

TINY DAGGERS
IN MY HEART

A NOVELLA

Richard Raymond

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Richard Raymond briefly attended Morehouse College on full academic scholarship, and was later signed to a major recording label as a performer/songwriter. *TINY DAGGERS IN MY HEART* is the author's first novella. Richard Raymond currently lives in historic Baltimore, Maryland.

COMING SOON:

A BLACK TOMATO

THE CRYING CLUB

27 BABY MOTHERS

The original working title for this book was *13 WAYS TO KILL AN AMERICAN BLACK WOMAN*. I was obviously angry when I started writing. Though I am more calm and focused these days, I choose to honor my infamous fury and offer my original dedication...

DEDICATION:

FOR EVERY BITCH ASS NIGGA...AND EVERY
NIGGA ASS BITCH...

That wasn't too bad, was it? Now enjoy!

RicRay...

After her moment of truth had come and gone, I stood perfectly still, disquieted. I guess one could argue that I was somewhat unfocused, as I tend to be during the days following New Year's Eve, and to a large degree that argument might be true. I was pressed for time to say the least and I really needed to leave, but I also wanted to stay a while longer and stare. To be truthful there was really nothing special about that job. There was just another corpse on a bed, and this corpse had maybe 30 percent of a head left. Moments before, this corpse was a frustrated, mean-spirited black woman, enjoying what would be her final Newport. The woman had thought she was alone, and like many naked women do when they think they are alone, she was biting her lower lip and mumbling F-bombs as she jammed herself with the middle and forefinger of her non-smoking hand.

She was exhausted, and deservedly so. The previous hour this woman had spent in a shared sexual effort, one which had yielded no apparent orgasm for her, and there was no creamy money-shot on her stomach for her to clean

off with a towel. Maybe 5 minutes before, her lover had stepped out in a big rush. Shortly after he was gone, she sparked up the cigarette and started fingering herself brutally. Try as she did however, she was apparently lost without her lover, at least sexually, and she finally cursed in disgust; having failed to achieve that elusive cheap orgasm. Seconds before her moment of truth, she inhaled her Newport one last time, switched hands, and blew a white smoke blob across her insanely thick breasts.

That's what has me distracted. Her breasts. You see, when I say this dead woman has insanely thick breasts, I'm not talking about artificially huge, washed-up pornstar breasts. I'm speaking more along the lines of fat natural breasts, two handfuls apiece.

There is blood and tiny shotgun pellets where there was once a face, mixed with what looks to be brain matter and saliva, but not a speck of all this mess has despoiled those breasts. Impossibly, her dead areolas and her dead nipples are clean, and they stand gritty and thick like old television tuner dials.

She's gone now, but for the past eleven years this lady had been a state's attorney. She was good at her job, and thus was asked by the state to handle the more newsworthy criminal prosecutions. She was also a budding national celebrity, and was on the national cable news stations as a "talking head" from time to time. She bore strong political ambitions, and several times she caused a local buzz by waging a verbal war against the mayor. Others obviously had ambitions to see her dead. I had no personal quarrel with her. An upset person ordered this murder for only Lord knows why, and the same person would soon pay me the balance on this contract. That upset person happens to have a ridiculous handle. Namely, the Master. The Master, what a thing to call a person. I'll tell you about the Master later...

Right now I'm holding a shotgun.

A gun-metal grey, pump-action Mossberg 12 gauge.

Riot gun some call it. It's in my right hand, raw barrel still warm to the touch, tail nestled beneath my armpit. Both my hands are in blue surgical gloves. My hand trembles slightly, then steadies as it, the hand, caresses her right breast.

Women pay thousands for breasts like these. The kind that always hold their form. Natural, but they stand erect even when upside down doing a handstand.

Her waist is flabby for an otherwise fit woman. She has stretch marks that look more like tiger stripes, and her belly button is puckered like lips blowing me a kiss. Moreover, her lower body ratio is off. Her tendons sit like steel pipes against her bony ankles, the whole ankle unit too skinny in proportion to her peanut butter thick thighs.

I had spent the previous hour peeking out of a closet, watching the prosecutor ride a man, cowgirl. The dead prosecutor was good at riding, surprisingly athletic, and that was the only position she and the man had been in until the condom broke. After some oral persuasion, the man agreed to fetch another box of rubbers. He got dressed and left.

About 30 minutes into their screw I had thought about stepping out of the closet and blasting them both, but something had told me to wait. This is his apartment, the man, and I'm holding his shotgun. He is a police detective, though I must admit not the sharpest one. I'd been studying him and the well-breasted attorney for quite some time. There wasn't much to the two of them really. The way these two love birds hooked up usually went like this...

Every second and fourth Friday of the month, the cop would be assigned to escort the prosecutor home from the main courthouse downtown. I'm not sure how this arrangement began. I was given very basic information when I accepted the contract. Upon receiving the info, I did my due diligence. I observed this bi-monthly migration first hand, and determined that these two were having

an affair of some sort. The prosecutor had a husband at home, miles from where she now lay dead, and she had a two year old son. The cop is unmarried, but had an occasional live-in girlfriend who works at the Hooters alongside the Inner Harbor. Careful examination revealed that the Hooters girlfriend goes out clubbing after work on Friday nights, and doesn't come home before 3am at the earliest, if at all. It was unclear how the prosecutor covered her own end of this affair, which lies she told her hubby or what have you, but some women are very good at lying. A woman will kiss you right in the mouth after having swallowed another man's load, she will.

After formulating a plan, I reported to my contact that I was ready and was forwarded half my fee, 9 thousand dollars, all in quarters, nickels and dimes. I'll explain this later as well.

You rob a locksmith at gunpoint, shoot him in the head like he did it himself, and you throw his overweight Latina girlfriend off the roof of a ten story building in Alphabet City. But all you wanted was the locksmiths' tools. With these tools you can slip into any crummy apartment undetected, and without a hint of force.

You don't touch anything. You don't drink for 6 hours beforehand so you don't have to piss while on the job. You head for the bedroom closet you know the cop never uses. Then you see the shotgun.

The shotgun was unexpected. It was a small oversight by the cop, but the little things are sometimes more important than the big things, you'll see. I was prepared to use my pistol with the three-quarter inch threaded screw-on silencer, but the shotgun presented an opportunity to pin the murder on the cop. I've never particularly disliked cops. At that time I was working through the usual frustration I feel after having missed yet another opportunity to kiss Victoria.

I'm not going to talk about Victoria, not yet. If you must know a tidbit, two nights ago I cried myself to sleep

after my latest New Years Eve debacle...

I found the shotgun leaning upright against an old couch in the living room. On the floor beside it were the chemicals used to clean the weapon during breakdown, an oily rag used to wipe it down. I pick up the shotgun and make sure it's loaded. It is. I cock it and now I just have to wait for the right moment to use one of my flash bangs to stun the cop. After stunning him, I planned on shooting him in the temple with my pistol, then blasting the lawyer with the shotgun. Murder, suicide. My favorite neat little circle.

By the way, these days I keep two flash bang grenades in my jacket pockets during winter and late autumn jobs, and I carry one wherever I can fit it for jobs during spring and summer. Flash bangs are hard to get a hold of, and they don't do much damage, but they are inarguably necessary if you have to make an escape...

Waiting for them, I stood in that bedroom for a long time. When the two love birds arrived I ran for the closet. For an hour the prosecutor is playing cowgirl. I hear the cop hiss 'Shit', and that's when the condom popped. The cop leaves to get more rubbers. After I think he's gone, I make it so the prosecutor no longer has a complete head.

The report of the shotgun was loud. I should have gotten out of there right away but there were those tits...

Black American women. Cambodian hair extensions and gold earring fragments all over the bed and floor. She didn't scream when I shot her, the attorney. She looked at me brandishing the Mossberg, her arms folded. She was steady and true to the end. She knew she was doomed but she remained defiant.

She had been the city's most effective prosecutor. She had put hundreds of black men and women, and too many wayward teenage boys and girls into state prison. Still, in Baltimore the prosecutor will always be remembered. She'll get a street sign named after her downtown someplace. She will be memorialized as a hard-nosed and

intelligent Afro-American soul sister. Now the gel of what was once an eyeball oozes onto lint ball ridden sheets her cop lover should have changed weeks ago. Now soul sister is very dead but not so much those tits.

I toss the shotgun onto the bed. Ugly feet this woman has, even for a corpse. Razor blade toenails pointing skyward. Hammer head shark toes. She could use a posthumous pedicure. I exit the front door and I walk calmly. My car is a block away.

I hate crusty feet on a woman. It always makes me throw up in my mouth a little. I mean, the toes are the first thing to hit the bathwater and the last thing to leave. There is just no excuse. Now, the first black woman I ever killed, way back when, that poor girl had immaculate feet...



You wake up at 5am. 30 push-ups are mandatory. I'm not into weights, but I do own a pair of 25 pound dumbbells, and 2 or 3 mornings a week I'll do sets of bicep curls. A vast majority of mornings I just deep stretch. Nothing too heavy. Then it's time to go to work. Besides occasionally killing people for money, work for me is my vending machine route. I currently own seventeen vending machines. Ten soda machines. Seven snack machines. I make around 5500 in a good month. Not exactly a booming franchise, but it's a living and it keeps me busy. That's why I demand payment for my contract jobs in coins. When I go to the bank I deposit dollar bills and coins anyway, and I can basically tell the government anything I want as far as the money I make. The vending machine business is a very inexact science...

The Master pays me by having someone drop off the bags of coins in one of my machines. Any machine. It changes each time, the machine I tell them. I don't ask who the drop off person is going to be, don't care. I just count

the coins. I use some of the coins to keep my machines filled with change. You should see my garage. Bags and bags of quarters, nickels and dimes.

You go to Sam's Club at 7am, the time the store opens for vendors, and you show the greeter your Sam's Club card. You get a big blue flatbed cart. First up is pastries. You absolutely must check the expiration dates on pastries. Dig through them. This store likes to bury the newer pastries beneath the ones that expire next week.

You ignore the black girl, the awkwardly tall zero shaped one with the burnt orange hair and the multiple gold teeth. She's checking you out.

You fetch chips and variety boxes of corn curls and pretzels and so forth. Again, expiration dates are important here.

You get candy bars, and you'd better not forget peanut chews. Very popular. Some vendors stock cheese-n-crackers and peanut butter sandwich crackers, but these items never sell for me. I only buy hard-to-sell bullshit like sunflower seeds and granola bars if I get special requests from customers.

The downside to the vending business is that there are a bunch of other vending machine companies out there fighting for the same customers. Consequently, trivial complaints from customers, small things, can explode into your most lucrative machines getting yanked from a location. I used to have 20 machines. I had to sell 3 of them after an adult day care center staged a revolt over my machines' lack of crème filled chocolate cakes. The revolt was lead by 2 black women, by the way.

