cobwebs and a few pissed off cockroaches. Scott got thirty dollars off the guy and he handed me the ten and kept the twenty. That's just the way it works. Actually he could have just pocketed it all and I wouldn't have said anything. What you find on a smash is yours to keep.

We finished checking the other rooms without finding anything of value so we went back into the living room where Trevor had the shotgun barrel jammed in the guy's mouth.

Oh shit.

Now one of the unwritten rules is you don't piss anyone off anymore than you have to. They know who we are and we know who they are. We rob and run, beat and bleed if we have to. Some-

times a little of both, but we never threaten lives. That shit will get you killed.

Trevor was shaking and whispering something to the guy that I couldn't make out while Devin just looked up at us like, 'Uh, a little help here please.'

So I being of sound mind and body turned to Trevor and said, "What are you doing dick? Lets search and surf bro."

"This fucker was gonna kill me." Answered Trevor in a cool Clint Eastwood style that would have won him an Oscar or Two but wasn't cutting it here.

"Fuck that, let's go. Your pulling shit that you can't back bro, now let's go."

"I can't back huh?" He asked.

I could tell this was no time for truth or dare. So I said, "Come on bro, let it go. We need you to help search." I glanced at Devin and Scott and they got the hint and started looking around the living room, never really taking their eyes off of the drama.

I tried to talk Trevor cool, but he was shaken pretty badly. Most of us had had guns pulled on us before including Trevor. But none of us had had them pulled on us by their dad like Trevor had. His father used to sit him on the couch and make him bite down on the barrels of guns, telling him how worthless he was and that if he pulled the trigger no one would miss him. So this was a lot more personal to him than to us.

The guy who was munching on blue steel wasn't saying much of anything; just sitting there; sweat rolling down his forehead, looking from me to Trevor with pleading eyes. Had I not been

able to feel the bruise where he had poked me with the barrel a few minutes earlier I might have felt sorry for him. But my main concern was to get Trevor calm and get the gun from him.

I tried my case again, “Bro, check it out. We need to roll. We’ve already been here too long, someone could come along and then we would have to go through the role of playing thug again.”

I tried a smile, but Trevor wasn’t looking at me anymore. His eyes were closed.

I was thinking of trying to snatch the gun from him when his eyes snapped open and the world exploded.

My first thought was that someone had dropped something in a puddle and got water on my face. Hey don’t ask. It’s just what I thought before I realized I could smell gun powder and everyone was whispering.

As it would happen, Trevor pulled the trigger and the guys head pretty much exploded. The boom made my ears shrivel up and everything got knocked down a few octaves. I blinked a few times and looked down, not the best idea I have ever had.

The guy, I mean the thing that used to be a guy was slumped back against the wall, his thoughts spread out around the room. Unlike my previous thoughts of gun blasts kicking everything out one way, it had covered pretty much everything and everyone in the room.

I could hear everyone talking but couldn’t make out what it was they were saying. I tried talking but it came out all weird. Like I was talking into a garden hose.

I grabbed Trevor by the shirt and hauled him back to the kitchen, waving with my free hand to Devin and Scott to follow.

We went out the back and I went over the back fence. Turning around I saw the guys following suit so I turned and ran through a back yard and went over another fence. We played leapfrog with fences until we came to an alley and then we headed towards the canal…

A few weeks later Trevor was picked up by the police on an under the influence charge and they matched his prints up with the ones on the gun. He went down for twenty-five to life. He had a public defender that was pretty much on the DAs side, and said he couldn't help him unless he told them who the other person was with him. They thought it was only him and another person because of the testimony of the guy and girl in the bedroom who said two guys broke into the bedroom where him and her were innocently trying to sleep and jumped him and tried to rape her. Nothing came of the rape or assault charges against the bedroom couple but the DA stuck Trevor First Degree Murder. And the jury didn't want to hear about any self-defense plea.

Trevor as far as I know is still locked up and never dropped our names. Some would say we should feel guilty for that, others who know better know that a family member wouldn't pull his family down with him.

I think what happened that night was wrong, the whole concept of us being there was wrong. But the past is etched forever in time and there is no going back. All the 'what ifs', and 'if we hads', don't matter any at all anymore.

As for Mike, well after we pulled him out of his dads house, he was hurt, but with time he got better, his dad never came looking for him and he never went back home. Sometimes those fairy tales we tell ourselves don't come true, sometimes dreams turn into nightmares before they keep you up all night.

Fists & Friends

Days pass, weeks fly by, month's creep up on you and vanish all too quickly when you are young. But the family stays close and familiar. When all you have is the streets, your brothers matter most.

Congregation at the park. Seven of us standing or sitting, drinking Coors Light, and smoking cigarettes. Someone lights up a joint, takes a hit and passes it along. Only I pass it on without taking a drag on it. You never know what is coming, so it is best to keep a clear head on nights like these.

Someone offers what they saw transpire earlier that night. I've heard this about twenty times now but listen any way.

"So here we are just kicking it and these wetbacks walk up and one of them is talking shit. Saying stuff about fucking Nazi wannabes and shit. And so Steve, you guys know Steve right? Yea, he is my homeboy. So Steve waits till this wetback gets close enough with all his little buddies and he pulls off his shirt to show his swastika tat on his back. And these Mexicans don't know what to think right? They are just like oh shit, or whatever. And so Steve, my man Steve reaches out and snatches this one Mexican up and starts just fucking him up. Just straight jacking him in his head and

shit. And so I grab this other dude and before you know it we are in like this huge mob fight and I'm-"

"A rumble." I say, just reflecting on the term used when I read The Outsiders book as a kid.

Joey doesn't understand for a second then catches on. "Yea, yea, fucking rumble. We were like fucking these Mexicans up good and shit-"

The snide remarks and little laughter that escapes from some of us are heartfelt. Because from what we can tell, Joey is the one with a black eye and busted lip. But he takes it in stride and pushes on with his tale, "and so I have this one and yea he got me a couple times but you should see him guys. I really fucked him up good."

Now here I am listening to this from a kid who should be at home, in bed, thinking about school tomorrow and how he wants to ask this girl out but doesn't know how. But instead he is tweaked out of his mind, has more scars than a Vietnam Veteran, and is standing there holding a bottle of Coors Light that he is about eight years away from being able to buy legally. But hey, someone once said that god woks in mysterious ways right? But if you ask me, god quit watching over us a long time ago. But that's just me.

Anyhow as Joey is going on about how we should have seen the other guy I am sitting there reflecting on how we most certainly are going to see him again and not before long either. We are gathered here tonight waiting for the shit to come down. We have a date with the Mexicans to dance in the park.

Dirty white boys vs. the wetbacks.

Three more of our guys wander up from the street.

Some nod, some shake hands. Some just look up and then go back to the conversation.

One of the three that just came up is Devin, a good friend of mine so before he can ask I walk over and pull him to the side, for a little fireside chat.

"What's up?" Asks Devin.

"Hey check it out homeboy, these Mexicans aren't fucking around tonight."

He looks up at me, "You got news bro or rumors?"

"Straight news. This one shrew, Peddie. He was telling me how the shit is coming down tonight, told me to take heed and jettison this craft before tonight's little scrimmage."

Now, I am no better educated than the rest of these losers but I try to cash in on every five-cent word I can, whenever I can. Devin just reads between the lines and says, "So what? They bringing knives and shit? We got knives bro, don't trip."

I try to see his reason but he is not trying to see mine. "No bro, I'm not trippin off knives, this shit is real."

"Guns?" he asks.

"Yea, guns. You know? Wham, bam, no thank you ma'am? It's gonna be a quickie with no cigarette for the ones staying behind sleeping forever in the eternal wet spot bro." My gentle way of pleading.

About this time people are wandering over to eavesdrop on our little conversation so I shut my mouth and catch Devin's eyes with my own.

He pulls a pack of cigarettes from his pants pocket and just says, “Guess I better smoke one now.”

Bastard.

I took a deep breath and glanced around. Our little gang had grown some more; I did a quick count and came up with about 17 guys. 2 girls. Shit, what are they doing here?

Mindy and Mandy, the two meanest snakes on Medusa’s head. Normally I welcome a cheerleader chant while I’m fighting, but not tonight.

I start to head their way when Devin grabs my shoulder and says, “I got this.”

So alone again I stand and stir my thoughts.

More blank names come walking into the park, their faces a circus of expressions. Some are laughing and chatting, while others are scared and silent.

Two guys coming my way, blank looks on their faces. But the faces I can put to names and I nod as Wayne and Keith comes up to stand beside me.

“What’s the deal?” Asks Keith.

So I say, “Keith bro, see them clouds?”

“What fucking clouds? Its fucking pitch black out here.” Wayne says. Wayne never was much of a between the lines kind of reader. He needs pictures and big simple three letter words.

“That bad?” asks Keith.

“Yea, something like that.” I say.

“Shit.” He says.

“Yea.” I say back.

"FUCKING ROCK!" someone shouts from within our little mound of mindless mussels.

We all look up and see the pack of Mexicans making their way to the park.

"Shit." Keith says again.

"Yea." I say.

Beer bottles get thrown against the cement basketball court. A sound that to this day still gives me chills.

There is only one unspoken rule to this fight. Don't go down.

We spread out over the glass-ridden court; shirts get thrown down on the grass. No one speaks. Only hushed whispers of wind flow to us, and the footsteps of the enemy.

Now let me reflect a little here, being that during this time I was deep into selling drugs of various kind of and sizes, I had acquired friends on the Mexican side too. But in this neighborhood, you fight based on the color of your skin. And somehow I always end up at the front of the pack.

The Mexicans fan out opposite us and start discarding clothing. Shirts, hats, rags.

So I step up to the plate and glance across to the line of Mexicans who are shuffling around, picking opponents. Juan the Mexican ringleader materializes from out of the cloud of Mexicans and takes up a stance right across from me.

I look at him and he looks at me.

Two days ago we kicked it at his house and he bought some weed, I made some money, we had a cool time. Tonight however, we are enemies.

I nod once, a slow nod, down and up, without taking my eyes off of him. He pauses for just a second, then nods and we both swing.

My punch connects a split second before Juan's does, and he slouches back with the blow, taking the force out of his punch that bounces harmlessly off my shoulder.

Never hesitate

I drill him again, and again. Staying on top of him as he sort of does this drunkard waltz backwards.

Around me the world is breaking apart. The sky falling in, I hear the blood rushing through my veins. A second sound catches my ear, the sound of stars falling and shattering against the earth. Maybe its just glass being broken under foot.

Juan is out of commission, so I stop hitting him and turn my eyes away, in search of the next warrior. I don't have to turn too far, I catch a fist to the side of the head and all the sudden the stars are back and doing hula-hoops around my ass.

I reach out with a solid jab and catch the star spinner and he drops.

One jab? I think. Then instead of stars I see the concrete racing up to my face to say hi.

I hit the ground and shoot back up to my feet. Don't go down. Don't ever go down. I was just down. Shit. Politics? Ethics? Karma? Fuck it.

I turn and see Devin get drilled from behind and before he can turn to advance I pull a kamikaze and come thundering over the top of him, pushing him out of the way and releasing a right fist into the guy's chest. I was trying for the face. I never said I was any good at this shit.

But it was enough to make him think twice about going after Devin, he turned and disappeared into the fold of chaos that engulfed us all.

Devin didn't even say thank you, he just went on swinging at some other guy. So being the kind of forgiving guy I am, I turned and slammed my fist into a dark face.

Now up until this time the only words you could hear were the sounds of breaths being lost and expelled from the lungs. Grunting. Primitive sounds of warfare. But out of the rumble of bodies colliding one word was unmistakable in its clarity.

"GUN!"

The fighting seemed to stop immediately. The Mexicans retreated back to the parking lot a little. I scanned around me. Some Mexicans were out cold on the concrete, so were some of ours. Some getting up and pulling back into our groups, checking wounds.

We all glanced over at the parking lot and sure enough, what more to ask for but three cars, low riders. Damn fine looking cars if you ask me. But no one did.

The passenger side door of one came open and a guy came up and out of the darkness within with a pistol grip shotgun in his hands.

I heard someone say, “Shit.” Probably Keith again.

I was about to say, “Yea.” When a new clap of thunder rolled across the park.

We, mean mother fucking white boys that we are, scattered quicker than the buck shot that came out of that shotgun.

Some ran without looking back, others tried to run backwards, some hid behind trees. One person actually took off running towards the low riders. Fucking idiot.

That idiot was me.

Now to this day you will hear about the crazy fucking white boy who ran at these mean mother-fucking Mexicans when they had guns and he didn’t have shit. Some will tell you I floated over. If there was a puddle of water on the ground they will swear that I walked on water.

I don’t know what the fuck I was thinking though. I honestly don’t. I don’t even remember thinking. It was just a reflex to run towards them. I had no plan of attack. Hell for all I knew I didn’t even plan on attacking.

But I did. The guy with the shotgun just stood watching me run at him. Then like someone hit a hydraulic switch, a light went on inside his head and he started to level the shotgun at me.