In my garage, beneath a 70 pound cut away slab of concrete, is a 30/06 modified snipers rifle, as well as at least two dozen fluid filled silicone tipped bullets...

Take an ordinary hollow tipped bullet and widen the hole a bit. Fill the tip with water, then seal it with a tear-drop of silicone. Now when you shoot a person in the head, the skull will explode with incredible violence.

Tracer bullets work great too I've heard, but I've never used them on a job...

You load your cases of soda. This is the most labor intensive part of the vending machine business, hauling soda. You get Pepsi for the Pepsi machines. Coke for the Coke machines. Flavored sodas are up to you, whatever you think will sell, but orange soda is a must. Avoid water. It doesn't really sell too well anyhow, but it fucking works. It actually quenches thirst. Soda dehydrates and makes a person more thirsty.

There are 3 things an assassin must be, if nothing besides. These 3 things are:

Physically fit
Morally disconnected
Consistently perfect

The big things you can't control. Accidents. Mishaps. So-called acts of God. The small things you must control. Accuracy. Your appearance and your demeanor. You see, it is the small things that, if left unchecked, will snowball into big things and you will be overwhelmed. Though it is not easy, you have to at all times remain diligent...

Make sure you have all the items for your route. If you forgot something like chewing gum or breath mints or those special vendible packs of microwavable popcorn, get it now. After all that, roll your flatbed over to one of the two open cash registers. Try not to look pissed off while the check-out girls yap with one another and hold you up. If you look even the least bit pissed, they will probably verbally attack you and spread rumors about you when you leave.

The older black woman who stands at the exit door asks you, 'What's wrong baby?' She gets mad when you don't say anything. Your mother used to ask you the same question, and you gave her the same response.

More times than you can count, your mother said you

were a difficult pregnancy. She was wildly emotional when she was pregnant, you've been told. One night your pregnant mother savagely beat your father with a golf club. As she was being hauled off to jail, your father screamed to the police:

'That girl got the Devil in her, man!'

Ever since your mother first told you this story, you wondered if the "Devil" your father spoke of was you. Later that night after you were born in jail, your angry mother repeated what your father had screamed to police, over and over in her head, until she had an epiphany. It seems that your father's sentence had unwittingly combined his last name, your mother's first name, and the Devil. Your mother snapped her fingers and wrote down the last four words of your father's sentence on your birth certificate. What she had written was your name.

Outside is your old white box truck. It's a clunky 18 footer with a walk-up ramp. A decade and a half old this truck is, but it runs good more often than not and that's all that matters. The General Manager at Sam's Club lets you keep the truck parked here overnight, in clear view of a surveillance camera. You're finished loading up and are about to pull off when you hear something terrible.

'Devlyn Herman!'

A plump black girl is announcing your government name to a parking lot full of weary vendors. The girl is jogging up to you, waving something. Big country thighs rubbing together and it's a wonder her crotch doesn't catch on fire. 'You forgot your club card.' She says.

'Thank you.' You say. The small things, they multiply and one day they will destroy you.



There is no God. There is no luck. There is only paying attention to details, getting it right the first time. A certain

contract killer was a religious man. He gambled at the casinos up north, and he dressed sloppily. In the end, he cried and swallowed twelve straight shots of Bacardi as federal agents surrounded his giant suburban home. I hear nowadays he is well groomed and keeps his prison cell neat and tidy. Too late. The phrase “Better late than never” is not in the assassin’s bylaws. Rather it reads: “Work early, on-time, or next time.”

The first week of spring and there is a baseball on my front grass. That’s the sign, the baseball, and it means the Master wants to use me again. The baseball thing was the Master’s idea, or so I was told. This Master sometimes seems to know me too well to have never met me in person. At least I *think* I haven’t met the Master in person. For all I know the Master could be the Gulf War veteran guy who greets me every morning at Sam’s Club, or the heavily tattooed slacker who works at the store where I pay my phone bill...

I pick up the baseball barehanded. I used to be a good baseball player. I was scouted a few times by the Padres and the Orioles, and was described in the local paper as a ‘Solid, rangy little second baseman.’ I might have been drafted straight out of high school if not for steroids and a girl named Trina Walls.

In high school I was a steroid dealer. In reality I could get any drug you could think of, but I chiefly had steroids. All kinds. Cutting edge synthetic testosteronees like the stuff the professionals use. I personally injected the entire offensive line with cycles of Boldenone Undecyrate. Our varsity football team won the state championship two years in a row. During those 26 games the quarterback was not sacked one time. The running back, who I sold to but didn’t inject, broke state yardage records.

I was a junior when I met Trina. She didn’t go to my school. My school was a ‘citywide’ public school. A prospective student had to ‘test’ into the school and the curriculum was rigorous. Trina was more like the typical

Baltimore hoodrat. Limited vocabulary. Tattoo on her neck. She wore silky hair extensions and tracks, neatly kept. She kept a perpetual “mean mug” on her face, and I could never tell if she was about to cuss me out or command me to fuck her. Interestingly enough, Trina was never much of a screamer unless she was getting nailed, and she hardly cussed or raised her voice otherwise.

I don't know if she loved me. Well, maybe she loved my car, at least at first. She'd make up reasons for me to pick her up from all over town. I didn't mind. She forever needed money, and I gave it to her, no questions. When I first met her, Trina attended one of those schools for juvenile delinquents, the kind with a daycare on campus and 20 year old sophomores. After she became my girlfriend she never went to school. She would go to my mother's place in the projects and watch cable until I came home from school or wherever. I would come home and we would watch TV and fuck. Then the fucking turned to arguing. The arguing turned me to start fucking her best friend. The arguing didn't stop Trina from getting pregnant, however.

When Trina found out I was fucking her best friend, I still don't know how she found out, she was pissed. She confronted me about it and I told her the pregnancy was making her irrational. She said 'Okay' and that was that. Then she contacted the police and told them everything she knew about me..

So I come home from Aikido one day, maybe six weeks into my senior year, and I have 45 syringes loaded with Equipoise in the trunk of my car. I get out the car and I hear men screaming at me. There are well dressed federal agents with guns drawn, sprinting towards me. Trina didn't say a word.

My mother was high off crack as usual, hiding in the bathroom. Mom, being all fucked up and paranoid, thought the feds were there for her.

Trina was on a cell phone I'd given her and she was

casually talking to whomever. She only looked at me once, but my eyes never left her. I'll always remember Trina quietly pacing back and forth, pregnant and pissed. Next, I'm being led to an unmarked Ford SUV. I don't get to meet our daughter, my daughter, whom Trina gave birth to a few months later.

I wanted to kill Trina. I made plans while in pretrial to do it, but later reasoned that killing Trina would kill half my daughter's future. I spent infinite time waiting for my court date, too young to be in jail, mentally far more than physically. In the end, I served 6 months in federal prison, charged as an adult though I was still a juvenile, and then I entered a first time drug offender boot camp program. I did exactly 22 months and 16 days of that, though I hardly remember any of it. I eventually get released, and my asshole probation officer assures me my record will be wiped clean if I complete one year of federal probation.

I still wanted to kill Trina. Still I couldn't do it. Still I held on to the same reason for not doing it: my daughter. I tried to contact Trina. She wasn't returning my calls. I wrote Trina a letter begging her to let me see my daughter. She responded by getting a restraining order against me. I never saw my daughter up close. Not once. Never learned her name.

I started following Trina around occasionally. I followed her to the bar on a few Saturday nights, to nursing school during the week. Soon I'm taking GED classes in the building right beside her nursing school, violating her order of protection, but she never sees me.

At some point Trina found a new best friend. She wasn't too much to look at in the face, the friend, but she had a plump pear shape and pretty feet. Tiny, chocolate, flawless feet. One afternoon Trina missed school and I approached this friend. I told her my name was Tony. I made the name up right on the spot. I talked to her for a while. Flirted. Then I struck gold. I took her to my little apartment and fucked the dog shit out of her. Then while

she was asleep on my futon, I pierced her voice box with my Katana.

Ask me why I did that to that girl, and I'll be lying if I say anything besides I don't know...

She wakes up, this girl, and she's drowning in her own blood. I rear back, and with a descending blow I hack off her head.

Besides Aikido, I'd taken Kendo while in high school, and for black-belt training we had to cut through bundles of wet straw and bamboo with a Katana. Cutting through wet straw and bamboo is supposed to be like cutting through a human neck. It isn't. Her blood smothered head tumbles, and it sounds wet and fat like dropping a holiday ham on a tile kitchen floor. I'm not looking at it much. At this point I'm staring at her feet. Made for a man's mouth these feet are. Every perfect toe.

I went outside and stole a large industrial strength trash bag from one of the bigger plastic cans, and dumped the contents into a nearby dumpster. It's night, and the alley behind my apartment is deep space black. I go back inside and I hack off the girl's pretty feet and hands. I stuff her piece by piece into the bag and I rabbit-ear tie it closed. Blood soaks my white futon mattress and blackens my multicolored area rug. This is a forensic nightmare. This whole apartment has to go.

I wait until midnight and carry the bag with the girl inside to my car. Then I go back inside and disassemble the futon. I am taking it with me, mattress and all. I roll up the carpet and cut it in half with a handsaw. I do the same to my futon mattress. I don't bother collecting the white stuffing that spills out. The stuffing is flammable, and that won't be bad at all. Made my forearms sore, all that sawing. But I had to make it so the carpet and futon mattress fit in my car.

I find the lighter fluid I use to light my hibachi and I squirt it on the floor. Then I light the hibachi right inside the apartment. I get my Katana, all my cash and a change

of clothes, and I tease the flames out of the hibachi with the lighter fluid. When the flames finally take hold of the walls I hurry to my car. I head toward the closest highway north. I drive to the Pennsylvania border, and I find a creek I think is reasonably remote and deep.

The bag with the girl inside doesn't want to sink, but it finally goes under after I wade in the water and push the bag toward the middle deep part. It now decays at the bottom of a creek somewhere I'll never tell. I burned both the futon and the bloody mattress that same night...

The fire in my apartment was officially ruled an accident. I was called by the fire inspector general: 'Another kid who tried to light a portable grill inside his apartment. This is happening way too much. Luckily no one was injured.'

I tell the police, 'I ran because I was scared at having started that fire while on probation. I'm not out here selling drugs or shooting people. I just lit up a small fire, and then I went to the corner store to get an energy drink. When I came back, I saw the fire.' They somehow buy the story and I don't get charged. I thought I was lucky or clever for not getting charged, which would have violated my federal probation, but I know now that people behind the scenes were pulling strings for me. As for the girl, her remains were never found. To this day, the police have no leads concerning her disappearance...