Too late. I slammed into the door and tried to head butt him in the nose but instead I caught the barrel of that damn gun with my forehead, I still have the faint little scar from the sight at the end of the barrel.

I grabbed the shotgun and twisted it out of the guy’s hands.

Now about this time people behind me started screaming and I heard the clicking of guns being cocked. I rose up and jacket a shell into the chamber as I spun around and sited down on the nearest Mexican to me, before the ejected shell could hit the ground I had him locked down. But he had me too. I was staring down the sights of that shotgun straight into the muzzle of a pistol.

Oops.

Not knowing what to do, but knowing I didn't want to die, I lifted the shotgun and pointed it up into the night and pulled the trigger.

BOOM!

Then I exhaled the breath that I didn't know I was holding.

No one moved, not even the wind.

I racked the shotgun again and pulled the trigger. BOOM! Again. BOOM!

I was fucking crazy. Could have been shot at any time. But Dirty Harry never died, and I really wanted someone to, 'Make my day.'

I heard footsteps behind me and spun around, racking the shotgun again and getting ready to unload a round of buck shot into-

Devin.

Devin was walking with his arms raised high, more for fear of the Mexicans shooting him than me, but to be honest, I damn near shot him.

A few guns sighted down on him but he kept coming.

A prophet or something.

I was thinking again and I thought he had come to back me up, but instead when he got close enough to me he landed a solid right hook on the side of my head and the damn hula hoop stars were back running circles around my ass again.

I must have dropped when he hit me cause the next thing I know I hear a car door slam and tires crunching across the gravel right next to my ear.

I looked up and Devin is staring down at me with this blank look on his face and all the sudden I understand that he fucking hit me.

“Why the fuck-" I started, but a well-placed kick put me back in blackness.

Somehow I ended up at one of our little hang out houses and there was nobody inside but me, I was lying on the couch. A spring jammed up against my ass from one of the cushions.

I started to get up but the damn house decided to relocate walls by spinning so I decided to wait until it was finished. I lay back down.

When I finally was able, I went outside and found Steve, leaning against the wall drinking a Coors Light.

“Hello cup cake.” He said, reaching into a box at his feet and coming out with another bottle of Coors.

“Hi butter cup.” I said and snatched the beer from his hand.

I didn’t feel like joking around right then.

“It was for you anyway dick,” he said, “how’s the head ache?”

"Fucking hurts, where is Devin?" I asked. The question coming out all slurred and sounding like, "guggen herz, wur Dubbin?"

"I think you have a little concussion cup cake."

"Fug yew."

After a few minutes Steve said, "Devin carried you back here by himself, we offered to help drag your fat ass but he wouldn't hear of it. Thought you should know."

We stood around for a couple more minutes and then I went back to the couch and the spring that loves me and passed out.

Now I guess you're not supposed to sleep when you have a concussion but hey I didn't really have a choice.

When I woke up Devin was there.

"Sorry bout that bro. But you fucking scared me." He said.

"Sorry bro, sometimes you feel like a nut, sometimes you don't."

He looked down at me, all serious, "You scared me bro."

All I could say was, "I know."

My head fell back to the couch and I passed out, watching as Devin spun into a sea of darkness before winking out completely.

Boys will be boys, men will want to be boys and we will always be there for each other.

Dark Duties

Thoughts alone carry off in the wind. I try to dissipate and float away on those wonderful currents of nighttime breeze, but I am rooted to this spot. Staring at this girl I know, I know I should say something wise and noble and heart felt. But all I can think of is wanting to kill.

She looks up at me through eyes of water, from a face that is so sweet and soft, so smooth and beautiful and covered in tears and says, “Did you hear me? He raped me. I don’t know what to do.”

Sorrow wells up in my chest, stopping my heart. Thoughts take off running through my mind. This cant be happening. Why is she coming to me? What am I supposed to do? Can I kill him and get away clean? Who else knows about this?

“Who else knows about this?” I ask, a little too sharp.

I watch as a tear streaks down her cheek, hanging for a second from her chin before falling down and slapping against her shirt and soaking into the material.

“Stained.”

She looks up. “What?”

“Nothing. Did you tell anyone else besides me about this?” I say turning away from her, afraid my eyes will tell her that this pain

is a stain that will never fully go away. Not even time heals this wound.

"No, na uh. I didn't know whom to tell. I shouldn't have told you." the sobs take her and she just leans into her hands.

I want to put my arm around her, tell her everything is going to be ok. But I don't know how, and I don't want to lie to her. So I sit there, like an idiot, the bubble of sorrow that held my heart bursts and a new emotion takes off running through my veins.

Rage.

How could this motherfucker do this?! I'll tear out his eyes; strip his skin from his bones!

"What do you want to do?" I ask

"I don't know, aren't you listening? I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO!"

"Ok, calm down. Listen to me for a second ok? I am going to take care of this."

She turns to me, "You can't call the cops, and I don't want my mom to know."

"Don't worry, I'm not calling the cops. I will take care of him. Just stay here and don't tell anyone until I get back ok?"

"What do you mean you'll take care of it? I don't understand, how can you" she stops. She can see my eyes, and she knows, like a wave slamming into a

Cliff that my choice is one none of us will ever be able to hide from.

"I said I'd take care of it. Just trust me." And with that I turn and walk out, knowing the best thing in the world to do is go

back in there, talk her into calling the police and drilling in to her head the fact that, 'it is not her fault.' But I'm feeling really pissed off tonight, and this is one of those things that just sets you off. Like watching someone lock their kids in their car when it is a hundred and ten degrees outside. You just want to tear out their throats and scream.

What's making this all the worse for me is the fact that I have been down these streets, and I know that I didn't like where they had brought me in life. But my own incapability's and irrational behaviors are not letting common sense or anything else penetrate my thoughts. I need blood.

I hear more sobs over take her as I start to close the door, but then she pulls her self together and calls after me, "Please don't hurt him."

Someone must have just jerked my ass up to the back of my neck, spun my head around hundred and eighty degrees and shot me out of a canon. "WHAT?!"

"I love him." she says.

Now all my reason and order just came crashing down to the ground, I wanted to do a few things:1) run over to her, take her in my arms and tell her that she cant possible love someone who would do this type of thing to her. 2) run over to her and slap she shit out of her.

But I just slipped the door closed and made my way to the front room where low and behold the demon of the evening had arrived while I was speechlessly talking to his victim in the other room. The demon goes by Robert when he assumes the façade of a

homeboy, and so this Robert thing lifts a hand and calls out to me, “Hey bro, what’s up?”

I just spit out a ‘fuck you’ hello, which consists of pretty much just hissing and spitting out a few syllables, I wanted to break his neck.

I leaned against the wall opposite Robert and let my eyes drift over him, making no attempt to hide what I was doing. He played like he didn’t notice what I was doing but everyone else knew what I was doing. Looking for the crumble spot.

Now on some people you can tell where their weak points are, maybe their wrists are paper thin, maybe they always cover their third rib when someone plays like they are gonna take a swing at them. Many signs.

I see Devin from the corner of my eye holding out a beer for me. But tonight I don’t feel like drinking, I ignore him. pull all my attention and focus on Robert.

Robert is 23 years old, about a hundred and eighty pounds. A little over six feet tall with brown hair and dark eyes that never focus on me but dance around the room, carrying with them his smile and laugh. He seems a little nervous, a few beads of sweat dot his brow, and the smile and laugh seem a little forced, but no one seems to realize this, no one except me.

I glance around the room and see a screwdriver lying on the ground next to an old VCR. That would sink nicely into his neck, maybe catching a major artery. Blood would squirt out so fast no one would be able to stop it from draining life from him.

I glance over at Devin and say, “Hey bro, I need to talk to you for a minute.” And head for the front door.

Outside Devin searches my eyes and finally says, “What the fuck bro? Why you doggin Rob like that?”

Can’t put anything past Devin. I tell him what Cindy told me and he just stares off into the distant darkness listening, not saying a word until I finish. Then, “What do you think?”

“I don’t know bro, I think we have to do something though.” I tell him. hoping he will have a good idea of what exactly we should do.

“Fucking Rob.” Is all he says and drifts off again in thought.

I get the feeling that Devin doesn’t want to do anything, just let it go so I push, “Bro this shit’s not cool. We can’t go to the cops.”

“Yea.”

“So?” I ask.

“So? So nothing. She could be lying.”

“Nah bro, she’s not lying. You saw how he was acting in there, trying to play it a little too cool. He’s nervous.”

“Shit bro he’s always like that.” Devin says, but without conviction. He knows too.

Steve wanders around from the back and heads our way, “Hey cup cakes.”

I nod to him in greeting and Devin says, “hey.” And the three of us stand around not sure what to say until Steve just drifts past us and heads into the house.

Devin leans against the porch railing and I lean against the house opposite him and we stand both lost in thoughts, not sure where to go from here. Not knowing what to say.

Then from inside we hear a crash and Steve scream, “What the fuck is wrong with my sister?”

This would be a good time to point out that Cindy who Robert raped is Steve’s little sister, and Steve has been in and out of the state funded motels some of which are, Soledad, Tehachapi, Wasco, and Folsom. I think some of these may get funding from the Federal Government too. He got to stay in these places for a number of things, mostly arson, battery, and assault. Steve is one of those people who have nothing to lose and doesn’t really care if he gets sent back, at least then he will be able to watch cable TV.

I glance at Devin and we both scramble through the front door in time to see Steve slam Robert against the wall.

Robert was sort of seeing Cindy and Steve knew but wasn’t supposed to know. He also knew that his little sister was only thirteen and Robert was ten years her senior even though she wouldn’t be a senior in high school for another five years.

Robert is pretty much almost in tears from fear but manages to speak, “Bro? Bro? I don’t know bro. Is something wrong with her? I don’t know.”

Eh eh wrong answer… sound the bullshit buzzer!

Steve slams Robert again, well actually sort of into the wall this time. When he pulls him forward you can see that the drywall now has a man size pushed in spot/hole.

I kind of want to tell Steve what's up but I know better than that, he would kill Robert right then and there, but for one thing, I wasn't about to stop him from beating Robert's ass. Devin however was quick to try and get Steve to let Robert go, don't ask me why.

Devin caught Steve's arm and pulled him back a little, as soon as he let go, Robert just slumped back against the wall.

"I WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY SISTER!" Ever present and accounted for Steve shouts.

"Well what the fuck are you going to accompany by beating him?" Devin asks.

"Accomplish." I offer, hey it's what I do best, correcting grammar in the mists of a war.

"What? Asks Steve, then gets back into the hatred and pumps steam into his brain. He yells, "CINDY! GET OUT HERE RIGHT NOW!"

"Bro, take it easy ok. Just calm down a little. We will figure this out. Now what's up?" as soon as Devin spoke that last question he cringed and I cringed with him. bad choice of question. Really bad.

I thought Steve was going to hit Devin for a split second but then we heard a snivel from the end of the hallway and we all turned to look at Cindy as she came into the front room, eyes red and swollen from crying.

Two guys up and split at the first sign that they were not needed, I might have myself but I couldn't just leave now.

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!" Asks Steve to Cindy.

"I, I just feel sick. Steve? Ok?" she turns away from him as she speaks and I make the mistake of looking from her to Steve and catching his eyes.

"You give her some fucking dope or something?" He asks me.

"What? Fuck you! You know me better than that shit. No I didn't give any fucking dope! Fuck you!" now he is pissing me off. Cindy is like my little cousin or sister or something, I would beat the shit out of anyone who ever even tried to give anything to her. Steve knows this but is desperate for an answer.

He looks over at Devin, and Devin holds his hands up as if to say, "Nope, not me."

This brings everyone's attention back to Robert. Our eyes all lock onto him.

Steve starts for him but I manage to slip in front of him and get to Robert before he can.

Robert comes up off the wall and starts to say something, eyes open wide when I shove my fist into his teeth.

Bad idea, I am getting pretty good at doing stupid shit lately, I want to scream because his teeth cut into my hand when I hit him and it hurt like hell but I stayed casual and drove my knee into his stomach.

Robert doubled over and I held him by his shoulders but I let him go and he dropped to the ground. I heard a door slam behind me somewhere and turned to look.

Steve had a crazed look of pure insanity on his face, smiling a sick smile; I could tell he wanted to hurt Robert bad, hell so did I.

Devin however had stayed casual. Glancing up at me I saw a faint frown then he composed a slate expression that revealed nothing.

Cindy had gone back and locked herself in the bedroom.

Steve went to see to his sister and I just growled down at Robert.

The world had come unhinged from reality and the storm of utter pain to come was building like clouds over all of us, but none of us knew how bad the storm was really going to be. Only that this storm would blow away for the time being and come back to rain on us another day.

Steve took Robert for a ride in his Camaro later that night. When Steve came back with blood on his arms and shirt and no Robert, we didn't ask any questions and Steve knew better than to tell us to forget what we saw. Devin grabbed a couple beers from the fridge, we popped tops and I handed one to Steve when he came out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his newly showered self.