I'm not a serial killer. Fat white men driving minivans, slitting the throats of preteen girls, or whack jobs with curly mustaches fish-gutting prostitutes in London, those are your serial killers. Me cutting that girl up, that was different. It felt like practice. By the time I got back to town and spoke to the police that morning I had a plan.

I got in contact with my old drug connections. They are very impressed I didn't rat them out. I indirectly intimated that I was available for special assignments, but no more drug dealing. They, the connections, indirectly hook me up with the Master, but not before I would kill a

young black woman again...



The local news says: 'In a surprising turn of events, the officer involved in the murder of the city's most prominent prosecutor has agreed to accept a plea deal of manslaughter 2.'

'A passion killing. An evening gone horribly wrong.' the rich and self important local news anchorwoman calls it.

The former officer, who had been facing life imprisonment and a hostile media, was to immediately begin serving a 5 year prison sentence. Because he had been a police officer, he will spend his entire stint in protective custody. Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor...

I now have 18 vending machines. I added a third machine to my only grade school location. I was reluctant to do this at first. It's a Jewish school. Not that all or even most Jews are kleptomaniacs, but these young kids steal so much from my machines that I barely break even. The school has agreed to split the cost of a security guard, who will 'guard' my machines during the four lunch periods.

Here's how you beat a vending machine.

Get a half cup of salt, a 2 liter bottle, a funnel, and warm water. This works on soda machines for the most part. Make your warm salt water in the bottle first. Then, pour salt water into the soda machine using the small funnel. Do it right, and change will start shooting out of the machine like 3 lemons on Atlantic City slots. Scientifically, the water creates a mild electric charge. This interferes with the way the interior electronics works.

Or you can get paper, tissue or a piece of fabric. This only works on machines with wide coin return slots. Snack machines, the brown ones with the big spiral rings, that

kind. Stick the fabric or wad of paper up the change return slot. When someone buys something and receives change, the change will get stuck. Later, just reach in and un-jam the clog and get your booty. Or rather, their booty.

The preceding was for entertainment purposes only. Fuck with my machines and I *will* find you and I *will* jam fat red preschool pencils up the shaft of your penis.

My latest hit is another black female. She is part Latina, not at all bad to look at, a good dancer, a middle school dropout, and a heavy drug user. She smokes everything but crack, pops pills of all kinds, and she drinks. Myself, I've never used a hardcore drug in my life. I drink sometimes, that's it. Drugs take a person to a place that I, as a professional marker, must never be. They usually lead to a person skipping small details like accounting for the wind when using a sniper rifle, or setting the proper blasting cap pressure on a pipe bomb, or bathing. My mother had much difficulty with bathing, or showering for that matter.

The thing that made this job different was that the instructions didn't specify whether or not the girl was to be killed. My contact, a dark and husky older man named Chicken George, stands beside me in a crowded gentleman's club and asks me for change for a ten. This is his normal method for giving me my preliminary instructions. I give him change. He gives me the ten, and written across Hamilton's face, in barely legible marker ink, is the word SAM...

SAM is an acronym for 'send a message'. Last time I got this sort of job, I shot a college cheerleader in the neck with a bow gun. I was aiming for her left thigh but she crouched suddenly. A crowd of people ended up chasing me, and I had to use both my flash bangs, then Aikido throw a fat guy to escape. The cheerleader was in bad shape but she lived.

SAM may or may not mean murder. Besides SAM, the message is normally a hand drawn weed leaf, which

means 'hit'. A SAM always compels me to ask questions. But first George has a question of his own for me.

'That cop,' Chicken George says, 'didn't he notice you'd taken his shotgun?'

I smile. 'The little things did them both in.'

I used to wonder why George always wanted to meet in a strip club, or in any public place for that matter. Back in my high school steroid days, I would come to his house every so often to discuss emerging masking technologies and business trends in the world of steroids. A few jobs ago I asked George to explain the logic behind meeting me in this gentleman's club. He told me, 'The fact that you decided to start killing people for a living should make the answer obvious.'

The music and chatter in this club is loud. George and I are standing pretty close to one another. I say, 'What's this new job all about?'

'You know what it is.' He says.

'Send a message. Got it. Can I use explosives?' I say.

'Like I need to tell you how to do your job. You're the professional. Use whatever you want.' He says.

Chicken George sports a salt and pepper goatee. His eyes are eternally red. He lights a cigarette and sips something blue. George is not a dangerous sort of man, at least not to me, but he *is* a legendary drug transporter. He is also a fine actor. He pulls a stripper close and stuffs a 20 dollar bill into her garter. She pushes her panther-tattooed ass against him. I'm taking baby gulps of bottled beer. I smirk. When it comes to Chicken George this is all for show. I know for a fact that George dines on a steady diet of male to female transsexuals. Genuine girls are not his thing. The dancer leaves after the song changes. Back to business.

'So we're going to try this again huh? Another SAM job for me to screw up. I feel like I'm being picked on.' I say.

'You're over thinking this. Just do what you always

do,' he says, 'like your last SAM job, but without the goddamn arrows.'

'You people could be a little more descriptive.' I say.

'I figured you hated all the schematic diagrams and personal profiles of your marks and shit. It could be worse. We could be asking you to handle somebody famous again, so stop complaining.' George smiles until I smile back.

I say nothing else to Chicken George. I find a stool at the U-shaped stage bar and order another beer. I pay with a hundred dollar bill, and tell the bartender to give me change in ones. As for the ten dollar bill I received from Chicken George, I'm keeping that. Until the job is complete this bill is my contract.

A dancer is onstage. She walks on fleshy ankles and small fat feet, and has curvy, rhino thighs. Her ass isn't 'fat' in the ghetto booty sense of the word. Her breasts are unremarkable, but her cup size is respectable. She has stringy, cheap dark brown hair, and she can't get her hair to look thick and full no matter how many different chemicals she uses. She's half Jewish/ half Irish, and she sometimes argues that she is 'ethnic' when I call her 'white girl'. But she *is* white. Polar bears aren't as pale as she is. Onstage her name is Firestar, but her mother named her Africa...



You don't spit on a man's hamburger. That's nasty. I repeat. You **do not** spit on a man's hamburger. Especially if that man is in the process of becoming a murderer. What happened is truly my fault because I should not have been eating at Burger King anyhow. I should have gotten the half dozen steamed crabs I really wanted.

This was the wilderness period in my life, maybe 6 weeks after I burned down my apartment. I still had the

probation officer nagging on me to keep a job, or else. I hadn't received a contract from this mysterious 'Master' character I had heard so much about. Nobody has ever seen the Master, at least not anyone I've talked to. What they always say is a sort of credo: *Cross the Master and you die, no questions. Ask too many questions and you die, no questions!* Whatever. It's hard to be afraid of someone you've never seen, at least it is for me. To make ends meet, I had been slaving for a *work today - paid today* temp service. 7 bucks an hour.

I had lost almost everything. My mother was kicked out of the projects because of me, and now nobody could find her. Thanks to my grandmother paying my car insurance, I still had my car. My wardrobe was pathetic. I was sleeping every night in my grandmother's basement. My only weapon was my Katana, which had sat in my trunk undisturbed for almost two and a half years. I had yet to buy my first gun...

7 dollars an hour, 8 hours a day on average and the temp service pays every day after you get back to the office in the evening. 56 dollars minus taxes and I net about 42 bucks. Like I said, I wanted steamed crabs. A half dozen large steamed crabs from the Crab Shack came up to about 22 bucks. I like to drink beer with crabs. Another 2 dollars. Meanwhile at the Burger King across the street from the temp service, a number 5 is about 7 bucks.

I go inside. Typical Burger King. Disgruntled, underpaid, overworked employees. Hoodrats stationed at the counter and drive thru. One with a headset, two without. Mexicans are in the back cooking. It's the middle of the day and the middle of the week, and there's only one person ahead of me. That person gets served promptly. Award winning service, that person got. I had to wait five minutes before I could even place my order. The girl who was supposed to be serving me, instead was telling a story to the headset girl about how her baby father 'wasn't shit' and will never see his kids. Not a good thing for me to

hear right now. Intolerable even. I speak up. 'Excuse me,' I say. 'Can I get some service?'

Her response is the rolling of eyes.

'Miss, all I want is a number 5.' I say.

The Burger King girl says, 'I see you. I'm not blind.'

'I can't tell.' I say almost to myself.

No service, just more story.

'Can I see your manager?' I say.

This gets her attention. She huffs and says, 'Can I help you?'

I'm blown at this point. 'I thought you said you weren't deaf.' I say, 'I want a number 5 and I want onion rings instead of fries.'

She says, her head down. 'I'm telling you girl. Niggas ain't shit.'

Maybe I smell bad. I had spent the entire day feeding flattened produce boxes into a bailer. My white tee shirt is black. My pants and boots are filthy.

'That's uncalled for.' I say.

'You know what you skinny motherfucker?' she says and the headphone girl grabs her shoulder.

I smile. 'No I don't know.'

She gets loud.

'You are lucky!' She yells, 'You do not know me! I will hop over this counter and drag your skinny ass up and down the motherfucking street if you keep fucking with me! You fucking cornball!'

Believe me or not but I didn't want to kill her. Spunk isn't bad in a female. How could she know me just by looking at me? Know the even more horrible person I would soon become?

'Sorry to hear about your baby's father.' I say. 'I'm not him. Maybe you *should* let him see his kids though.'

She lost it, and probably would have decreased the quality of her life by attacking me if the headphone girl hadn't stepped in front of her. After calming the girl down, the headphone girl takes over the register.

'I'm sorry sir,' she says. 'I'm the shift leader. You said you wanted a number 5?'

'Yep.'

'With onion rings right?'

'Yes ma'am.' I say.

I pay for the food, she gives me an empty cup, and my change. I barely caught what happened next. While I'm filling up my cup with one half Mountain Dew, one half Iced Tea, I glance over my shoulder and see the girl I was arguing with unwrap my burger, hock spit on it, then re-wrap it.

Wow. Now I have to kill her, I said to myself.



In China, a rash of poisonings have compelled Chinese authorities to ban a deadly rat poison called Dushuqiang. This substance kills a person by inducing bloody vomiting, followed by severe cardiac arrest. Five milligrams will kill a 200 pound man in five minutes. My plan was to administer 60 milligrams to the Burger King girl. First, I had to go to Peru to get it.

I know going all the way to Peru is a long way to go to grab up a few milligrams of rat poison. A hammer blow to the head, or homemade napalm would perhaps be easier to pull off, but this wasn't the only reason I was headed to Peru.

In the weeks following my hamburger getting spit on, I moved out of my grandmother's basement and got a new job, and on that job I met a girl from Peru named Nancy. Nancy isn't anything to look at. She's short and box shaped. Spongebob with bad skin and a vagina, she is. Nancy is from a family with five brothers. One of these brothers, Paulo, is a small time cocaine farmer. This Paulo tells me over the phone that he will sell me kilograms of 98% pure cocaine for 800 dollars a kilogram, if I can get

down there to buy them. In Baltimore, a kilogram of cocaine that pure could sell for as high as 75 grand.