We drank in silence.

Wrath

I was out running around the neighborhood when my pager started vibrating against my side. I swept my hand up and snapped it out of my pocket with precision handling, turned my wrist upside down and hit the button. My grandparents.

My grandparents?

I clicked through the number and found the time, two thirty seven in the morning. What the hell? I was at a loss, why would they be paging me? Then I knew why, the only time you get middle of the night pages from your family is when something bad has happened. My skin crawled for a second and then I slapped a homeboy on the shoulder.

"Hey bro, phone run?" homeboy lingo for, 'Excuse me friend, could you please take me to the nearest pay phone?'

"You got gas money?" Asked Steve.

I reach in my pocket and pull out a dime bag of crank and toss it to him.

He sticks it in his pocket then says, "Ready when you are."

We run down to the nearest 24-hour gas station and I walk up to the phones, drop in my change, hesitate, and then dial.

My grandfather answers on the first ring, "Hello?"

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"Hold on." I hear him cover the receiver with his hand and then after a couple seconds he comes back on the line, "Beau?"

"Yea. I'm here." I say.

Ever sense I was like four years old and addicted to watching the Dukes of Hazard TV show, my grandparents have always called me Beau.

My grandfather whispers in to the phone, "Chuck is back in town."

Instantly my eyes cloud over and anger spreads through my body, "Where's mom?"

"She's here, he came by earlier tonight looking for her but I told him she wasn't here, he said he would kill me if I was lying. I slammed the door and locked it then went and got my gun from the night stand dresser, but he was already gone."

"Are you guys ok?" I asked.

"Yea, I think the little shit is staying at the motel down the street."

"Keep her inside and don't let her go anywhere." It was all I could think to say.

"Son, I know." He said, and then hung up.

I stood staring at the phone, recounting all the times I had watched my mom being beaten by her boyfriends.

I had always been too young to do anything to help her when I was growing up. Sometimes she would provoke them to keep them away from me. Sometimes this worked, sometimes we both ended up bloody. Sometimes her boyfriends liked little boys for other reasons, but she never knew this and I never told her.

When I was eleven years old she was living in Oregon with this guy who beat her. I went to see her for Christmas break. And as usual, everything started out fine and fun, we all had a good time together. Then one night while I was sleeping in the living room I awoke to screaming and the sound of shattering glass. I was only eleven but at the sight of my mother's bloody face something inside me snapped and the coward was forced into the back of my mind. I sprang to my feet and launched myself at him, I tried pushing him away from her, and then I tried biting his arm. This caught me a backhand slap to the cheek and a coppery taste in my mouth. I was helpless to stop him by myself.

I remembered him showing me the double bladed dagger he kept displayed on the mantel over the fireplace and I climbed up on the rocks and grabbed it, the whole time crying and sobbing.

I made my way over to him but not too close and was telling him to let my mom go. Please let her go. Just let her go!!!

But he didn't hear me, and my mom was losing consciousness, she wasn't holding her arms up to defend herself from him anymore. His fists landed hard each time.

I ran around and put myself between my mother and him. facing him, I stabbed out at him with the knife but he just brushed my arm away and hit me. Everything just went black for a second, but I didn't pass out, I was still holding the knife, I lashed out again, this time swinging the knife in an arc. I caught his arm and he stumbled back a few steps.

Super mom, who I assumed was completely unconscious, came to life when he back handed me and sprang from the bed,

claws clicking, teeth bared, and eyes full of hate. She was pissed. He ducked one punch from her and caught another one to the side of the head, but he didn't go down. Instead he laid into her with five or six punches of his own until she was out cold.

I drove into him with the knife and felt it punch through his shoulder, dig into bone and cartilage and stop. I ripped it out and took a step back.

"You little mother fucker!" He spat.

I just stood there holding the knife out in front of me, tears streaming down my face, sobs racking my breathing, arms and legs shaking from fear.

I looked into his eyes and my voice wavered but I managed to say, "I'll kill, kill y-you."

He left forever from my mom's life that night. A few days later I heard about a biker gang killing of a man. The Knights. People my mother knew, her boyfriend was never heard from again, by anyone...

Now however standing outside of the gas station, staring at a pay phone, I realized what I had to do. Actually more like, what I wanted to do, what I felt I needed to do for me.

I jumped back in my homeboy's car and we headed back to the neighborhood.

"You know where Devin is bro?" I asked.

"Na, huh uh."

I found Devin and explained things to him, "Bro, you know my moms? Well remember her ex, Chuck? Well I got a page from my gramps and he says Chuck is back in town bro. I guess he

couldn't stay away too long. But I am not gonna give him the chance to get his hands on her again. No way bro. And I know she will go with him if he calls and threatens my grandparents or something."

My mother for all her faults is a good person, she loves strongly of her family and friends, she would take a bullet for people that really don't deserve such loyalty but that's just her. I love her very much, even is she has always had a problem with picking assholes for boyfriends.

Devin looks at me and says, "Ok, what do you want to do?"

"I want to go bash his fucking brains in bro. Make him think twice about ever coming back."

"No shit. Is he at your grandparent's house?"

"No, well, he might be watching it. I don't know, but my gramps said he might be staying at the motel down the street."

"Let's roll." Said Devin as he snatched a pair of ski masks from the front closet, and a baseball bat.

We pulled the ski masks down on our heads then folded them up so they looked like ordinary beanies, Devin pulled a Yankees hat down over his so we wouldn't look like a couple of bank robbers or cat burglars out on the prowl. I personally can't stand baseball. Stupid game, no action. Only my opinion though.

Little did we know that we would never even remember to pull the ski masks down over our faces, but that's how it goes sometimes. So anyhow.

When we pulled into the parking lot of the motel, all was quiet. All except my heart at the sight of Chuck's truck. This was it. top of the first inning.

"Which one is he in?" Asked Devin.

"Fuck bro, I don't know. Shit."

"No prob., I got it. What's Chuck's last name?"

"If a wood chuck, could chuck wood, how much-"

"Shut the fuck up, what's his last name?" Asked Devin, a little annoyed that I could be joking around at a time like this.

"Chuck Wood." I said, grinning.

"Fuck you." Said Devin.

So I told him Chuck's last name and he ran over to the pay phone out front of the office, dialed some number, and mouthed a few words unheard by me. Dropped the receiver back on the hook and ran back to the car, "112" he said then snatched the bat from the back seat.

"Fuck you." I said. "What?"

"Called the office and asked for his room, she offered to patch me through but I told her I would be calling off and on and if she wouldn't mind id rather just call his line so as to not wake her up all night long." The bastard actually grinned at me.

"Very thoughtful of you." I said, then climbed out of the car and closed the door quietly.

We walked over to room 112 and checked to see if we could see into the room. Nothing. He had closed the curtains, but we could tell that the light was on inside. I motioned to Devin and we walked over to his truck, locked.

"What do we do?" Devin asked.

"Come on." I said, and took the bat from his hands.

I walked straight up to room 112 and slammed the bat against the door. Immediately a dog started barking from inside the room.

Chuck I knew had a German Rottweiler stupidly named, "Dog." And more than likely that was the dog inside.

I heard someone tell the dog to shut up inside the room so I hit the door with the bat again, then waited for the barking to quiet down before I knocked with the bat again, this time tapping out the melody to 'shave and a haircut, two bits.'

The curtains were pulled back a little and I stepped back a little from the door so he could see me. He quickly closed the curtains and I couldn't hear any sound from inside, so I kicked the door once. It was loud but no louder than my earlier knocking and that hadn't seemed to have awakened anyone.

Devin and I stepped back a little ways and then Devin said, "Tap the window."

Now when Devin said this I was thinking he meant smash it, but when I raised the bat and straddled the plate ready to drive a home run he whistled and I glanced back and understood at once. The bastard really meant tap the window. So I did, reluctantly.

A few seconds passed then Chuck glanced outside through the window and saw Devin with a knife in his hand getting ready to slash his tires. Then he was gone from the window and I heard the security chain on the door. I glanced back at Devin and we both started towards the door.

The door swung open and we heard Chuck say, “Get ‘em boy! Get ‘em!”

Not a second passed before a dark shadow came rushing out of the room and straight at us. Devin screamed like a little bitch.

“Hey Dog, good boy. What are you doing dog?” I asked, reaching down and stopping Dog as he shoved his nose in my crotch. If he had had a tail it would have been waggling the moment he seen it was me. As it were, he didn’t have a tail but his little ass was just swishing back and forth, I guess he too forgot he didn’t have a tail.

Dog might have attacked us and shredded us if it hadn’t been for the fact that Chuck likes not only to hit his women, but his pets too. and I had spent a lot of time with Dog when I was visiting my mom and Chuck a few years earlier when Dog was just a puppy.. He was a cool dog, I was a cool guy, and we were cool. Devin was a little bitch and I swear I could see Dog give one of those all dog grins when he looked over at Devin than back at me.

The door slammed and we heard the security chain again.

“Motherfucker.” Devin gasped. Still trying to swallow his balls and have them return to their rightful place.

I scratched behind Dog’s ears and asked Devin for his knife. He handed it to me then took a couple steps back away from Dog and I.

“Chuck!” I called, “Come out now or I’m going to kill your fucking dog.”

At the sound of his name Dog nudged under my chin with his snout and then let his tongue dance stupidly from one side of

his mouth to the other, then caught me with a kiss on the mouth. I wiped it off and kept an eye on the window but we saw nothing move from inside.

As I was getting a cramp in my leg I stood up and heard a small sound from inside the room, I glanced at Devin and he glanced at me, hunched his shoulder and walked up and put his ear to the door.

"I think he is trying to get out of the bathroom window."

"Should we go around?" I asked.

"Fuck bro aint nobody here, aint heard or seen no one and we been making all kinds of noise."

"Yea." I said, and slammed my shoulder into the door.

"Ouch."

Devin coughed and I got the hint and we locked arms and stepped back then forward and kicked out.

We heard wood give way but the door was still closed so we stepped back and then kicked again, this time the door flew open and I rushed in, Devin right behind me, one hand on my back.

We didn't plan it out but we just came together like old times, falling into a rhythm. I had the bat so I couldn't run second man; Devin was empty-handed and had a better sight on the room after we kicked in the door. So he brought up the rear.

Naturals.

When I came into the room I saw Chuck in the bathroom, sure enough trying to wedge open the window. Why do people always think they can slip out of a window that is only about ten

inches wide and sixteen inches tall? Why? Is everyone too stupid to realize the absolute non-possibility of it?

As Chuck spun around and saw me thundering toward him he slammed the bathroom door but I wasn't stopping, like a bull in a matador ring I had my sights set on that fucking room and I was going in, one way or another.

I slammed into the door and it almost flew off its hinges slamming against the wall and I rammed into Chuck, driving the bat into his stomach.

He gasped and I pulled up on the bat as hard as I could, catching him square in the face as he was doubling over, he crumbled. But I wasn't finished, a hatred that I hadn't felt in a long time was taking control of me, the demon was unleashed.

I ripped into him, smashing down with the bat, kicking, and shrieking in a whisper.

I didn't even have enough power to inhale enough breath to let out a real scream. I was enraged, wanting to pull and push all of my power into each strike. Ultimate power was mine, I could control the hands of time at that moment, and with all the energy I was putting into my rage I could have stopped the earth from spinning. But instead I just wanted a soul. one soul.

I only stopped when I could hold the bat no more, the blood was too slick to allow me to grip it tightly, so I laid into him with a few punches then fell back onto the bedroom floor, crying, sobbing, feeling lost, feeling incapable of being satisfied, unfulfilled.

Devin just stood there, staring at me. Then he bent down and said, "Bro? Are you ok?"

I couldn't answer. I dared not answer; if I had answered him right then I might have lost my mind completely.

He picked me up and put me on the bed then went into the bathroom and snatched the bat off the floor. Rinsed it in the bathtub, left the water running and went out side.

He came back in and hauled Chuck out of the bathroom, across the room to the door and outside. I couldn't stand; I just laid there, lost to myself.

I finally got up and went outside, Devin was waiting in the car.

I tried to close the door but the door jam was all twisted and the latch was bent. I wiggled the latch back and forth and it finally came off in my hand, I tossed it inside and closed the door as best I could.

I glanced into the car as I opened the front door and saw Chuck in the back seat, blood covered his face but I could tell he was still breathing, I really didn't care.

We drove for about an hour until we got to the old shooting area. It's a place way out in the middle of nowhere; it's a place where no one goes anymore, not on the weekdays anyhow. And it's a place where absolutely nobody goes at night. The foothills.

I got out of the car and Devin pulled Chuck out of the back. And dropped him on the ground.

For the first time I heard Chuck crying. I don't know if he had been the whole time or not but this was the first I heard him. he was begging for his life and I was numb. Devin pulled me over to

the side and said, “I won’t say you went too far. But we can not just let him go now.”

“Yea.”