It was Paulo who told me about the rat poison from China. He'd give me five ounces, free of charge, just for coming, he said.

Now all I needed was some cash. I was flat broke, but I had an ace-in-the-hole guy I could always go to if I needed drug money.

Chicken George is *the* most successful and long-standing narcotics transporter in the history of the city. He's not flashy. He drives an older Cadillac. He lives in a townhouse alone. He's lived in that same house as long as I can remember. He doesn't shoot people, or sell drugs as a kingpin or middleman, he's just a really good transporter. He was bringing 40 tons of high grade weed per week to southwest Baltimore in the 90's. Heroin earmarked for Park Heights and the white trash pockets of East Baltimore, came from his Arab connections in the middle east. I knew that George would deeply appreciate the connection I had made with Paulo in Peru. The Master, whoever that was, would definitely appreciate those prices.

George would also understand why I wanted to make the initial trip to Peru myself. Connections in the drug business are often and easily stolen. I figured if I bought two Kilo's at that sweet price and stepped aside, I could then, assuming good faith, negotiate terms toward my true desired profession, becoming an illegal independent contractor. It was my preference for killing black women that initially struck Chicken George as odd.

'Black women huh?' he says. Sometimes, Chicken George chain smokes cigarettes. This is one of those times.

'Yep.' I say.

'That's some crazy shit.' he says. 'I don't like black women much my damn self. All they do is bleed periodically and pump out bastards.'

'I agree.' I say. 'So you can help me? I need about 5 thousand dollars. I'm also going to need somebody to get

this probation officer off my back. If that's possible.'

'Anything's possible.' George says. He makes a web of smoke, then the cigarette comes out of his mouth and with the same hand holding the cigarette, he starts picking his feet; scratching off dead skin with his long crusty fingernails. 'To tell you the truth,' he says, 'I wasn't going to deal with you unless you did something like this cocaine hookup. Something more up your alley.'

'My alley? That's fucked up George.' I say.

'Not really. You see Devlyn, there ain't no robbery in fair exchange. If you don't want to sell drugs no more that's cool and everything, but shit, you ain't no contract killer. At least not that I can see.'

I lean forward on the couch. 'I'll demonstrate for you when I come back from Peru. That's all I can say right now.'

He recoils a bit, throws up his paws. 'Whatever you say big man. Just be careful down there when you go. And I'm talking about using your head. Even the holy water in Peru is too dirty to put your dick in.'

It's not like I'm going down to South America to fuck transsexuals like you would, you big fag. I don't say this aloud.

Chicken George says, 'So what's your plan?'

'I don't know. Get about 5 grand from you. Come back with two bricks and a vial of rat poison.'

'How are you getting back?' he says.

'Plane I guess.'

He frowns. His lips poke five inches off his face. 'Nah little buddy. You'd be better off with a small pistol, a backpack, and a bus ticket. I can have someone meet you just before the Mexican border.'

'That's pretty far to ride on a bus. Wouldn't I have to cross through Panama? How long would a bus ride take?' I say.

'21 days if you stop and party. Take my advice and stop to party. I know some nice safe places. The Panama

canal is tight, but I know a family who can help you through. You have to look out for Mexican police in certain villages.'

'How do you know so much about down there? I thought the middle east was your specialty.' I say.

'Young nigger please.' George gets louder as if he lives for opportunities to brag like this. He says, 'I was shipping shit from Venezuela to south Texas back when Pablo Escobar was doing hits and picking up dry cleaning for Griselda Blanco. And my shit was better than all of theirs. I keep telling ya'll little niggers bout' me but ya'll too fucking hard headed.'

'Whatever old man. Why'd you stop then if everything was that good?' I say.

'I didn't say everything was all good Devlyn.' Chicken George coughs till his throat is clear, then he says, 'It all stopped one afternoon when the cat I was getting coke from caught me sucking on his little brother's dick.'

George goes upstairs for a few minutes. When he returns, he gives me a sheet of paper with a bunch of names and times and phone numbers. Then he hands me the 5 thousand in cash. As I'm getting up to leave, I squint and I wonder how George has managed to survive so long in this business, when everyone else he started out with is either dead, doing decades in jail, or hiding in witness protection...



They say the Devil doesn't want anyone to believe in God, because he's very upset that God does not believe in him. What they are saying is that God believes the Devil is a loser, basically. I say this because my mother has called me her 'little Devil' for as long as I can remember. I mean, you call a child a thug, or an angel, or a little poet, and perhaps he'll become whatever you call him and fulfill that

prophecy. It's hard to tell. For what it's worth, I've always found the prospect of me being the Devil fascinating...

In order to stay 'on point' so to speak, a professional marker cannot be a drunkard. He should refrain from using drugs. He should buy escorts instead of having a girlfriend. He should never get married or raise children while in the business of killing. And most importantly, he should refuse luxury whenever possible. Walk into my home and you'll see walls staring back at you. I have one television, a big nice one, and a video game console. In my master bedroom I have a day bed, an IKEA lamp, the paper kind, and an antique wooden bedside table. I removed the carpet and polished the wood floors some time ago. To my knowledge, no other living person has seen my bedroom since I purchased this home. Try to not show people where you sleep. If you have some desire to impress people with the fancy this and that in your home, you will not make an effective contract man. Remember this also: women are to be thought of as drugs. Friends are a luxury.

I always say follow your own path, because the path the world follows is one of delusion. Case and point: religion. Let's take a quick look at Christianity. What I don't get about modern Christianity is how everyone follows Jesus when Jesus *let* his enemies kill him. What kind of lesson is that? Also, somebody please explain how Jesus died for my sins? And what does that say about God? What kind of self respecting dad would have to see his favorite son murdered before he decided to forgive the rest of his children? Ask me, and I say the big bang theory. I say the answer lies somewhere between Einstein-Bose condensates and the Planck energy...

I will tell you the secret code I live by. Afterwards, get a can of yellow spray paint. Wait until the darkest, foggiest, most moonless night of the year. Go to your local Wal-Mart and tag the east wall with exactly what I tell you:

Your focus is your God.

Fuck the world. If you cannot fuck the world, tell the world to go fuck itself.

Lie whenever possible.

Money runs in circles. Don't chase it. Just turn around.

*Faced with the choice of giving one's opinion or not giving one's opinion, it is best to **not** give one's opinion.*

Your friends are not your friends... save yourself.

Wear a hood instead of being one.

Masturbation is always an alternative.

Fear is a luxury no man can afford...

I drove then stood idling, streetlight to streetlight. Trapped in traffic, bracketed between a vintage Corvette and a Prom night horse drawn buggy, I pushed slowly along. I'm using far more brake than gas pedal. My tires and struts and electronic shocks rumble across cobblestone. I'm in historic Fells Point, on Thames street. There are million dollar boats anchored nearby. A glowing carnival ship further out. White girls walking confidently. White guys in jeans and sandals are bar hopping. The police are on patrol, and the police are protecting them...

I had been pulled over by police 15 minutes earlier, and though my demeanor was dark side of the moon cool, they searched my car anyhow. They found nothing they were looking for. No weapons. No drugs. No open containers of booze. Nothing that they could have used to ruin my Saturday night. Had they, the police, been diligent, they would have had the idea, one of them, to pry open my center console. There, beneath the emergency brake sensor wires, was my new legally purchased handgun. The rat poison was there too with the pistol, in a small vial. That may have been a problem if discovered. An envelope

was beneath the wires, and inside the envelope was a few thousand in cash.

The Burger King girl, tonight was her night.

Saturday's was the Burger King girl's night to hop the bars in Fells Point with her friends. Her night to get rape-me drunk and be taken home and fucked alongside her below standard looking, over confident friends. Her 2-chicken-boxes-a-day eating friends who have wide butts, and wear tip-over steep heels. Their jeans expose the cracks of their asses even when they aren't bending over. They struggle into tight fitting shirts too short, not covering flab that should, that must at all costs be covered.

I find a parking space a few blocks away. In this area where the white people live and party, apartments are too expensive and there are twice as many resident cars as there are parking spaces. There are a lot of cryptic signs concerning hours you can legally park and this and that. Tow trucks lurk. They'll get you too.

I spot her, the Burger King girl. She's trying hard tonight, wearing a green strapless dress, kinky and short. Her legs are gummy and thick, and they angle into black heels. Her walk is deliberate. Walking hard. To crack the pavement, I think is her intention.

I'm in somewhat of a disguise. Baseball hat, the fresh dingy kind you buy from Old Navy, pulled low over my eyes. I've grown a full beard. My plan is to never let the Burger King girl see me eye to eye. This actually isn't too hard. She's the type that needs glasses but refuses to wear them, and thus sees things no further than 4 feet in front of her.

The great thing about these Fells Point bars is that they don't frisk patrons. I'm carrying my pistol, and the vial of rat poison is in my left jeans pocket. I show ID, pay the 7 bucks and I'm inside. Next I'm nursing a beer. I should have bought a few loose cigarettes from a corner store somewhere. I'm a bit nervous. This is my trial run. If I pull this off, as I told Chicken George I would, then I'd

get my first contract. No more working at the catering company with Nancy. No more 9 bucks an hour. George had paid me 9 thousand for the two Kilos. The prick. I had wanted something close to fifty thousand but he says to me, 'Help me help you Devlyn.'

'That's fucked up George.' I say back to him.

'Yep,' he says. He's with his latest fling, and once again we're in his home. The fling is a transsexual who calls himself Gwen. Full fleshy lips, sandy brown complexion, skinnier than me besides an ass that is proportionately bigger than any genuine woman could theoretically have.

George is acting like he doesn't have time for me. He sucks his teeth and says, 'Kill that Burger King girl like a professional, and the Master will fuck with you I promise.'

I look at the shemale. I wonder if he/she is cool to talk about such things around. George picks up on my distrust.

'Don't worry about her,' he says. 'Our little community is good at keeping secrets.'

'If you say so.' I said. That was yesterday.

Now the Burger King girl is on the dance floor shaking her ass with the white boys. I wanted her to go back to the bar for another drink. I wanted her dead. Five songs later and the music format switches from hip hop to reggae. The Burger King girl is headed to the bathroom. Her friends are with her. Two tons of fun they are, heavy breathers. I look down at my watch, had to really squint in this dark, and it's 12:30.

When I look up, a chubby white girl is standing in front of me. Kissing distance. She's all smiles, checking me out.

'Hey there,' I say.

'What's wrong baby?' she says. 'You look mad or something.'

I reply, 'What makes you so concerned about me?'

'I'm just checking on you,' she says. 'You look like you're going to kill somebody.'

Irony.

'I'm just lonely, I think.'

Big pout. 'You poor little angry man. What's your name?'

'Devlyn.'

'With a Y?'

'Um, yep. What's yours?'

'Africa.' She says.

This is how I met Africa. She says her name and my eyes get the size of boiled eggs.

'I know,' she says. 'A white girl named Africa.'

'Well if my name were Europe, that would really be weird.' I say.

Africa talks with one of those deliberate 'black' accents. Slang expressions. Hand motions. 'Buy me a drink baby.' She says. Africa is about my height with those tall heels she's wearing. I pull out some cash. Africa sees the wad, frowns approvingly. 'You must have a good job.'

'I work for a catering company.' I say.

'Yeah right, you ain't got to lie to me.' She says. 'More like you *own* the catering company.'

I buy her a drink. She parks on the chair beside me. I order myself another beer. 'You got a job?' I ask.

'Yes.' She says. She swallows hard, 'I'm an entertainer.'

'Like in the circus?'

She laughs, 'You guessed it smart-ass. I'm the elephant.'

Africa shakes her head and kills her drink with two gulps. Without her asking, I order her another.

She says, 'You got a girlfriend Devlyn?'

'I don't want one,' I say. 'How about you. You got a girlfriend?'

'Look at you, trying to see if I'm gay.'

I just nod.

She says, 'Well, if you really want to know, I used to live with a girl a couple of years ago. I don't blame you for asking though. This whole lesbian thing was cool when it

first started. Now it's played out. It's still heavy where I work, though.'

'So where do you dance?'

'Who said I danced?'

I don't dignify that with a response.

Africa exhales. 'I dance at the Glass Slipper.' She says. 'It sucks. I could probably take home more money if I like, screwed the bar manager, but I do **not** fuck with white guys.'

'Why not?' I feel like I'm interviewing her.

'I just don't. Never have.'

Interesting, I think to myself.

She says, 'So you don't want a girlfriend. You got money on you. What's up?'

'What's up with you?' I say right back to her.

'You. That's what's up. Help a sister out.'

The burger King girl is passing by, looking for an open spot at the bar. She finds one a few chairs down from me, closer to the entrance. She's alone, no fat friends this time.

I whisper to Africa. 'I'll help you out, but only if you answer this next question honestly.'

Africa nods. 'Uh-huh.'

I grin. 'Will you call me a nigger if I want you to?'

Africa grabs my crank through my jeans, discretely.

'Yes, if you want me to.' she says, whispering, matching my tone and volume.

'Do it now.' I say.

Africa whispers, 'You are one sexy ass nigga. You mean like that?'

'No, not all corny.' I say, 'More like, I'll call the police if you come inside me you raging black nigger.'

'Funny man.' Africa kills her drink. 'You drive?'

'Of course.' I say, and I realize I'm still whispering.

Africa pulls out her cell phone and walks out the front door, but I walk more slowly. I pass the Burger King girl and she's on her toes, leaning on the bar, dry panties

peeking from beneath her mini-dress. She has her drink already, and is waiting for change. It would be the last cash she ever handled. A thousand times I had rehearsed this move, in my mind. Once I see she's not looking, I pour the entire contents of the vial into her drink. No one sees me. Within an hour Africa is riding me, feet flat on the bed, reverse cowgirl.

The next morning Africa is naked and on her stomach, resting her chin on her folded hands. I'm thumbing off 150 dollars for her when I see the TV.

Breaking news. 'Outside a Fells Point nightclub, 3 women collapse and die mysteriously. Onlookers say the three women were convulsing and vomiting blood. The police are baffled.'

'Oh shit. We was there last night.' Africa says.

I thumb off 500 more dollars. 'Here's half a thousand to tell anyone who asks you that you were *not* there. I don't know anything about why those girls died, and the last thing I want is cops in my life.'

I probably would have killed her if she did not take the money. This could be your moment of truth Africa. Ride or die. Your choice. Africa takes the money. Then she makes me coffee.

The two fat chicks must have shared that drink with the Burger King girl. The TV anchorwoman, a black lady, she almost smiles as she sends it over to sports.



After I receive the SAM assignment from Chicken George, Africa gets off work and she and I head to her apartment. We absolutely never, ever go to my place. As far as the two of us go, I suppose I'm damn near boyfriend status these days. To her. We go back and forth like old lovers as we negotiate 2am traffic in my car.

'Roll up your window nigger.' Africa says. What once

was a fetish word used during sex has crept into her everyday lexicon. The little things, they snowball...

I raise my window. 'You cold?'

'I'm fucking freezing. You ain't cold?'

'I'm good.' I say.

'Yeah I forgot,' she says, 'you don't feel shit.'

I turn on the radio. Nothing on except love songs that I don't want to apply to us. I turn it off.

Africa says, 'Did my uncle sell you that other machine?'

Small world. The catering company I worked for before, where Nancy still works, is owned by Jews. Africa is half Jewish. Her uncle grew up with the owners of the catering company. It was through Africa's uncle that I purchased most of my machines.

'Yes he sold it to me.' I say. 'But those kids at your cousin's school are going to rob it.'

'No they ain't.'

My voice raises an octave. The way a man speaks to his wife. 'Yes they will. Those little bastards are sharp. I don't see you volunteering to do any of my accounting paperwork. I lose money over there religiously.'

Africa doesn't respond. In her lap is a big gold purse and inside the purse, clumps of bills which represents the nights take. She begins sorting bills, counting silently. She says, 'Why do you still drive this same old BMW? I know you can afford a new car.'

I smirk. 'You even know what BMW stands for?'

'Black man's wheels.' She says.

'No. Big Moose Woman.'

Africa giggles. 'I'm going to fuck you up. I thought it meant big monkey wacko.'

'Nope. Blow my wiener.'

Africa has one. 'Bitch murders weirdo.'

I have a better one. 'Black murders whitey.'

'Devlyn wants to kill me, how sweet.' She says, 'I think he's falling in love with me.'

'Shut the fuck up.' I say, and I almost mean it.



The reason luxury is not good for a contract man is because luxury is the opposite of work. It is the difference between a bicycle and a Bentley. What I am talking about is less fiscal and more physical. Also, the Bentley draws too much attention, and attention is the arch enemy of the illegal independent contractor...

I understand how you feel. But you little fuckers, you just want to shit on people. You want to punish your past. You have a secret fantasy where you make all the girls you ever wanted wish they would have been on your dick when they had the chance. If you really wanted to punish them however, you would go to computer school. You would learn a programming language. Then you could email them viruses that cripple their home computers. You have to think outside the box.

You could send female strippers to their five year old son's birthday party. How about filling their trash cans with cement? Make it a habit. Make hate your ritual. Go crazy with it. Squirt dish detergent into their gas tank. Slash their tires. Steal their car. Or really, you could grow a pair, don a mask and gloves, and pack rounds into their torso at close range. Of course, the overwhelming majority of you have no balls whatsoever...

Want to kidnap someone?

Mix either acetone, which is basic nail polish remover, or clear rubbing alcohol with powdered bleach. You've just made chloroform...

How about blowing up someone's car?

Make a solution of 50% nitric acid, 50% sulfuric acid. Be extremely careful. You clumsy fucks shouldn't even attempt this. Add water. Be careful! After adding water, mix in 1 part glycerin to every 5 parts acid. Let the solution

cure for a whole day. This is nitroglycerin. All of these items are available at your local Home Depot...

Get your house. Have your kids. Chances are, if you really feel this need to shine and rock jewelry and push dick hardening cars, then you should just do it. Fuck what I say. Get yourself a good woman, or an African-American woman if you like your hamburgers spit on, and settle the fuck down. Don't hate the world if you really want to be loved. In trying so hard to be loved through hate, you just become hated. Mainly, hated by your own pathetic self...



I lost my virginity down by the water, in back of a hospital. Very close to, if not bordering a small violent Baltimore project community called Cherry Hill. I grew up there until I was 12 then we, my mother and I, moved to another set of housing projects off Martin Luther King Jr. boulevard. The woman I lost my virginity to was one of my mother's friends. A fellow crackhead, like my mother, she was. I didn't know much better, I was fifteen. We fucked, the condom popped, and I caught something called NGU. Non-gonococcal urethritis, NGU is an acronym for. First time in some pussy, good too, and three days later I think I have a shard of glass lodged in the shaft of my penis. Taking a piss was an hour long ordeal, I tell you. Not a good way to kick off my life as a sexually active teenager. For revenge, I dipped an 8-ball of crack into ammonium nitrate and gave it to her to smoke. I rushed her. I told her to hurry up and get high because I was horny and I wanted a second go-round. The lady smoked a piece of that rock and she damn near died. We were behind that same hospital, and I walked her stumbling ass over to the emergency room and got out of there. She has permanent brain damage.

I thought about using a similar tactic, dirty drugs, to

'SAM' to my next mark . But, I decided a next generation Molotov Cocktail would be more effective.

A next generation Molotov Cocktail is pretty simple to make. In my garage I poured gasoline into an empty 22 ounce beer bottle, halfway up. Then I stuffed cloth into the neck of the bottle. Nice and snug, leaving only a thin tail peeking out for me to light. Next, I jam in a chlorine tablet, the big stupid kind, and it takes me a while to get it into the already crowded neck. Can't let the tablet mix with the gas. That's how the double whammy happens. You get two explosions for one cocktail with this one, plus a sort of napalm effect to whoever gets the flaming chlorine gas solution on their skin or clothing. After I finished taping the neck of the bottle tightly, I gathered my contingency items and headed to the place where I lost my virginity...

Years before when I was in Peru, I accomplished a little more than setting up that 'connect' for the Master. I found out that Paulo was a member of an international gang known as Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13. I didn't think much of it at the time, Paulo was still just a cocaine farmer working for others. Still a sort of peasant. But then the MS-13 gang became as large as it is today, and Paulo, thanks in no small part to me, was now a 'shot caller' or major boss down there. Money will do that for a guy. Paulo, whom I've spoken to rarely since, says he's eternally in my debt. It just so happened that my latest mark, the SAM, was the steady girlfriend of a low ranking member of the Baltimore chapter of MS-13. By low ranking, I mean he was expendable.

Paulo sets it up that this low ranking member, along with my mark, would meet with some other members of the local gang at the hospital parking lot at midnight. The scheduled security guard, a Puerto Rican, had been bought off. He wouldn't show his face in the lower parking lot where we were gathering tonight, I'd been told. They, the gang members, were also told that a black guy would show up, and that black guy was me. My initial safety was

assured from Paulo himself, and the way this gang operates, no low ranking member dared ask any prying questions.

So I'm standing there remembering my first sexual encounter, and there are the seagulls I used to shoot with BB guns and the filthy water. In attendance now are maybe 10 Latin guys, tattoos, young and short as fuck, and 4 girls. My mark is the girl with the darkest hue, the half-black girl. She is stumbling and wasted. Potty mouth too. Nigger this. Motherfucker that. The only half-black girl and she's the loudest one here.