Devin went to the car and popped the trunk, he pulled out a coil of nylon rope and a gasoline container.

He set them down then reached back in and pulled out the bat and a length of hose.

The gas container and hose we usually use to siphon gas from other peoples cars at night so we don’t have to pay for our own. But right now I couldn’t really think on my own, I was on some eternal autopilot. I walked to the side of the car and unscrewed the gas cap, slipped the hose in and uncapped the gas container.

I have always been good at ‘jackin off’ the siphon hose, so I don’t need to suck the gas with my mouth. Basically to do this you go like this. You push the hose in deep and put your thumb over the exposed end of the hose. Then pull the hose out, let your thumb off the end and push the hose back in. Cap it real quick with your thumb. Six or seven times like this and if you do it right, presto! You get instant gas, for any motor driven vehicle.

I filled the container and pulled the hose out and tossed it in the trunk. I set the gas container next to the trunk and picked up the bat.

“Bro?” Said Devin from the other side of the car.

I handed him the bat and walked over to wear Chuck lay curled on the ground. I knelt down and waited. But he wasn’t saying anything, just laying there. He wasn’t even crying anymore.

I nudged him with my hand and said, “I want two words from you.”

He just lay there, not hearing or not answering. So I stood, slipped the knife from my pocket and flicked it open.

“Bro?”

I looked back at Devin, “You should go somewhere else bro.” And then I turned back to Chuck, knelt down, and cut off his left ear.

A scream pierced the night, and I heard Devin saying, “Oh god! Oh god!” over and over again but I didn’t really care, I was hoping that maybe god was watching right this minute.

“Two words.” I told Chuck again.

“IM SORRY, IM SORRY!” Chuck Screamed.

“Wrong two.” I said, and sliced a chunk of flesh from his arm.

Devin stumbled over to the front of the car and threw up. I dangled the flesh in front of Chucks face for a second then tossed it to the side and cut another slice.

The screaming was the worst. I have never heard someone scream like that. Such a high-pitched echoing forever scream that is as cold and reverberating as the winter winds in Antarctica.

Frozen ice chills.

I stood and grabbed the gas container and started pouring it on Chuck. I splashed his legs then stopped.

“Oh, no fucking way bro! God no!” Devin was saying from the background.

“I need a light.”

"No. uh huh! No way bro!" Devin walked off into the night.

I searched the ashtray and then the glove box and bingo! Matches. PERFECT!

I walked over to Chuck and said again, "Two words."

He didn't or couldn't answer.

I snapped a match off the little rack and held it between striker and my index finger.

"Fuck you." I said and sent the match flying towards Chuck. It caught the striker under my finger and was blazing while airborne.

WHOOSH!

ARGHHHH!!!!!

The two were almost instantaneous.

I waited till the flames died off and smoke rose slowly, languidly into the night. The stench was horrific but I was too far gone to be set back by that.

"Two words." I said as I doused him again with gasoline.

This time I emptied the whole container over him.

I jumped in the car and pulled it down the road a ways then walked back.

"Two words." I said again.

Silence.

I struck a match and then set it to the rest of the pack of matches and when they all caught I tossed it, and this time there was no scream.

Later we swung by the motel and I called Dog to the car, scratched behind his ears and let him in the back. Devin had recuperated and gotten himself under control. He knew we had to kill Chuck but he had no idea how we would do it. I told him I thought that when he grabbed the gas can he knew but he said that was just to burn the body after to leave no evidence.

Devin, still not very found of big ass dogs said, “So, you gonna keep him?”

“Nah, I’ll let my mom take him.” I stared out the side window as the night glided by the other side.

“Hey bro?”

I turned towards Devin, “Yea?”

“No regrets about tonight.”

“None at all bro, thanks for being there for me.” I said.

“Anytime bro.”

And so on. we drove back to the neighborhood in silence, Dog occasionally licking the back of Devin’s neck and making him gasp and do a little mid-driving jig that I thought was funny as hell. He didn’t share my humor, Dog sure as shit did though because I swear that black bastard was smiling ear to ear every time I looked at him.

Sins of man can claim more from the sinner than the person they sin against, but sometimes, just sometimes it grants them release and a freedom worth life in prison. The body can be caged, but the soul knows no bounds to breathe free.

Games Kids Play

Sometimes we do things just for the pure adrenaline rush we get from it. sometimes these aren't the best things to do and definitely not always the safest, but always worth it.

I walked alone, taking in the awesome night around me.

A wind poured down through the streets, carrying leaves, trash and anything else it could westward. The trees shook their branches and the occasional Palm tree swayed, threatening to pull free of the earth and take flight.

Clouds as dark as mud puddles raced across the night sky, obscuring the moons glow. The night itself seemed to breathe chaos.

Walking into the wind, my shirt to my chest, my pants flapping around the sides of my legs. A scent of smoke twisted past me. An orange glow rose up from the fields on the other side of the canal. My destination.

I could feel the energy of the night as I made my way to the fence at the end of the street. The sign said, "Stay out! Stay alive!" but I climbed the chain link anyway, eager to see the flames on the other side.

I dropped down from the top of the fence in time to see three shadows running down the canal bank a hundred yards away, coming towards me.

I reached for the knife I kept tucked into a sheath at the small of my back, pulling it out I felt comforted by the weight of it. a double bladed throwing knife, my personal favorite.

Armed and somewhat dangerous, I began making my way towards the three shadows, keeping as best I could to the darkness of the fence.

When the three shadows were about twenty feet from me they stopped and froze, as did I, keeping low and bringing the knife up to my chest.

I was about to make a move when a light snapped on and was shone into my eyes, blinded I brought up my left hand to block the light from my eyes when I heard someone call my name.

“Shit. Yea it’s me,” I said. “Do you fucking mind not shining that thing in my face?”

“Oh sorry bro.” Came the answer as the light was flicked off.

I blinked a few times and put the knife back into its sheath, as I made my way towards the shadow that was presumably Keith from the sound of his voice.

“What did you guys do, light the whole field on fire?” I asked, nodding a greeting to Joey and Dylan.

“Nah, we just came to check it out. Just seen the fire department coming down Pacheco road” Said Keith, as we shook hands.

Without a word we all started back towards the fence, nights like these are strange; they carry with them their own conversation.

Back on the street we could hear the neighborhood dogs howling to the sirens of the approaching fire department vehicles.

Dylan reached into his jacket and produced a slim Jim tool, not waiting for us to say anything he headed over to the Ford Bronco that he had been trying to break into for the past month. Rumor was that the guy who owned it kept his wallet and a spare set of keys under the front seat. A rumor that Dylan was dead set on trying to prove or disprove.

Keith, Joey and I just kept on walking, not really interested in the Bronco. After a few blocks Joey peeled off and headed back to his pad.

"So what are you up to tonight?" I asked Keith.

"Hell, I don't know, whatever comes my way I guess. I heard Cathy and her sister are planning a party at their place when their mom goes out of town for that funeral."

"No shit? You know when?"

"Nah, I think they said Monday, but I don't know."

"You ever hook up with Lindsey?" I asked.

"No, I tried the other night over at Devin's grandma's house, but she just sort of blew me off. I think she's lesbian or something."

I couldn't help but laugh at that one. Lindsey wasn't exactly known for her lack of sexual interests. I won't say that she is 'easy'. Because any guy who has ever tried to get with a girl knows that

there really isn't any such thing as 'easy' when it comes to women. But on a list of one to ten, ten being the hardest to get, Lindsey is a hair shy of a three.

"Fuck you." Said Keith

I laughed even harder.

With the burning field behind us and the wind blowing at our backs we made our way to the park.

Keith with all his faults is a reasonably well-rounded kid; he is sixteen years old like me, a skinny little kid who has had a rough life. A kid who has adapted like most of us to live beyond our parents.

When we got to the park we noticed a group of people in the middle of the park, just beyond the reach of the lights. As we headed over Keith called out, "Where the Woods at?"

A chorus of voices answered, some howling some calling out. This was family, we were on safe ground. As we got closer I started picking out faces and putting names to voices that called out. A twenty pack of Coors Light sat on the table with the top torn off and ice dumped into it.

Steve offered us a beer, and we both accepted. I twisted the top off and tried to flick it but it just fell out of my hand and landed on the ground, I never could figure that out.

After we all greeted one another everyone started back into their previous conversations and I just listened in for a while. It seems Cathy's party was indeed scheduled to happen on Monday, Steve had gotten pulled over last night, Ryan had to go see his parole officer today, and Danny was looking to buy some weed.

This last one caught my attention and I told Danny that I had about a quarter pound.

"I was just looking to score an ounce. How much?" Asked Danny

"For you bro? Forty five is cool."

"Sweet, I don't have the money on me though. You gonna be around for a while?" He asked.

"Yea bro, no where else to be." I said, as he took off towards his house.

I looked over at Devin, "What you got going tonight bro?"

Devin just stared at the ground, took a drink of his beer and said, "Nothing, why what's up?"

"I need to get that Q.P. from your house."

"Nah bro, I got an ounce on me if it's for Danny." He said.

"Cool."

I started to take a drink when I heard Joey speak up out of the crowd, "Mother fucker. I asked you earlier if you had some weed."

Devin just smiled and said, "And I told you no earlier."

"Bastard."

"Yep."

We all laughed, then settled back into the night, listening to the sound of the wind as it blew leaves across the basketball court.

After a while of me sitting off to the side, drinking my beer and listening to the night Devin came over and sat next to me. "What's up bro?"

I drank the rest of my beer and twisted off the cap to another before answering, “Not much bro, fucking bored though. You?” I asked as I set the cap between my thumb and finger and gave it a flick. It rolled off my hand and landed in the grass.

“Shit bro, give it up.” Said Devin laughing.

“Fuck you.”

“This shit is getting old bro, this kicking it at the park shit. Know what I mean?” He asked.

“Yea bro, I know. But what else is there to do?”

Devin just smiled at me and stood up. “Come on then.”

I stood up, dusted the grass off my ass, and asked. “Where we going?”

“You want something to do or what?”

“Yea, yea. What about Danny?”

“I’ll leave the weed with Keith and he can collect the money from Danny and pay you later.” Devin said.

“Ok, cool.”

As we walked out of the park I couldn’t help but wonder what Devin was up to. My curiosity was peeked when he told me to make sure my pager was on vibrate.

“Where we headed anyway?” I asked.

“Star Peterson’s grandparents house.”

“Bro, Star is probably asleep as well as her grandparents, they aren’t gonna like us coming around at three in the morning, hell they don’t like us coming around anyway.”

“They aren’t gonna know we’re there.” Said Devin with a grin.

"Ahh shit bro. What are we gonna do? Throw little rocks at her window?"

"Nope."

If curiosity could be a climax, my pants would have been a mess. But I said nothing as we headed towards the house.

The house was a single story, three-bedroom house just at the edge of the canal. It only had neighbors to the west and across the street to the south. As we crept up to the chain link fence we scanned the other houses and saw no lights on. only one light showed in the Peterson's house, and it came from Star's room. A faint red glow through the curtains. Star always slept with the red light on. people have asked her repeatedly why, but she has never answered. Not to my knowledge anyhow.

We made our way up to the front of the house and Devin glanced in the window. "All clear."

I whispered, "Feels like we are doing a smash bro. Please tell me we're not."

"Nope, no noise. We sneak in."

"Shit." I muttered as I followed Devin around to the front door.

He tried the doorknob and said, "Locked."

"No shit dick head, this isn't exactly Green Acres." I mocked.

He gave me a light elbow to the ribs and said, "Come on smart ass."

We made our way to the back door and as I sighed, Devin opened the door.

"Holy shit!" I said.

"Shhh."

We made our way inside and Devin shut the door but didn't let it latch closed.

"So what now?" I whispered.

Devin made some scissors motion with his fingers and I was about to tell him how we weren't in Vietnam, and this wasn't some Recon mission when we heard a cough from the hallway. We froze. Listening.

Then we heard a smack and then running water. At first I couldn't figure it out and then I knew. We were listening to someone take a piss.

My mind went reeling. Was it Star's grandpa? Her grandma? Were we about to be busted? Shit what would happen if we got caught? The old man could shoot us and be in the right. Oh fuck. Is it Star? Would she flip out if she saw us? Start screaming before we could tell her who we were? Too many questions with no answers.

Devin grabbed my arm and led me in to the kitchen. I knew he meant for us to hide there but I stopped him and leaned in close and whispered, "People who get up in the middle of the night usually go to the kitchen dick."

As I led the way to the living room we had to cross right in front of the hallway, if whoever should look out or even glance in the mirror above the sink we were toast. But we made it safely to the living room and ducked behind the couch just as the toilet flushed.

I felt alive, my skin was electrified. I could hear my heart beat. The fear of discovery pumped adrenaline into the blood stream at a fast rate. I was about to glance over the couch to see what was going on when a light snapped on.

I glanced at Devin only to wish I hadn't, the fucker was smiling ear to ear.

We could see the entrance to the kitchen from behind the couch, which meant that if someone went in there, then surely they would see us when they came out.