Send a message huh? Send a message to me meant: hit them all if you have to. These MS-13 fools pack big guns however. Might not be pretty.

I walk up and I give high fives and someone tries to pass me a joint, which I refuse. The boss of bosses from Peru has vouched for me, and I'm sure these kids are wondering why. I size up the crowd. The cocktail bomb won't kill them. At least I think it won't. It'll definitely send a message of some sort. Oh well, I say to myself. This girl is probably a snitch and maybe these are all potential snitches. Whatever. I never ask 'why' when executing a contract. Bad, horrible business move that is. I'll do what I do and I'll get my next payment of 9 thousand and maybe I'll go to Vegas next week. I might even go to New York to see Victoria...

I walk to my car saying I'll be back. I'm not lying, but I'm not getting out of the car. I light the bottle between my legs. Then I speed over and I toss the bottle right at the black girls feet.

Boom.

The explosion was more violent than I had anticipated. The girl, my mark, gets burned very badly. Gasoline chloride sears the girl's flesh, and she makes sounds like she's having intense orgasms.

When I drive away, a dude, a real stalwart he must have been, he shoots out my back window. I keep driving.

I'm at the stoplight before you get to the Hanover Street bridge and I feel a bullet whizzing by my head.

The small details, they snowball.

My focus is my God.

My focus is my salvation.

I duck low and roll out the car holding a folding-stock, modified, fully automatic AK-47. I let the car behind me have it, aiming for the front windshield. I get shot, but I barely feel the slug ripping through my left shoulder.

My focus is all powerful.

I keep shooting. I don't get shot, or shot at again. Fucking great, I think. 3rd world revolution style shootouts in the middle of the street, that's the shit that gets your ass caught. But the guy who shot me, he'll never do a day in jail, unless they have prisons in hell. I'm back in my car, my poor faithful car, the one Trina liked so much, and I'm speeding over the bridge at a million miles an hour. This car is finished, I say to myself. Evidence with leather seats, it is now. Right away I call Chicken George, I rarely call him like this, and I tell him he has to send somebody to steal and burn my fucking car. Now.

I don't want to go home. Also, I'm bleeding slowly but steadily. George responds quickly to my requests and has one of his 'ladies' drop me off a block from Africa's apartment. I walk the rest of the way through an alley. The AK-47, I still have it. When I get to Africa's, she sees the assault rifle and sees me bleeding and it's like a light goes off in her head. But then, she always suspected I was some sort of madman.

'What the fuck happened to you?' She says.

I ignore her. I put the rifle in the bathroom, behind the toilet, then I rejoin her in her kitchenette.

Africa is reaching for my shoulder, 'Is that a bullet hole?'

I give her that look. That honest, cold, '*Bitch-don't-make-me-have-to-kill-you*' look. She later joked that she came on herself right there. She says. 'I'm not even going to try

to guess why you didn't go to a hospital.'

Africa applies pressure that stems the blood flow. She shows me the precise spot to hold, then she goes and gets a first aid kit.

'Thank you.' I sneer. 'Please tell me you've got something strong like Tylenol number 3 pills.'

'Nope. No narcotics. I could have Destiny bring over some.'

'Wouldn't that be like, stupid?'

'Um, yeah?' She offers meekly.

I nod then I say, 'Forget it. Just hurry up and sew me the hell up before I bleed to death.'

She mumbles and gets to work. Black man kills black woman with cocktail bomb. Has a big shootout with Latin gang members. Where should he run to? Where else? To Africa...



I'm stocking the vending machines at my Our Lady of St. Jude's Head Start location, and the front desk attendant says we need to talk.

I haven't visited here in a while. It took a month and some change for my shoulder to heal. In my stead, a *Labor People* temp worker has been covering my route. I had him drug tested and bonded. Servicing a vending route is not only stocking the machines, but also collecting money. And you just never know when you're dealing with temporary labor, or permanent labor for that matter.

I say nothing to the woman. I smile and raise my eyebrows. Miss America, 700 days into her nationwide promo tour, she couldn't have smiled as fake.

'That guy ya'll sent here,' she says, 'he's been hitting on our teachers and parents.'

Well, at least he hasn't been hitting on the children, I think to myself. 'That's unfortunate.' I say.

She isn't finished. 'And he doesn't put any diet soda in the soda machine whatsoever. You press the damn button for a diet soda and you get root beer.'

Now that's funny. I want to smile so badly. 'I'll have a talk with his company.' I say.

'Excuse me?' she says.

'His company,' I repeat. 'He works for a labor service. I've been out sick the past seven weeks.'

'Oh. So he doesn't work for your company?'

'No ma'am.'

'Well in that case, I'm going to need your supervisor's information? Your company needs to adopt better background checking practices. I've been in this business for years and I don't mean no harm, but this man just smelled like a sex offender or something.'

My bosses' information huh? Why is it that a young black man always has to have his boss talked to? I already know where she's going with this.

'Miss, I own these vending machines.' I say.

'Oh. Okay.' She says. Black women hate to be wrong. Here comes that venom. She's about to show me who's really boss. 'Well what I was going to tell whoever owns these machines is that the machines are no longer welcome here.'

I know what you're thinking. I'm not going to kill her. 'But ma'am.' I say. 'The gentleman who was servicing my route is no longer doing it. I'm back now. And I have plenty diet sodas in my truck.'

A glance down at the woman's fingers. No rings. No band. I would bet pay on half a murder contract that she has at least 3 children. She's speaking to me like I'm one of them. 'It's too late for that sir,' she says. 'You weren't here. You didn't hear the things he said. He made everyone feel uncomfortable.'

'Did he make you feel uncomfortable?' I ask.

'Oh God no,' she says and she's getting louder. 'He could tell the kind of woman I am. Don't nobody play with

me like that.'

'I'm not sure I understand.'

She says, 'If he would have told me what he told that young girl teacher, I would have cut him. That young girl teacher just graduated high school last year.'

That word 'cut', the way she said it, could be indirectly twisted into a threat. I pull out my notepad. I say, 'So what all did he say? If you know.'

The woman sort of gathers herself, seeing I'm writing this down. News camera, microphone for this lady please, someone. 'Well he and the young girl were talking about her teaching methods at first. God knows why. Then he told her that the word of the day should be legs...'

I brace for the punch line.

'He told her that they should go somewhere private and spread the word.'

I shake my head.

'That's not all.' She says, 'He told the white girl teacher Megan that he wanted her to sit on his lap so they could straighten things out.'

'Did this woman complain?'

'No, but this is a place of business. That is not professional.'

'Got it,' I say. 'Any other offensive remarks?'

'He told one of our parents, another young girl, that his face is leaving in 30 minutes, and for her to be on it.'

'That's just corny.' I say.

'I'm telling you. Just tacky. Handsome man too. Looks like a cross between Will Smith and Denzel Washington. Fine looking.'

I fake chuckle. 'Sounds okay to me. But I'm a guy.'

'Oh yeah,' she snaps her finger to help herself remember, 'he told the young teacher once that she had great legs, and asked her what time do they open?'

I've actually seen this teacher. Tall with supermodel quality legs. 'Maybe this guy is a comedian, I say.'

'That may be, but this isn't some comedy show. You

don't tell the Head Start director that her pants must be from outer space because her booty is out of this world.'

'And you say he never insulted you?'

'Nope. He was smiling at me all funny one day, so I warned him that I would cut off his Wang if he said one word to me. He still be looking at my butt all the time. Pervert. And black men wonder why we say they all dogs.'

'So you threatened him?' I say.

'I didn't say that.'

'Cutting off a man's Wang could be interpreted as a direct threat. At least to a man with a Wang.'

'Well he needs to watch his damn mouth.' She says.

I close my notepad. I hadn't actually written a thing. Just made a funny drawing of her, 'Okay. I'll report this to *Labor People*. I'll probably have to call this man to testify in contract court over the removal of my machines.'

The woman, she just stares.

'You see ma'am,' I say, 'I'll sue *Labor People* for fiscal damages, and they will in turn claim that their employee was threatened.'

'I wasn't going to do nothing to that man.' She says, and she isn't loud anymore.

'Also, if you indeed said you would cut off his Wang, that is a form of sexual misconduct. I assume you are not a salaried employee. I'll have to speak to the Head Start sponsor company, Christian Charities. If it gets ugly, it's possible they'll freeze all funding to this program until this problem is resolved, which could take months, maybe years.'

'I mean,' she stammers, 'I guess it's not your fault he said those things. You said you were out sick right?'

'Right.'

'For what? If you don't mind me asking.'

'Cancer.'

'But you're so young.'

'Bad genes.' I say.

'So sorry to hear that. Cancer? Good Lord Jesus. Well I

guess I'll talk to the director on your behalf mister...'

'Herman.'

'And what's your last name?'

'That's it.'

'Oh. Well maybe the machines can stay mister Herman. You say you have diet soda in your truck?'

'Yes ma'am. I'll give you a couple free of charge, just for looking out for a struggling black man.'

The woman smiles but no teeth show. 'Okay, that's good. I like seeing a young black man not out here selling drugs or killing people. Your mother must have raised you good.'

How could I respond to that? 'Thank you.' I manage.

'And before you go mister Herman, I have a list of people who lost change in the soda machine.'

'No problem.' I say, 'I'm glad that man didn't say anything to you. Could have gotten ugly huh?'

'Real ugly.' She says.

Speaking of ugly, this woman is exactly that. Huge glasses. No shape. 5 stomachs, unless one of the stomachs are her breasts. Too short. Long torpedo feet. Pro wrestler neck. A decent mustache. Her hair is in a ponytail, snatched and held taut by a worn circle of elastic and fabric.

'I just can't thank you enough for this. I'll get you the sodas. You get me that list.' I say, turning.

'Yes sir,' she says, and she's talking to my back. 'And because you're so nice. I'll let your machines stay.'

...And because I don't have any imported rat poison handy, I'll let you live...

...And, the only reason you wanted my machines gone, you four legged bitch, is because your Denzel Washington dream guy didn't have anything dirty to say...

to you.

New Year's Eve, the whatever anniversary of my first contract murder. The thing about being an illegal independent contractor is, you can't buy a car brand new with a suitcase filled with hundred dollar bills, but you can party *really* hard.

For example, I show up at a New Years Eve get-together in Harlem and I need help carrying all the shit. I have a case of champagne, 250 a bottle retail. 5 "Baltimore style" seafood dishes, courtesy of Nancy and my peeps at my old catering job, each dish in aluminum trays labeled with reheating instructions. For the weed smokers, I brought an ounce of 'Sour Diesel', a highly potent exotic marijuana, stuffed inside one of 25 New Year's Eve themed teddy bears. The teddy bear without a sport coat and slippers, deep inside his furry ass is the weed...

Pick a few days to break loose. To break tradition. New Year's Eve, the night before the world's birthday,

that's my time. My evening. I'm also a prompt, time conscious kind of guy, and this holiday is the only one where black people actually show up on time to party. I arrive and the party is brimming. 30 minutes till midnight...

30 minutes until I get another chance to kiss Victoria.

I've come here for "X" number of years, and each time I miss my chance to kiss Victoria. But I have to remain persistent. Seven times you fall, eight times you get up. All that bullshit.

A room full of beautiful people and I'm so ugly. Cheeks of stone and it takes a weightlifter's effort to smile. The New York black community's best and brightest are here. A doctor over there. A popular pro athlete nearby. A chart topping R&B trio hamming it up. Great skin on everybody. The latest fashions. Gossip told with one animated hand, a drink or a smoldering blunt in the other. No other place I frequent, however infrequently, makes me feel like such a failure. These are the peers I never got to compete with. The successful Historical Black College graduates. Distinguished restaurant and nightclub owners. And me, I have an aching bullet hole in my shoulder. Still have pain when I raise my arm.

My first contract murder happened on a New Year's Eve way back when, here in New York. I used a sniper rifle to destroy a reality TV star's head. Ten minutes and 43 seconds later I get to my car and there's Victoria.

Victoria is a celebrity, though I didn't know that until she told me. She's all nerves before she sees me. Her friend, the reality TV star, had just been killed right next to her. Now she's running up to me. Her face is blank, erotic terror as she ducks and crouches behind my leg. Her little black dress is dirty and torn. Trying to get away from the kill zone, Victoria had been trampled. If she needed protection, well, she'd found the right guy.

She's not afraid of me. There's a crazy sniper on the loose, but that crazy sniper couldn't possibly be me.

Everybody knows that snipers are psycho looking guys with three names, like Lee Harvey Oswald or John Allen Muhammad.

Moments earlier, I almost couldn't shoot that TV star. Victoria was standing near her, blocking my shot. Victoria, the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

Victoria needs a ride. Anywhere, just away from here.

'I'll pay you.' She says, breathing heavily, fingers dug into the backs of my knees.

I love you, I respond, breathing softly, but I'm not speaking outside my own mind.

There's a man on a roof nearby. He has a bullet hole in his temple and I put it there. Beside him is the bolt action snipers rifle. Beneath his dead body, a pistol. Gift from Chicken George, the rifle was. I won't say where I got the pistol. First order of business when I get back to Baltimore is to get a new snipers rifle. I can't breathe without one of those things.

Remember how to make chloroform? That's how I got the guy. This guy, who had a middle name, he was the last person eliminated from the dead TV star's reality show. Big gym rat he was, bad breath. Steroids I know it. The dead TV star, after eliminating him, told the entire world that this man was secretly gay. It was the truth. He didn't take that too well, and the dead reality TV star spit in his face. After she slapped him.

The guy on the roof, he was an ex- marine, but he was no trouble for me at all .

Victoria is behind my leg, and I load one last box into the trunk. The boxes in my trunk are filled with candy for the 7 gumball machines I'd recently purchased. I tried gumball machines for a year after that, but they don't make money unless you have hundreds of them. Not worth the gas you burn refilling them really. After the gumball machines, I tried snack and soda machines...

Uptown, from midtown to Harlem, I take Victoria.

'How can I thank you?' She says.

'Be my friend.' I say and that was so, so brave of me.

'That's so sweet,' she says. 'Hell yeah, I'll be your friend.'

She writes her number on an expired insurance card, which is lying around for some reason.

Between midtown and Spanish Harlem, Victoria had sent and received a series of text messages with her phone. I'm about to find out to whom she was communicating.

Victoria, she's a singer. She used to sing background for major pop stars as a teenager. She is best known for singing choruses on rap records. She has a thick New York accent when she speaks. Her hair is weird and curly and I figure she's black mixed with something other than white. Perhaps Korean or Native American...

The thing about making a profession out of killing black women is, you know you *do not* deserve one of the handful of cool black women that may reveal themselves. Even though they could save countless lives. They could perhaps soothe you. King Kong you.

We park in front of a building and Victoria is talking on the phone. Then out of the building emerges the best looking guy I've ever seen. The type of guy who even the most confident man can't help but get a bit jealous of. He's wearing a wife beater and it's dead winter. His shoulders are round and there is no collarbone visible. He walks like he can't be killed. Tight curly hair, tapered on the sides, with hair sheen applied regularly. Perfect white teeth. NBA shooting guard tall. The way he smirks, walks, moves, is not like me at all. Another level, he is. And as he's walking towards my car like he can't be killed, I'm thinking of Aikido and how I could break his wrist if he grabs me. Turn his palm back to his face and apply pressure. Snap. Please grab me, I almost whisper aloud. Victoria gets out of the car and she's hanging from his neck. She's so tiny and he's so big. She's so beautiful and I'm so damned.

The guy looks over at me, my car. 'You pay him yet?'

He says.

Sad little killer. Never got yourself a Victoria. Not once. Just fire breathing crack whores, chickens who snitch, and potty mouthed escorts for you. Angry little hack. Cab driver killer.

'He's not a hack. He's just being a gentleman.' Victoria says.

More talk between them. Mainly she talks, he listens, eyes wide. At first, details of the murder and her getting trampled. Next I'm being vouched for.

The guy leans into my passenger side window. Big forearms and all that hunk swagger. 'You're welcome to come inside bro. We're having our first annual New Year's Eve get-together.'

This won't be much of a party now, thanks to me, and there will more than likely be police investigators here eventually. They will ask Victoria questions which could lead to them asking *me* questions. I can't risk it.

'Maybe next year.' I say.

'Okay dude.' He says, 'Thanks for giving her a ride.'

This guy turns and effortlessly swoops up Victoria, and she blows a playful kiss and waves at me. Then he carries her away, and I explode within. Like a fireman shielding a child from a towering inferno, he slowly rushes her to safety. Meanwhile, *I* am that towering inferno. Watching him carry her away enraged me almost to the pull-out-my-pistol snapping point. Until I started crying. I cried and I drove, and every sad song on the radio cried with me. I kept crying, perfectly crying, all the way to my motel room in New Jersey.

I called Victoria two more times before I saw her next. Once to check the number and we ended up chit-chatting, which was very difficult for me to do without plucking my lips like a monkey from sheer happiness. The second time I phoned was to ask her if there was going to be another New Years Eve party, and was I invited. A day has not passed in which I do not daydream about Victoria, since

that night I met her.

That was whatever years ago.

Ten minutes till I get my kiss. The New Years Eve kiss rule these folks up here in Harlem abide by is: *Close your eyes. Scream 'Happy New Year!' and open your eyes. Kiss the first person you see of the opposite sex.*

Victoria's boyfriend has been the recipient of a few kisses. That figures. It's hard to get rebound positioning on that guy. Some years it has been other guys. Never me. As for Victoria's hunk, he's in jail at the moment. Something about getting pulled over with too many baggies of powder cocaine.

One year, a very prominent rapper kissed Victoria. I swear to God he shoved me right out of the way. Hey! Stop cheating!

Victoria smokes weed and she drinks and she puffs cigarettes. Her best friend has a gigantic ass. A big girl with a big ass. She's an interior designer by trade, the big girl, but she should have went into adult film. That ass on Victoria's friend is distracting I tell you.

Darwin was wrong. Not about evolution, that happened. I mean, he was wrong about natural selection. There's nothing natural about selection. Provided with the correct information, women would select men like myself more. The Victoria's of the world need to be protected. It's not natural. People unlike me, weaklings they are for the better part, they shape the world against me. Jails and mental hospitals filled with me. Churches and snobby New Year's Eve parties filled with them.

I'm such a mess. I'm ready to quit killing tonight. I've really wanted to quit killing since the night I first met Victoria. I swear to myself on this night that if I get my kiss, I will indeed quit killing.

I imagine that kiss. I imagine the sparkling milky way above, and I imagine Victoria grinning after she discovers it's me kissing her. I get bold while driving north on the Jersey turnpike. Every year, I preach to myself the gospel

of me kissing Victoria while passing each turnpike exit. I pump myself up real good until I get around exit 7 or so. As soon as I hit the George Washington bridge, I get terrified.

When I arrived earlier, Victoria gave me a warm hug. I gave her the teddy bear without the sport coat and slippers.

'Stick your hand up his butt.' I said. Victoria was already tipsy. She stuck her hand up the bear's ass. I should have put a diamond ring up there too. Got down on one knee.

5 minutes left. I sip a glass of champagne and chew on a handful of breath mints I'd snatched from a bowl. I lose Victoria in the thickening crowd for a second, but then I find her. She's by the kitchen, standing with the big butt girl and a female rapper friend. The female rapper and Victoria's boyfriend are cousins and are roommates in this apartment.

The secret mind of a career bachelor. I should have been here as a pro baseball player or a cosmologist. I could say with a drink in one hand, 'I study the cosmic microwave background radiation and thousand-light-year-wide clouds of hydrogen gas.' But I cheated on Trina Walls and here I am.

Seconds left now.

10. *I close the distance between myself and Victoria. Fuck the rules. I'm not closing my eyes.*
9. *I'm going to jam my tongue in her mouth and fry my tongue in her stomach acid.*
8. *I'm going to grab her butt. Yep, while I kiss her.*
7. *I wonder if her spit tastes like cigarettes?*
6. *They say only men and whores smoke cigarettes.*
5. *They shouldn't say that about Victoria. At least not around me.*
4. *Not that I'm into violating a person's first amendment rights, by the way.*

3. *Give yourself to me Victoria and I will at once abandon Africa.*
2. *I will be your slave Victoria. Steal me from Africa.*

ONE...

The whole party was counting down. I'm in prime position, standing right in front of Victoria. Somebody hits the lights.

Darkness.

Happy New Years!

The lights come back on...

Honk. Confetti. Hooray. Honk.

Horror.

There is a female to male transsexual at 12 o'clock, gender bending the rules. She is kissing Victoria, hot, violent and deep. Tiny fingers on her ass.

I drive up here each year with the innocent hope of a little boy in my heart, but each year that hope is ripped out of me. Each New Year my hope is replaced and I am forced to drive home in crying agony, wondering if I will ever leave Harlem on a New Year's day with anything more than these tiny daggers in my heart.



Run.

Don't walk, run.

Toward that thing, toward those things that make you most afraid...

RUN!

That's *your* fear over there. Claim what is yours. Take ownership of your fear. Roaches in your house. Fear is crawling. Stomp fear.

If you fear flying, buy a plane ticket. Fly intercontinental.

If you fear dark alleys, buy a gun. Walk around at

night.