My eyes were glued to that spot when motion seemed to twist my focus and all I could see was a blur before I realized that it was Star, headed into the kitchen.

She was wearing a blue spaghetti strap little blouse, and panties. Nothing else. I swear I heard Devin let out a little moan. I almost reached back and slapped him, but instead I turned and pushed him out from behind the couch.

We both stood up and we could see everything, the living room, the front of the kitchen, but we couldn't see Star. The feeling was amazing, I can't even begin to describe it. it felt like being a god or something. Knowing you are n some ones house. The safest place to them. Knowing that they don't know your there. It was powerful. And scary.

Devin pushed my shoulder and I looked at him as he pointed towards the hallway and stated in that direction. I didn't know what he was doing but I followed anyway. We walked as quietly as we could down the hall, as we started to pass the bath-

room I had a feeling that we were about to be busted so I ducked into the bathroom, Devin kept going.

I made my way to the bathtub by memory, not turning on any lights. I stepped into it and slid the curtain shut. As it closed something fell and hit the bathtub. I froze. Listening, but didn't hear anything. I reached down and felt around for what had fell, it turned out to be a bottle of shampoo or something, I couldn't be sure in the dark. I stood it up at the drain and left it. then all of a sudden I realized that I was in the worst place to be in a house at night. The bathroom. Jeez what an idiot. Maybe I should try to get out.

I stood trying to decide what I should do and where Devin had gone. The bastard better not leave without me. As I started dwelling on it I was certain that he had left already, and then I heard a click and the faint light from the living room went out.

I tensed, ready to be caught, waiting to be discovered. But as the seconds ticked by I was fairly sure that Star has gone back to her room.

Her room?

Shit, I bet that's where Devin had gone. Where could you hide in there though? Maybe her closet. She always kept it neat and more than once we have had to hide in there when her grandparents knocked on her door.

"Bastard." I said under my breath. The lucky son of a bitch is in there right now, watching Star in her panties and blouse. What if she sleeps naked? Oh that fucker. I am gonna kill him. I couldn't shake the memory of Star as she walked into the kitchen. Damn

him. then I remembered where I was, not that I had really forgotten or anything.

I opened the curtain and stepped out of the tub. Froze and listened. Nothing. I made my way to the hallway and peeked around towards the bedrooms, nothing. As I made my way back to the living room something reached out and grabbed my arm.

I almost screamed.

Then Devin said, “Did you see that? Of my god. I’m gonna have a wet dream tonight.”

Needless to say I almost hit him.

Then he said, “Where the hell have you been?”

“Fucking bathtub. Where were you?”

“I hid in the extra bedroom until she went back into her room then came out here. What took you so long?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“You were in there forever. You jacking off in there of something?” Whispered Devin, letting out a little laugh.

“Fuck you.” I said, a little too loud.

We heard a door open and headed for the couch again. Just as I hit the end table I remembered it was there. The lamp rocked and I could feel it starting to fall, I tried to reach out and grab it but it fell against the table and shattered. Someone screamed.

My mind spun out of reality and I stood frozen. Rooted to the spot. Devin fucking laughed out loud.

He grabbed my arm and pulled me towards the kitchen. I was about to say something about them being able to see us if we went across the hallway when we heard a shotgun being racked. An

unmistakable sound. We crashed through the kitchen and out the back door as the old man yelled something from the hallway.

Devin was still laughing as we jumped the fence and headed north on the canal bank. My lungs were burning for air as we ran. We got to the next street and jumped the fence, then ran down the street. My lungs screaming for oxygen. When we got a couple streets down we slowed to a walk and made our way to a tweekers house. As we went inside, Devin started laughing even harder, so I hit him.

Reflection & Preparation

Saturday night. The night of wonders, and sometimes wander. I was alone at the park, kicking back with a twelve pack of Coors Light. Legs outstretched in front of me, leaning back against the trunk of a tree. The clouds, racing each other around the sky, the wind in my face, feeling truly alive. Tonight was a night to reflect on the past, on myself. Who I am.

"Who am I?" I ask aloud.

The tree branches shook overhead as if trying to give an answer. But the big oak was without comment. Instead of listening for an answer I began to ponder the question myself. I'm not a bad guy. I do right by my friends, I watch out for them. The question of who I am is a hard one to answer.

I take an outward glance at my self. Standing somewhere around five feet ten inches tall, a hundred an eighty pounds of decent enough build. My hair a light reddish blonde, and blue eyes that seem to sparkle and hold most any ones rapt attention, when I want them to.

Let me try another one. What am I? A person, yes. Astounding! Ha ha. In truth I am alone. Always have been, even when I had others. I always kept mostly to myself, scared to voice feelings of my own. Scared that someone would look at me and think, 'Damn

psycho'. So I bottle it up. keep it locked away. I wear a strange facade though. Because that happy, smiling, funny person that everyone sees is actually me. But I am two different people. Because I am also that person that feels he will forever be alone and wants to be alone, yet I want so badly not to be alone. But alone is what I know. Jeez, where is Dr. Seuss when you need him? so I am alone, but that's okay right now. Maybe later I will find someone. And the killer is that I am attracted to so many women, I can sit and watch someone and think, 'I could really be happy with her'. But as soon as they show interest I fade out. Turn cold and dark. Disappear back into the 'thief of dreams'. Secretly searching for the next enemy I can tear apart.

I live in the shadows of people's lives. Coming out every so often to offer advice and laugh with them, then returning back to my place of loneliness. My place of comfort. Maybe everyone feels this way, I don't know. I hope not though, because I like to see people happy. I try to live my life like a dream, something without consequence. I try to be hollow and empty so that no one will take notice of me. Just another face in the crowd. But it doesn't work so well, people seem to look up to me and I don't know why. Jeez, if they could see through my eyes my own life, they would never bother to speak to me again.

Thoughts of suicide have been with me from the seventh grade. And they have always been there. I guess the main reason why I contemplate suicide is because I am curious to know who would really care. Family wise anyway. I don't particularly want to die or anything, just curious to see who would be in tears, who

would shrug it off as just another day and who might actually miss me. But I hate suicide. It's such a pussy way to go out. Whenever someone talks about it I get pissed off and want to ring their neck, try to beat it out of them and scream at them that it is not an answer. A bit of a hypocrite? Maybe. But that's just me. Part of what I am.

Maybe the question shouldn't be, what are you? but more appropriately, why are you? why do we do the things we do? Why do we think the thoughts we do? Does it make you happy to be what you are? Or would it be more fulfilling if you could say, this is why I am. Kind of like a conclusion and a strong conviction to your life. A real reason to be alive.

"Hey bro, what's shaking?"

I looked up at Devin and shake my head to clear away the thoughts, "Nothing much. Want a beer?"

I didn't even notice him come into the park. I need to pay better attention to things. Self-preservation is something I like to think I have a hold on.

Devin takes a beer, spins the cap through his fingers and snaps it up and out over the basketball court.

"Fuck you." I say. I still haven't learned how to do that cap snap thing.

Devin sits down next to me and we both look up at the clouds, and in silence let our thoughts spin away from us.

We are the closest of friends, and Devin can tell that tonight is one of my reflecting nights. I rarely come out to the park alone. Had it been anyone other than Devin I would have told him or her

to take a hike. But Devin can be so quiet that you forget that he is even there, if it wasn't for the occasional yawn or sigh when he starts to get bored of the silence.

I reel my thoughts back in and ask, "So what's the newest of stories out there?"

"Nothing really bro. You looking for work?"

"Hmmm. I don't know. What kind of work?"

"I'm not really sure." And with that, we both fall back into our own thoughts. Staring up into the night sky. Wondering what's really out there? Not so much in space but in the world. The people. The lost laughs, the heartfelt foreign words of a women in love in some far off place, telling her lover how much he means to her. Thoughts like that. Or maybe I'm just fucking crazy.

Finally I pull myself together and look over at Devin, "Contracting work these days huh?"

"Not exactly, can I get another beer?"

Handing him one, I start to say "As long as you don't flick that fucking ca-" too late. I listen as it zips from his hand and strikes the far side of the basketball court.

"Dick." I couldn't help but grin. Then I slap the bottom of my beer bottle against the top of his and jump up and out of the way.

"Fuck." The foam rushes up over the top of his bottle and he puts it to his mouth, leaning forward trying to keep the foaming beer off his shirt. After a couple seconds he pulls his mouth away and says, "Fuck that." And tosses the bottle away. He straightened up and flexed his chest as I slugged him.

Rules of the game. You can't take your mouth off a 'shotgun' beer least you take one to the chest.

I sank the remaining beer into a sinkhole the kids had dug in the back of the park for whoever should come around. More than likely it would be the younger ones. But we all had faults. Theirs was they were not old enough to buy it themselves. So I contribute. Doing my part. Even when I myself won't be able to legally buy it for another five years.

As we walked through the park I tried to get some bearing on this 'job'.

"Well really I don't know much. just that Steve knows a guy who needs five guys for tomorrow night."

When he said 'tomorrow night', I knew we weren't talking about day work, like helping some guy's pops hangs a chain link fence. This wasn't going to be legal.

"Interesting." Is all I say.

"Actually I was thinking of you, me, Dylan, Keith, and of course Steve."

"No, don't get Keith involved. What about Ryan?"

Devin shrugs. "Yea that works."

So we set out into the streets. Searching for a crew for a job. Though we didn't know if we needed a crew, what a crew was exactly and what we were getting into. But we were ready to jump in headfirst.

The next night we were at Devin's waiting for Steve to call. Devin was a year older than me, and completely my opposite when it came down to it. he stood a couple inches shorter than I, with a

small more solid frame and wore his hair so short; water would probably run right off of it if applied. He also had hair that caught people's attention because it was so light it was almost white.

When the phone rang, before Devin could get to it I snatched it up. "Baby boomers labor union." I say.

"Ready to roll?" Asks Steve.

"Yep."

"Cool. See you in ten."

And the line went dead, we grabbed our jackets. I had a dark maroon jacket and Devin a navy blue. These colors are just as good as black when you are doing illegal things. And no one is likely to spot you unless they throw a light directly on you. even then you look less suspicious wearing something other than black.

We step out into Devin's front lawn and shoot the proverbial shit as we wait.

Meetings

Thirty-eight minutes later Steve pulls up with his eighty something Camaro. We jog over and pile in on top of Ryan, Dylan, and two other guys we knew from the neighborhood.

Ten minutes later we drop the two guys off at a corner and are off to places unknown.

"Ok, so here is the deal," says Steve, "each of you will get a clean thou. One night's work. Maybe five, six hours. Only about forty minutes of work. We are hired muscle."

Devin flexed his back arm muscles. Ryan looked like the whole thing was coming as a surprise, while Dylan could see that he wouldn't get a shot at breaking into the infamous Ford Bronco that he was still trying to break into. He slumped back against the seat, disappointed. Clearly. I had to grin, my brothers, and my family. My life. I knew them like books.

"Who we fucking up?" Asks Devin.

"I don't know. It didn't sound like that kind of thing. More like movie muscle. We just stand around and look mean." Answered Steve.

I couldn't help myself and started laughing.

"What?" asked Steve and Devin.

"What? what?!" I was amazed, "Look at us man, a sixteen, two seventeen's, and an eighteen year old. Who we supposed to scare away? Prom dates?"

Steve pulled us into a driveway and killed the engine. Opening his door he said, "It doesn't matter." And climbed out of the car.

"Doesn't matter?" I muttered mostly to myself, how can it not matter?

When we came to the front door I could see a camera tucked behind the window glass, the glass caged behind steel bars.

Oh shit I thought as we waited for someone to disengage god only knows how many locks before the door swung open.

I was thinking some hotshot pimp looking fucker and what I got instead was an absolutely stunning five foot five brunette beauty queen. She wore a tight clingy blouse and running shorts that covered her backside with maybe a millimeter or two to spare. It was clear that she wore no bra and had a nipple ring. Nipples about the size of silver dollars and oh god I got to quit staring at her.

Steve exchanged words with her and she pointed down the hall and said something, then Ryan pushed me from behind and I realized we were supposed to be moving down the hall. I tore my eyes away from the brunette and checked out the house. The hallway opened up into a living room and it was clear that this lady had money. A big screen TV, VCR, huge stereo system, giant saltwater aquarium, leather couches, and huge jars full off beer bottle caps across the fireplace mantel.

I turned towards the kitchen when my mind caught up to my ass and spun me back around to the collection of beer bottle caps. I glanced at our leading lady and she didn't seem like the type who would throw huge parties and collect all the beer bottle caps. Then I spotted some boots at the far end of the couch, men's boots, and about six sizes to big for princess porcelain.

Just when I was about to fall in love again… damn.

We walked out a door in the kitchen and into what used to be a garage but was now a tattoo studio. Nicely done with cabinets along one side, a sink, mirror, and checkered ceiling and floor. Flash art was pinned to almost every exposed chunk of wall and cabinet and sitting in his own tattoo chair was the man of the house, the lover of the girl. I hated him already.

Jason, as it turned out was twenty-six years old, a year older than our own Steve, and was for all likes and dislikes a hell of a nice guy. We talked tattoos and I have to admit, I liked this guy.

We were talking about everything except the night ahead and in came my ex goddess. Her name was Saurian. Even her name was beautiful. Nineteen years old and could move the, Ah hell fuck it. never mind. I stared at the floor as she offered us each a beer, then brought my eyes up and saw that she had brown eyes, so deep and dark… I took the beer from her hand and let my fingers slide against hers as she slowly pulled away, giving me a wink that only I could see. My blood pressure soured and my mind spun around a few times. I found out later that her name actually means a group of lizards. Go figure. Parents must have been hippies with a pro Darwin complex.

Children & Guns

At ten o'clock, we left the tattoo studio and went inside the house. The couches sat at right angles to each other and in front of them sat a table made of wood. I know, I know, a lot of tables are made of wood, but this one was like a tree trunk that someone had lacquered the hell out of and polished clean.

Jason excused himself and headed down the hall. A minute later he came back with a military sized duffel bag that rattled a little as he set it on the table.

We all sat forward and watched as he unzipped the bag and dumped out a small munitions depot upon the table. Assault rifles of various makes, pistols of various caliber. shortened shotguns with pistol grips. I was looking over them when I saw Ryan pick up an AR 70 assault rifle. I slapped his face and he dropped it.

"You don't deserve this." I said and picked it up.

"You know guns?" Asked Jason with skepticism in his voice.

I looked up at him, grinned and said, "AR- 70. 5.56mm caliber, six hundred and fifty rounds per minute, four hundred and forty yards effective. 3118 feet per second muzzle velocity. You want the weight too?

His eyes lit up with interest and he asked, "You know the fucking weight?"

I smiled, “Supposed to be eight and three quarters of a pound but this baby is dirty as hell.”

“Holy shit! That’s amazing. I don’t know how much it weighs but everything else you said was right on the money. Shit” He smiled and pointed down at another rifle.

“AKM assault rifle.” I said.

“Nope, that’s the AK-47, figured you would have known that one.” A little luster ran out of his eyes.

I look at him and smile again, I knew better. I pointed to the bolt. “The only major difference in a 47 and AKM is that the AKM’s bolt locks into a sleeve and not directly into the barrel itself.”

“No shit?”

“Yep.” I know when I know my shit.

I glanced at the rest of the guys as I read from memory the specs of the AKM. Steve looked shocked to all shit, Ryan and Dylan both looked amazed, and Devin just smiled, though he didn’t know that I knew anything about guns. I would have told him but he never asked. I figured he would grill me about it later.

“Come back here. I got something I want to show you.” Said Jason as he stood up and headed for the hall. I shrugged and stood, took my glorious time stretching and then followed him back into his bedroom.

“Close the door.” He said, so I did.

He reached under his bed and pulled out a bundle of curtains. Laying the bundle on the bed he opened it up and I saw staring up at me was a Dragunov.

Oh where to begin with this one? It's a sniper rifle. Capable of hitting a man sized target at 330 yards ninety percent of the time. And we aren't talking about the best of shooters testing these things. They are effective at 880 yards. They have cut outs to reduce weight. Actually weight is only nine and a half pounds. They are single shot weapons but they use a short stroke piston to reduce the kick back of the shot (the lift of the scope sights when you shoot), making it easier to keep your eye on the target. It holds ten shells. The only real set back on this baby is the fact that it is forty-eight inches long. But still a nice gun.

Jason looked up at me, "You want it?"

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"what's the price?" I asked.

"Talk to you later about that. You like subs?"

"Roast beef personally."

Jason smiled, "No, I mean submachine guns?"

"Don't know."

"Taste these?" he said and pulled out a metal case and set it on the bed. Inside were two Heckler & Koch MP5's. All of a sudden I was falling in love for a second time in one night.

"Nice." I said as I looked over them and noticed the awkward cocking handle. It was located on the left side, not the right. Cool. I knew a little about these guns but not much and I let Jason fill me in on the details.

"Ok you got this here MP5 right?" He asked. I felt like saying something smart-ass but I didn't. I nodded and he continued;

fires 9mm Parabellum ammunition, effective at 220 yards, 800 round cyclic rate (rounds per minute), and takes either a fifteen or thirty round magazine. Muzzle velocity of 1313 feet per second, and a weight of five and a half pounds.

"Cool." I said when it was clear that Jason was done talking.

"Why don't you take one of these tonight?"

"Why don't I indeed?" I said and slipped one into my grubby hands. SWEET! I failed to ask him why I would need it, so I said, "About tonight…

He cut me off, "Come on I'll fill you all in. Grab that bag for me?" he said as he pointed to the top of a nightstand. I grabbed it and followed him out of the room, the MP5 hanging at my side, a smile on my face, and a light in the back of my eyes. The unknowing knowledge that tonight the demon may have time to come out and play for a while. My smile widened as we stepped into the living room.

Walking back into the living room, Steve and Ryan both sat up when they saw what I had hanging from my right side. As if it wasn't any big deal I just shrugged my shoulders and said, "HK MP5."

"Sweet," is all Devin said, trying to stay cool.

"Holy shit!" is what stumbled out of Dylan's mouth as he shot to his feet.

"Only if the angles piss us off." I said as I took a casual seat next to Devin. We both grinned at each other like a couple of kids in a candy factory.

I gave Jason the bag I had grabbed off the nightstand in the bedroom and he dumped the contents out on the table.

One hundred dollar bills wrapped in bundles with little straps on them that said 'ten thousand. United States of America' I felt a little dizzy as I counted that there were fifteen bundles on the table. I couldn't multiply a damn thing so I looked at Devin only to see him staring wide eyes at the table. We were cool, but not that cool. Then I heard someone say, "a hundred fifty thousand dollars."

Jason turned to the voice and I noticed it was Dylan, "You're with me tonight."

Dylan just nodded and I felt a little left out. What was with all the bedroom buddy shit if I wasn't the man? It didn't matter.

Devin turned to me and said, "We're out." And stood.

"Uh, no." Is all I could say.

"Fuck that, we're done. Jason, good to meet you, thanks for the conversation but we're not down for this," Devin turned to me, "come on.."

I stared deep into Devin's eyes and said, "No."

Steve was still staring straight at the money not even aware of what was going on around him. I looked at Ryan and his eyes said he was down. Dylan was looking around confused, he knew that when Devin said no to something, that something was seriously fucked up. he looked at me and I just shrugged.

"You know what he wants us to do tonight?" Devin asks me.

"No and neither do you."

Devin looked over at Jason, "What's the deal?"

"If you're out, then see you later, if you're in then I'll explain."

Devin looked around the room once, then down at me. He mumbled "Fuck." Then sat down on the couch and reached for a pistol grip shotgun. Picking up a loose twelve-gauge shell he rolled it through his fingers as he listened to what Jason has to say.

Jason looked around the room. "Anyone doesn't want to be a part of this thing, then leave now."

Dylan stood up and then sat down, he looked at me and I said, "It's cool." And he seemed to relax a little. Devin next to me just sighed as if to mock, 'Yea right.'

Jason took a seat in a chair across from the two couches and said, "I have to make a purchase tonight. A purchase of what, you don't need to know. I'll want one guy going in with me while the rest of you wait out at the car." He looked over and pointed, "What's your name?"

"Dylan."

"Okay Dylan, you will go in with me, it shouldn't take any more than thirty minutes from door to door. They will want to test the money and bullshit before the exchange to check us out and make sure we aren't too nervous. Can you handle that?"

"Sure."

"Good. Now the rest of you will be at the car, not in the car but at the car. Stand around it in case something should happen. Remember, not in the car. You will only be all bundle fucked in the car." Jason looked at Devin and asked, "Problem?"

I thought, 'Oh shit' as Devin leaned forward a little and said, "Yea there is a problem, you act as if this isn't your first time doing something like this even though it is, and you try to hide the fact that you don't know what will happen. Can I ask you something? Don't bother nodding your head I'm going to ask you anyway. Who are you… correction, who are we dealing with here?"

"You don't need to know." Replied Jason a little too casually.

Devin pushed the twelve-gauge shell into the shotgun and pumped it, then leveled it directly at Jason. "Who?"

"You going to shoot me huh? Devin was it? Okay Devin listen, we are going to buy some drugs from some guys who claim to be Mexican drug lords or warlords or some shit. Same difference. Happy now?"

Devin lowered the gun and studied Jason for a second before replying, "Drug lords and War lords are two completely different groups. One wants power and money, the other just wants money. Who set up the drop?"

Jason with a little light flickering behind his eyes that said he was catching on real quick offered an answer with no coaxing, "They did."

"And what time did they set for the drop?"

"Two o'clock."

Devin glanced at his watch and said, "It's eleven forty right now, let's go."

"But we still have…" Jason tried the math in his head and stumbled, now I saw why he chose Dylan earlier because he was the

first to add the total of the money and therefore probably the smartest one of us all.

"We have barely enough time to set up before they do, if they haven't already."

We all stood up and started sorting through the guns again. Devin hung on to the shotgun and also picked up a Jericho 941-9mm pistol. Jason opened up a couple of cupboards in the entertainment system and we noticed they were lined up with boxes of ammunition. "If you need help just yell." And he disappeared back into his bedroom.

Devin went to the entertainment center and started asking what we needed. I snatched up a Desert Eagle .44 Magnum and called out to him that I needed the shells for it. he grabbed a box and tossed it over.

I was loading the magazine, which holds nine when Ryan asked me what kind of bullets the gun he found took.

I looked up and saw that he was holding a Colt MkIV Series 80. "Either thirty eight supers or forty five ACP. Point it at me."

"But I thought you shouldn't point a gun-"

"Shut up and point it at me just doesn't pull the trigger."

So he did and I called out to Devin, "Ryan needs forty five's."

Ryan looked at me and said, "Neat." Then caught the box Devin threw him and started looking for a way to eject the clip.

"Umm."

I looked up at Ryan and said, "See the lever on the left side of the butt behind the trigger?"

"Oh. Yea."

"Push the lever, the clip should slide out, and then pull the slide back until it locks. Once you slam a clip home just hit the slide release right there on the side and it will slide home ready to shoot."

Ryan smiled, "Neat."

I looked around at all of us trying to stick guns in our pants and stuff and yelled out, "Yo Jason, you got any holsters?"

Dylan looked over at me and asked with a smile, "Like cowboys back in the day?"

I didn't smile but instead realized that we were all just kids. Sure some of us had more experience in life than others but Jesus Christ we were just fucking kids.

Jason came out of the back room with a box and dropped it on the floor next to the table. I opened it and went rampaging through the holsters. Most of them were shoulder holsters, which were good, I tossed one to Devin. I found a good one that held two guns and four clips and tossed it on the couch. When Ryan reached for it I said, "No, not for you." and tossed him a single saddle, which is basically a shoulder holster with no counter balance for spare clips on the opposite side.

Which reminded me, "Jason? Got any spare magazines?"

His head popped out from around the corner of the hallway and he said, "Jesus man. It's gonna be cool."

"Spare mags is what I asked for, not a prayer to the almighty."

"Uhh yea, bottom drawer in the kitchen by the trash can."

It never struck me how completely bizarre it was to be in a house that had so many guns and stuff in it. I went to the kitchen and opened the drawer. “What the fuck?” I asked as I looked down and saw that someone had put masking tape on the magazines with writing to match them up with the pistols quicker. I yanked the drawer out and went back to the living room, dropping the drawer on the couch.

“Find some spare clips and load them. And be sure to pull the fucking tape off or else it could jam up and not release right.”

“Devin?” I looked over as he was struggling with the holster, trying to get it centered.

“Yea?”

“I need a shit load of nine millimeters for this HK.”

“Hang on.”

As I waited I dug through some of the guns, I noticed one I liked as a secondary back up gun, controllable and easy to shoot. A Beretta Model 84 in .380 auto, and called to Devin, “And some three eighty rounds.”

“Okay fuck, hold on a second.”

He had finally gotten the holster right and was loading his nine-millimeter into it.

I looked over at Steve and noticed he was no fool with guns, at twenty-five years old he was by far older than the rest of us and showed it. he had sandy blonde hair that hung around his shoulders, gray eyes and a beak of a nose. His lips were so thin as to almost be nonexistent. He had found two SIG P220 firing nine-millimeter rounds, which most call SIG Sauer because of the

writing on the left forward area of the slide. Very nice guns. He had on a double-breasted holster to carry them both and when I looked down at the couch I noticed the one I threw there earlier was gone.

"Dick." I said as he looked up at me and smiled.

I dug through the remaining holsters and found another one like Steve's and put it on, before I loaded it up with guns and ammo. It took me maybe a minute and a half.

Dylan was having problems finding a gun. I reached down and picked up the AR 70 that I had slapped Ryan for holding earlier and offered it to him.

"Oh man I don't know." He said, fear and excitement in his eyes.

"Fuck that, that's mine." Said Ryan as he snatched it from my hands.

I was about to object when Devin said, "Yea, if Dylan is going in with Jason he needs a pistol not an assault rifle bro. And we need the heavy equipment outside when things go bad."

"When things go bad?" asked Dylan.

"Yep, what's that thing shoot again?" asked Devin as he turned back towards the entertainment center.

"Five point fifty six, and yoo-hoo honey, I'm still waiting on my order of nines and three eighties."

"Fuck you. what are these?" asked Devin as he pulled a box from the cabinet.

I walked over to take a look and shrugged.

"Beats me. They're the right ones for Dylan though."

Ryan spoke up, “Dylan my ass, I am taking this bad boy with me.” He lifted the AR 70 so we could see.

“Yea, yea, who ever.”

Devin tossed him the shells as I retrieved my own bullets from the cabinet, taking stock of all the boxes of ammo Jason had stored here. There was a lot.

I loaded up my clips and pistols then as I was shoving shells into the HK magazine Jason came out of the bedroom and threw me a ‘clip hip’ that had three thirty round clips attached to it for the HK. I slung it around my waist and tightened it, and went to get some more ammo for the clips.

Devin came around the table to help, and Steve helped Dylan find a gun. They settled on a Browning BDM 9mm, which holds fifteen in the magazine. He showed Dylan how to work the safety, telling him to remember the phrase, “Down for Destruction” which meant that when the safety is in the down position it is ready to fire. He showed him how to load and reload it and then helped him into a holster.

As we were all straightening up and checking our equipment Jason came out of the bedroom with another duffel bag and dropped it on the floor. He walked over to the table and rummaged through the guns until he had the fifteen packs of hundred dollar bills that got buried under all the guns.

It shocked me again to see it, and shocked me more to realize I had forgotten all about the money.

He took one bundle and tossed it to Steve, “That’s two thousand each, when we are done here, I’ll double it.”

With that we headed out the back door, into the alley behind his house. He unlocked the doors to a new Ford Expedition and we all climbed inside. A truck full of hard ass mother fuckers, loaded up and ready to roll.

I looked up towards Jason and said, “Better get some killer tattoos for this shit too.” I heard a couple of nervous laughs and then we all put our seat belts on and drove out of the alley into the street.

Tension

As we pulled out of the alley I checked my watch, twelve-thirty three. We had a little under an hour and a half to check out the drop spot.

We drove down into the old abandoned warehouse area of the city and Jason shut off his lights as we slipped in between two old rusted warehouses. Most of the windows were shattered except for a few that only had holes in them. a lot of graffiti was splashed across the buildings. No working streetlights and no electricity doused us in darkness as we all climbed out of the truck.

"Where are they supposed to be?" Devin asked as he turned towards Jason.

"Building 225, it's up the street a little, I found it yesterday so we wouldn't be wandering around all night."

"Okay, Tristan you come with us and you three stay here."

Ryan started to object but Devin cut him off and told him that we might be back sooner than we thought.

As I checked my HK and Devin chambered a round into the shotgun, Jason started to get a little nervous.

"What are you thinking? You think they might already be here?"

Devin cast a glance at Jason and said, "I hope not."

From the back shadows of the Ford I heard Steve start to let out a nervous laugh but then cover it up as if he were just coughing.

We made our way quietly to the building and Devin took a quick glimpse inside, and then whispered for me to go around and check the back. Glancing around I took in all that I could, a car that looked to have been stripped and then lit on fire a long time ago sat to one side of the street, no new vehicles were in sight. I honestly didn't think that the Mexicans would be here this early but I kept my eyes peeled anyway.

At the back of the building I found a row or cargo bays, four to be exact, two of them were closed but the other two stood open to the elements. I eased over to the first open one and checking to make sure I wasn't backlit by anything I glanced inside. Judging by the looks of things I would guess this was an old cotton warehouse. It had bail lofts on all sides and rows and rows of sprinklers running every which way across the ceiling. In the summer they have to keep the cotton cool with water from the sprinklers otherwise they might spontaneously combust.

It was a fairly open building, empty except for a small office. I had a look inside the office before tapping on the wall beside the door in the front to let Devin know all was well.

"Looks like a cotton warehouse." I told Devin as he had a look inside the office.

"Yea probably," then to Jason, "What's the deal?"

Jason took a questioning step back, "What do you mean?"

"I mean what is it that's going down in here in about an hour?"

"I'm just gonna buy some stuff man, shit. What?"

"No, I mean what's the deal? Are you supposed to come inside? Stay outside? What's the deal?"

"Oh, I don't know. They just said meet them here." Answered Jason.

"Shit, too bad we don't have radios." Said Devin as he glanced around.

"Hey bro, we aint staying by no car tonight are we?" I ask Devin as I glance outside to make sure we were still alone.

"Nah, fuck that. We cover our asses, plain and simple."

Jason holds his hands out, motioning for us to calm down, "They said if I bring anyone to have them wait by the car."

Devin and I exchange a quick smile and I tell Jason, "That is exactly why we won't be there."

"Oh."

"We better get back to the guys before they start flipping out." I say to Devin.

Walking back to Jason's truck I fall back behind a little, and catch Devin's arm and pull him back out of earshot from Jason. "Winds feel funny tonight."

Devin just looks at me with knowing eyes and says, "Shouldn't have come."

It was too late for that now though, we were committed to whatever should befall us here tonight.

We told them what we had seen and that we were so far alone out here and Dylan seemed to relax a little with the news. The plan was simple enough. Don't fuck up, don't get shot, don't piss anybody off, and don't stray away from cover if things go bad.

We had talked about spreading Devin, Ryan and myself out around the building itself but Jason almost had a coronary until I promised to stay with the truck, at least then it would look feasible that we were playing by their rules. Devin and Steve would cover the front of the warehouse from the building across the street. If things went bad, it wouldn't take them but a few seconds to clear the street and be within fight distance. Ryan with the AR-70 would be ducked down behind the burnt car a little down the road, so that if things did go bad he could lay down cover fire while the rest of us ran like crazy.

Ryan was complaining because he would be pretty much right out in the open if someone should take more than a glance in his direction. He had a legitimate cause for concern, so Devin and him ran over to the car to see if he could find a way to get into the warehouse the car was closest to. He could hide and then come out once everyone was inside or the shooting started.

Jason was looking more nervous with each passing minute and I had to tell him that it was cool, we had him covered. He asked if we had ever done anything like this before and I just smiled and lied, "Yep, a couple times."

I checked my watch, 1:27am

I let out a quick whistle and saw Devin stick his head out of a doorway. “They here?” he called.

“No! but it’s about time, counting thirty.” I answered.

“We’ll be right there.” And he ducked back into the warehouse.

As Devin and Ryan came trotting back up the street I looked at Dylan who hadn’t said more than two words since we got here, “You cool?”

“Yea, I’m fine.”

I have to admit, Dylan looked pretty damn good, and I had him hold his hands out and they weren’t shaking all that bad.

“Check guns, make sure all safeties are off, and rounds chambered.” I said.

Everyone went through the ritual of checking each gun and then checking it again to make sure.

I started to ask Jason if he brought a gun when we heard the sound of a car engine not far off.

Coming Apart

Devin pushed away from the wall he was leaning against and with Steve in tow they ran across the street to the warehouse where they were to set up and wait.

Ryan took off down the street to his hiding place and I told Jason and Dylan to go get in the truck and drive it right on up to where I was standing next to the drop spot warehouse. As they pulled up next to me I could hear the car that was somewhere not yet known kill its engine.

As Jason and Dylan got out of the truck I popped open the back passenger side door and asked if there was anyway to turn off the overhead reading light. When Jason said he wasn't sure I did the only thing I could think of.

"What the fuck?!" Yelled Jason when I reached in and shattered the dome light.

"Quiet." I told him and placed the HK on the floor and pulled the floor mat over it.

I started the zipper on my jacket and pulled it up enough to conceal the HK 'Hip Clip' that I was wearing around my waist. But not high enough to slow me down from being able to get to the two pistols.

A ways off, we heard a car door slam and then someone getting chewed out in muffled Spanish.

"Here we go." I said to no one in particular. Jason looked over at me and I could tell he was nervous, almost beyond reason, his hands were shaking so bad I knew for sure he would call it off and tell us all to get in the truck.

But it didn't happen. Instead three cars pulled into the street and started our way, headlights off, parking lights on; coming from the opposite direction we heard the car come from earlier. This caused a little worry and I wondered if any of the other guys could tell.

Jason said, "Oh shit," under his breath.

"Stay cool." I answered back, but my mind was saying the same thing, oh shit indeed.

The montage arrived and stopped directly in front of the warehouse. Two men jumped out of the second car and ran to the warehouse, one guy keeping an eye on us as we stood around the Ford.

"Stay casual, stay loose. Damn, wish I had a cigarette."

Dylan looked at me with a curious expression, "Thought you didn't smoke."

"I don't, but in the movies the mean bastards always smoke a cigarette before the fight."

"Oh god." Whined Jason.

I let out a little laugh then swatted lightly at Jason's arm, "Its gonna be cool bro."

The two men came out of the warehouse and one started pulling on a chain that raises the big metal roll up door. The first car pulled in and they closed the door behind it, the other two cars sat motionless, idling in the middle of the street.

A third man stepped out of the second car and walked towards us, a pistol held down at his side. As he advanced I slid my hand in my jacket and unsnapped the catch on the holster and then pulled the forty-four out and held it at my side. Fuck this intimidation bullshit.

The man advanced cautiously, keeping a good bead on us but looking for others with care. He never raised the pistol.

"Sgt. Belkin?" He asked.

Jason took a step forward, "Here."

What's this shit? Sgt. My ass. What the fuck did this little bastard get himself into? I wanted to slap Jason just for good measure but held back. Instead I watched as four men emerged from the third vehicle and the driver of the second car all filed into the warehouse by way of the door beside the big roll up one.

"Please collect your things and follow me senior." The man didn't turn his back and head back, instead he waited while Jason grabbed two duffel bags from the back of the Ford, handed one to Dylan and slung the other over his shoulder, and then they all filed away. The man looked back casually as he led them away, trying to figure me out no doubt.

When Jason and Dylan disappeared into the warehouse I glanced at my watch, 1:56am. I glanced around and couldn't see any sign of Ryan, Devin or Steve, but I didn't look very hard either,

for all I knew there could be more men in the cars or nearby. I glanced down the street at where we heard the car earlier and wondered who was out there and where they were. No telling now. We should have brought one or two more to walk the perimeter. Too late now.

Two men, I couldn't tell if they were the same two from before came out of the warehouse and stood next to the door, one of them lit a cigarette.

Bastard, I thought.

I walked around to the front of the Ford and jumped up and planted my ass on the hood, the two men looked up at the noise then went back to talking amongst themselves. I held the .44 in my right hand, looked up at the two guys and for the hell of it, I slipped the clip out quietly then as quietly as I could I ejected the one round in the chamber, pressed it back into the clip. Then almost laughed as I slid off the hood, landed as loud as possible on the ground, slammed the clip into the gun and chambered a round noisily.

The two men jerked and jumped, the cigarette falling from the lips of one as they grabbed frantic for their guns, cocked them and pointed them at me. I raised my empty left hand and waved. One of them flipped me off.

I knew then that Devin couldn't see me for he would no doubt be laughing his ass off at that one.

I wished I could see what the hell was going on in there. Patience isn't one of my best virtues. I walked around a little, staying

close to the Ford but letting my mind wander. I glanced at my watch a few times. Time seemed to be dripping by.

Then I heard someone yell and then a gunshot followed by a louder gunshot and more screaming.

Candle Light & Chaos

I figured the gunshots came from the warehouse so I threw myself at the Ford as two bullets split the air beside me followed by two thunderous booms. I snatched the HK off the floor and rolled back behind the truck. Instead of taking a chance and sticking my head out from behind the Ford I dropped flat and looked under it. two pairs of legs at the front of the warehouse were running across the street. Towards Steve and Devin's position.

Oh shit!

I rolled from behind the Ford and came to a stop in a prone position, the HK in my left hand, the .44 in my right. I needed both hands to make these shots count so I let the HK fall from my grasp and clutched at the Desert Eagle with both hands. Leading the first man I squeezed down on the trigger and thunder rocked the street as dust rose into the air in front of me and the man pitched to his side where he landed with a thud, unmoving.

The second guy squeezed off two shots at me but they both went wide and behind. I rolled twice then came up in a crouch, took aim and watched as the man was flung back into the air and landed flat on his back, head slamming the street. I glanced over and saw Devin emerge from the warehouse and take a shot at someone across the street. I rolled for good measure and snatched

the HK off the ground as I righted myself and ran towards Devin. Steve came out next to Devin and started firing as I ran behind them and into the warehouse. I turned around as fast as I could and slid the Desert Eagle back into the holster, gripped the HK in both hands and told Devin to watch out.

Devin ducked back into the warehouse and I popped up next to Steve. I could see muzzle flashes coming from inside the door over there but I couldn't see who was shooting. Bullets were slamming into the metal roll up door on our side and all around the door so I grabbed Steve and pulled him back with me as we ducked back inside.

"What the fuck happened?" I asked Devin.

"Fucking bastard came right in on us. Right on top of us. I don't know, he fired and I drilled him."

"Shit."

I had no idea where Dylan and Jason were, I just knew that they were over there in that other warehouse. I couldn't risk opening up with the HK for fear of hitting them. And Ryan, where the fuck was Ryan?

Shots cracked and spun off the door frame and came thumping into the warehouse, some smacking at the air, some whizzing by untouched where they slammed pretty good into the opposite wall, kicking out chips and chunks of plaster.

"Any other way out of this mouse trap?" I asked Steve.

"Don't know, didn't check."

"Well shit. You ready to go?" I asked them both, nodding towards their guns.

They both nodded and we started jogging our way down the inside of the warehouse along the wall. Every fifteen feet or so there was a window about eight feet off the ground, no good to us. At the far end we came to a door, a door with a whole cut out of it and a chain securing it, closed, locked, and fucked.

"Look out." Said Devin as he leveled his shotgun at it and I tried to scream out a warning but he pulled the trigger and sparks flew. Something hot sunk itself deep into my cheek and I thought about knocking the shit out of Devin.

"Dick. Fucking doors metal asshole!" Screamed Steve as he hopped up and down on his left leg, clutching at his right shin, but unable to do any good with pistols in his hands.

Devin just grinned, shrugged his shoulders then pulled the chain off the door.

Still a dickheaded thing to do.

"Fuck you." I said from the corner of my mouth as I went by Devin and sprinted outside. I cast a glance to the left where the door leading to the other warehouse was and saw one guy duck around and squeeze off two shots at us. I opened up with the HK and he jumped back real quick, no doubt thanking the holy mother he didn't get caught slipping.

Devin came out next, followed closely by Steve who tapped Devin on the shoulder and told him to follow me when he started to take off the other way. I sprinted down the side of the warehouse where the deal was going down wondering to myself who the hell they could be shooting at in there before I realized Dylan and Jason

where still in there. Why hadn't they run like hell out the back? No time to think.

I came to the back corner of the building and risked a quick glance down the backside. Nobody there and no moving shadows, I ran out behind the warehouse and made my way to an old what looked like an old crane of some sort. Its metal body was rusted and spray-painted but the metal would give me some protection. Or so I hoped.

When I got to the crane and looked back at the warehouse and I could see in one of the big roll up doors. Illuminated by the headlights of the car inside, I could make out three people at the front of the warehouse, shooting at the warehouse across the street where Devin and Steve had been, where all three of us were only about a minute ago. They must have just been shooting for the hell of it because I knew they had no targets.

From the corner of my eye I saw Devin take off down the side of the building, running full out for the big door. I wanted to shout for him to go back but that would have blown our cover, besides it was only a matter of time before the guy that took a shot at me when I ran out of the warehouse told his friends we weren't over there anymore. Instead of waiting around to see what would happen I grabbed a piece of pipe and took off running towards the side of the door, hoping to intercept Devin before he bulldozed his way in there and got himself killed.

I was in step with Devin and he looked over at me, something registered in his mind and he eased up, coming to a stop just short of the door as I made it to him.

"What are we-" Devin started but a scream caught our attention as a man jumped out from behind the other side of the door and started to raise his gun. His eyes dancing wildly as he looked from me to Devin. Knowing I had no time, I swung the piece of pipe and it caught the guy square on the side of the head. With a dull ring and a stinging jolt I dropped the pipe and pulled Devin down to a crouch as slugs punched divots in the metal wall over head and all around us. I started to reach out and touch one of the little mounds of metal when Devin slapped my hand down.

"If a bullet hits it the same time, its bye bye finger."

"Oh. Yea." I pulled my hand back and started to ease my way back away from the door when Steve came rushing out from behind us and came around and stood right in the open doorway, arms extended and pistols firing. The sight was unbelievable. I stared transfixed as Steve with his hair swishing around his face, his lips pulled back from his teeth, sighted down on whomever he could. His forearms where quivering with the force of each shot, the pistols slides kicking back and snapping smoking shells out into the night where they landed not far from my feet.

Inspired to take this to our deaths or beyond I stood and eased my way out next to Steve, holding the trigger of the HK down as I did so. The bullets came out with a ferocious slap-snap-crack sound as they dug into whatever was in their way. I caught one guy with about five rounds that ripped him from thigh to shoulder in a blink of an eye. More bullets punched holes in the hood of the car and spit angrily through the windshield. Then I clicked dry and reached for a new clip.

Devin came up beside me, letting out a roar from the shotgun, pumping and letting go again. The roar was loud and the bite was meaner. He caught one guy with a side shot and I watched as the skin from the guy's neck and shoulder were shredded with buckshot. He pitched in a twirl to the ground screaming.

Steve was just finishing reloading and he started firing shots as he made his way to the other side of the door.

I slammed a clip in and chambered a round then opened up on a guy who got caught coming out from behind one of the cotton bins. The 9mm slugs punched fast into his chest, sending him backward without his feet touching the ground.

Running after Steve I grabbed Devin's arm. We followed Steve to the other side of the door and ducked down, keeping our eyes on the door.

"I didn't see Dylan. Did you see Dylan?" Steve asked.

"No bro, I didn't. I think they might have executed them the moment they heard shots."

"No way. No. Their in there."

"Let's go check it out from the side." Said Devin, pointing towards the backside of the warehouse.

I nodded and we waited for Devin to finish loading shells in the shotgun that done the three of us ran in a crouch towards the side, Devin glancing behind us every couple of seconds.

We rounded the corner with Steve in the lead and Devin bringing up the rear. When we got to the front of the building I heard Steve say, "Uh oh."

"What?" I didn't bother to wait for an answer and pushed out past Steve as I glanced down the front of the warehouse and saw Dylan and what I thought was Jason running like a couple guys with their asses on fire towards us.

Bullets smacked against the side of the warehouse and we all flattened ourselves to the ground as we looked down the street to see who was shooting at us.

"Hey dickhead! RYAN? IT'S US MOTHERFUCKER!" Yelled Devin.

He quit shooting at us and we looked back towards Dylan who went running past us, and on down the street…

What the fuck?

Jason was right behind him but said something that sounded like, "ser-mo bon bon."

"What?!" I asked catching Jason's arm when he tried running by us.

Out of breath, with huge eyes he motioned for us to follow Dylan then finally said, "There's a bomb, c4, I set it to go off."

Well that sure as shit got our attention and we were all off and running towards Ryan and Dylan. I noticed some bullets whistling past us but didn't pay much attention to them, Ryan was shooting back but knowing his accuracy with trying to plug us, I didn't think the other guy had much to worry about.

As we approached the car Ryan was standing behind, a pulse beat once through the night and I watched as for a split second we had shadows cast in front of us. Then the buildings all lit

up like a flash from a big camera and the explosion sent everything tumbling into the air.

I looked back and was shocked not to see a huge fireball, and then I remembered why. C4 doesn't exactly ignite things in flames when it blows. It is a high explosive and uses gas and air as its destructive power. The warehouse was pretty much gone and I could see a car lying on its side, and the two cars in the street covered in debris and dust, their windows all imploded. Then I caught a glimpse of Jason's truck and it seemed to be in the same shape.

Place of Death

The shooting had stopped as soon as the warehouse exploded and we all stared at it in awe. Debris was still falling from some far off place above us, some hurling towards earth like comets, and some just floating on the breeze. I grabbed Jason by his arm, spun him around to face me and asked, “What the fuck? How?”

“I had some C4 that they said they might be interested in. When you guys started shooting I grabbed some things, placed them in a cotton bin and set the C4 and threw it to the far side of the warehouse as Dylan and I ran for the door. Those guys were so interested in you fuckers that they didn’t even seem to pay any attention to us.” Explained Jason.

Something snapped through the night and Ryan cried out and fell to the ground. My natural instinct was to hit the dirt and as I did I looked left and saw Ryan screaming and holding his stomach while he curled up into a ball on the ground.

“Where did that come from?” Asked Devin.

“I didn’t see it.” Said Steve, still standing but looking behind us down the street. Another shot split the air and slammed into the pavement six feet behind Steve.

“Get down mother fucker!” Yelled Devin.

Steve dropped to his knees, but even as he did another shot whistled through the air slamming him backwards to the ground. I scrambled to Steve and saw that the shot had taken him in the right shoulder. I dropped the HK and put pressure on the wound, Steve cried out in pain but I had to keep my hands on him.

"Top of that building." Said Devin, pointing three buildings down.

"I see him, come here and put some pressure on this." I said.

Devin crawled over and we pulled Steve back behind the car, where Jason had already taken cover. I wiped my hands off on my pants as best I could then snatched Ryan's AR 70 and braced my left elbow on the trunk of the car, took aim and squeezed off a shot.

"Did you get him?" Asked Devin.

"I don't think so, too hard to fucking see, I think he went to ground."

Before anyone could grab me I sprang to my feet and took off running down the street, staying close to the buildings but watching for any movement on the streets. A good sniper won't sit in one place for too long and I was counting on this fucker being above average. When I got to the side of his building I stopped for a split second and listened. Nothing. I made my way quickly but silently down the side of the building to the back. The door was gone so I stepped inside and crouched down just inside the doorway.

Nothing moved inside the building and I waited a few minutes for my eyes to adjust to the darkness. I started towards the stairs, stopping every five or so paces to listen. Most amateurs make the mistake of moving too much and not listening to their surroundings.

Come out, come out, wherever you are… Asshole.

The stairs had a three and a half foot railing that was solid, so this bastard could be ducked down just on the other side for all I knew. I stopped and ducked down when I got to about three feet from it. Something felt wrong here, really wrong. I glanced behind me. He was coming right at me, a shadow, but a moving shadow, and moving pretty fucking fast.

I didn't have time to take aim so I did the only rational thing you do when being bum rushed by some lunatic, I launched myself at him.

We slammed together and did a little after midnight dancing, looking like a couple drunks after hours as we fumbled with each other, trying to strike the other but mostly finding only air and clothes, we tangled and fell to the floor.

We came to rest on our sides, still holding handfuls of the others clothes, clawing our ways to flesh, finally we both gave up and pushed away from each other and shot to our feet. I reached behind me and unsheathed the knife at the small of my back, holding it in my right hand, slightly behind my right leg. I was counting on an element of surprise, so when he came at me with a left hook, I ducked it and slammed the knife deep into his side.

I heard him lose his breath and sort of half collapse, I drove my left elbow into his face and felt the promising feel of cartilage shattering. I stepper to the right as I pulled the knife out of his side and grabbed his hair with my left hand as I held him up with the front of my body. Not one for wasting time I cut his throat and let him fall to the floor.

I wasn't sure that he was the only one here so I snatched the AR 70 off the ground and ran up the stairs, taking them two and three at a time, no need for stealth anymore.

When I kicked through the door at the top I shot to the left and was ready to pop anything that moved, but the rooftop was empty. I made my way back down, checking every door I came to. Somewhere far off I heard a car start and take off with a squeal of tires.

Those mother fuckers left me.

I ran to the front of the building and glanced down the street, Jason's truck was gone, no one in sight. This sort of pissed me off and I prayed someone would jump out from somewhere and take a shot at me but no one did.

When I got to where Jason's truck used to be, I kicked at some of the glass on the ground and went into a swearing rant that would have surprised even the most veteran of sailors. Maybe not their wives though.

"Think we left you?" Asked a voice behind me.

I was only half startled to hear Devin's voice but I had to play the pissed off friend, so I spun around and sighted down on him with the AR.

Devin smiled and walked up to me. I felt like shooting him in the leg just for smiling like that.

"Where'd they run off to?" I asked.

"Steve needed some medical aid and well" He looked at the ground, "Ryan didn't make it."

"That mother fucker! I swear to god I'm gonna kill him."

Devin looked up at me, "Who? Jason? Bro, we all came out here. We knew the score."

"Eighteen fucking years old, that's too young to die."

"Yea well… Come on bro, we all knew what could happen here. He wanted to come." Devin wouldn't remind me that he was against this thing from almost the start, he was a better friend than that, but I could tell it was on his mind.

"All for nothing bro." I said.

"Not necessarily, Jason got some stuff from the warehouse, I was surprised myself but the place didn't get totaled altogether, just the roof and out side walls, the cotton bins barely looked touch. He took in two bags; one was c4 so I guess he only had one bag to collect but um, well… He took four bags from inside before they took off."

"Still for nothing."

"Yea, I hear ya bro." Answered Devin as we made our way down the street. Brothers, from friends, from the streets, from the neighborhood. Bound by blood. The breeze swept down the street and swirled around us, before it continued on, the moon hung low across the stars and seemed to set the mood for our walk out of this place of death…