Me, I fear the one thing I shouldn't. Otherwise I am invulnerable. Unflappable.

But you fear death. Why? No one has ever lived that did not die? Even your beloved Jesus couldn't stay forever.

Nor could the prophet Moses. Muhammad. Albert Einstein. Michael Jackson...

My fear is crippling. You fear falling from great heights. Me, I could spend days on top of a tall building with my high powered rifle.

You fear God? Are you kidding me? Your bible says you were molded in God's image. So you really fear yourself. That's ridiculous, to fear yourself.

Many of you have known my fear, but you somehow overcame it and now you are not afraid. Rich or poor, you are not afraid.

Paralyzing, is my fear. One moment, I'm a force of nature. The next, sad. Just fucking sad.

You say you fear the police? Dummy. You *are* the police.

My fear walks. It breathes. It wants me, maybe. I can't be too sure it wants me. I sure don't want *it*. It's scary.

Victoria, horrifying.

Africa, not at all.

But my fear is not a woman, not really.

Run! Top speed. Draw your weapon.

You'd better not fear something silly like cats. Cats are sneaky you say? Well if a cat can outsmart you, you're dumb. Dumb people fear everything.

I need to heed my own advice. I try once a year. I drive to New York, determined to conquer my fear. But here I am now, running away.

Women, if you fear your husband, leave him. Hot grit that bastard if you have to.

Women, if you fear getting raped, don't wear provocative clothing. Learn Kung fu. Buy a small concealable pistol. Even if you have been raped before, you survived.

Fight back. Learn. Evolve. Fear is the opposite of evolution.

Fear is religion. Heaven and Hell. Fear is your pastor and his V-12 Mercedes. His sparkling Caddy. His house in some gated upscale sub-division you'll never visit.

My fear involves compromise. Sacrifice. Things that are hard. Hard for me, some of us. Easy for others, most of you.

If you fear being made a fool of, educate yourself. Be determined about it. If you are a meatball, don't talk too much. Listen a lot.

I'll tell you very soon, my exact fear, but listen a little more. Even fear itself is not worth fearing. Confront it. The biggest thing. It's nothing.

Caution is good. Don't spend like a fool. Don't take your hard earned money and gamble or make all or nothing investments. Don't cosign for anything by the way. Ever.

In orders of magnitude, caution is the moon. Fear is the visible universe.

Caution is a million. Fear is a googol. A one with a hundred zeros.

A googolplex is fear, a one with a googol zeroes.

Start counting to a googolplex. Halfway there you can be afraid. By then every atom in the universe will have dissolved, or the universe will have long before collapsed in to a gravitational singularity. Heat death, or the big crunch, they call it.

Okay, you ready? Here it is, um...

I think of Victoria and I can't say it. I'm such a monster. Guiltless chickens frequently die by my hands. I have bad karma. Good credit though.

Victoria, I fail you.

I can't say it Victoria. I can't pull you close and whisper the things hidden within my secret mind.

Right now I'm driving home. Radio off. I'm in the far right lane, slogging along. Shit, I should have stepped up.

Done *something*.

But that's it. I fear my own success. I fear happiness. I fear love. I won't go near love. I get queasy when I picture myself and Victoria holding hands, walking through some park in love. But I *do* want to walk through a park with Victoria. I just don't want to forgive black women. And I don't want to be forgiven either. I just want to cry and kill and hope and lose. I want attention, and I want to be left alone. I want to be eternally remembered, and I want to be quickly forgotten. Like I said before, I'm a mess.

It's a week after New Year's day, a Sunday, and Africa has made plans for the two of us. Her uncle gave her tickets to a Ravens playoff game. A 4:15 start time. Also, a friend invited her and a guest to a comedy club that Sunday night, which was to feature a popular black female comedian. This comedian, the headliner, was pretty funny. Visually, she has a nice athletic body, but her face is primate looking, something she plays up with self deprecating humor. Okay, I say to Africa, pick you up at 3 o'clock...

First, before I hook up with Africa, I have to see my family. It's grandma's 77th birthday. Early afternoon party at her house.

Here's my family.

My mother, who won't be there because she's MIA.

Aunt Lisa and her husband, uncle Larry.

My younger cousins Jeanetta and Larrisha, both now adults.

My granny of course, and her 5th of Montebello Long Island Iced Tea. I seldom see the two of them separated.

And lastly my favorite family member, Aunt Penny.

I used to have a crush on Aunt Penny growing up. Everything she wears is skin tight, and she's now well over 50. Her tits either defy gravity or her bras are industrial

strength. Her butt is wide as well as her hips. She never bore any children and she always has a new boyfriend or two, usually far younger than she is. When I was a child, maybe 4 or 5, she would reach under the table while we were eating and play with my crank. My mother didn't care. They both would later say it was to make sure I didn't turn out gay. The tactic worked I guess. When Aunt Penny jerked me off at age 12 however, that may have been a bit much. But don't think bad about Aunt Penny. She's special.

I've had this BMW SUV since my last contract. It's pretty nimble and has more room than my old car. Africa loves it. When I'm parallel parking in front of grandma's, I spot Jeanette. She has a newborn in a car seat carrier, all swaddled. This is news to me. I didn't even know she was pregnant.

'Dev-lyn.' She says, and she kind of sings my name, riding out each syllable. Jeanette favors Aunt Penny. Same round smiling face. Same body type. Jeanette is a devout Christian though. Devout may be a weak description. Bible thumper may be more appropriate.

'Hey Jean.' I say, 'When did you have a baby?'

'November,' she says. 'I gained 45 pounds but it was a blessing. The word calls upon us to be fruitful. The million dollar question is when are *you* going to have another child?'

My family, the women besides my grandmother, keep in loose contact with my daughter's mother. They see her out and about from time to time.

'I don't know,' I say to her. 'I'm scared of women these days.'

'Don't be too scared,' she says. 'A lot of our black men these days are forgetting women altogether and living on the down low, if you know what I mean. That's an abomination in the eyes of God.'

A young man emerges from Jeanette's car. I wasn't trying but I gave him a suspicious look. Bad habit I guess.

‘That’s my fiancé Brian.’ She says, ‘He is studying to become a reverend. His daddy is co-pastor at our church.’

I shake Brian’s hand. What’s up brother kind of stuff.

‘Your sister here?’ I say to Jeanette.

‘Yes.’ She says and she’s singing again, ‘My little sister has got man troubles. You know she lives here now, right?’

I don’t get into gossip. I smile and the 4 of us go inside.

‘Oh my God. Look who showed up.’ Aunt Penny is strutting toward me, arms spread. She’s wearing a one piece black cat suit and red stiletto knee high boots.

‘Devlyn,’ I hear above all voices, ‘you come right over here before I fuck you up.’ This is my grandmother. One in the afternoon and she’s already tanked.

I hug everyone. Aunt Penny a little longer than the rest. Uncle Larry is on the couch watching football. He’s a good man I guess. Good at least, to my aunt. He works as an overhead mechanic for Baltimore Gas and Electric. BGE, they call the company these days.

Uncle Larry says, ‘Who you got Devlyn? Green Bay or Arizona?’

I’m not into sports anymore. I personally think it’s foolish the way men follow sports. Especially those 24 hour sports news networks. It’s like *General Hospital* for guys. *All My Children* for male couch potato stay-at-homes.

‘Arizona.’ I say because I don’t want to get him started.

‘The Cardinals ain’t never won a championship in the Super Bowl era,’ he says. ‘I got Green Bay.’

‘I’m going to the game later.’ I say.

He says, ‘Damn boy. You got playoff tickets? I looked on the internet for tickets, and some people were selling them for 700 apiece. That’s too rich for my blood, especially if *my* team isn’t playing. I guess you be making big money with those vending machines, huh?’

‘Making a killing.’ I say.

Uncle Larry says, ‘The Ravens are sorry as hell any-

way. They lost their last 4 games. You might as well say they backed into the damn playoffs. The Pittsburgh Steelers. That's my team.'

Uncle Larry is from York, PA. He met my Aunt Lisa at a Baltimore nightclub and got her pregnant with Jeanetta the same night. He never went back home. Not once.

Aunt Lisa is working the kitchen. She's wearing an apron. Her hair is an elegant graying afro. Aunt Lisa was always the classiest sister. My mom, well anyways. I'll let you guess what Aunt Penny always was.

'You hungry Devlyn?' Aunt Lisa says.

'A little.' I say.

'Shit. We all hungry.' My grandma again.

'Stop cussing ma.' Aunt Lisa says, 'You know Jeanette brought the baby.'

'Bitch that baby ain't even half a year yet. She can't understand no cussing.'

'Ma, we talked about this.'

'Yes bitch, and I told you this is my house, my birthday, and my goddamned rules. Don't fuck with me today Lisa.'

'You shouldn't take the Lord's name in vain, Grandma.' Jeanette says.

'Aw shut up child. Your mother gets on my nerves. Like I told you in the hospital when you had your baby; your mother, that damn Lisa, has always been difficult. Since *before* she was born. When I had Lyn, easy. Penny, easy. Lisa, 21 hours of hard goddamn labor.'

'Touchdown!' Uncle Larry stands up.

I look around. 'Where's Larrisha?'

'Upstairs.' Aunt Penny says, 'Crying over that Negro.'

'That nigger ain't do shit to her,' Grandma says. 'She's a little ho. Plain and simple. She had sex with her boyfriend's cousin and his best friend at the same time. His best friend told him what happened and he put Larrisha's ass out. That's why she's been staying over here. I don't know where she gets being a ho from.'

We all try not to look at Aunt Penny.

I say, 'Okay grandma. How much do you want for your birthday?'

Grandma smiles. She doesn't say a word before she fires up a cigarette.

'Ma. The baby is upstairs.' Aunt Lisa sings from the kitchen.

'Shut up bitch. Always signifying.'

'How much do you want ma?' I say. I pull out a knot of cash. Ten thousand maybe, I didn't count it.

'Well, I've got to pay the taxes on the house soon. Then I got to pay the damn cable bill for all them pay-per-view movies Larrisha orders.'

'Say a number grandma.'

'Could I have 500?'

'Take this.' I give her two thousand dollars.

'Shit,' Uncle Larry says, 'I need some money too. I'm a grandfather now.'

I always do this. I come here on my grandmother's birthday and dispense the proceeds of murder amongst my family.

I give uncle Larry 200.

Aunt Lisa gets 500.

I don't give Brian shit.

Aunt Penny, she gets a thousand. 'Get the girls.' I say to her.

Aunt Penny heads for the stairs. Her heels are loud. I shouldn't be peeking at my aunts ass. I shouldn't want another hand-job from her either, but I'm already damaged goods.

The girls bounce down the steps. The baby isn't with them.

'I heard there was a skinny nigga down here giving out money.' Larrisha says. She's lighter-skinned than everyone in the family. When we discuss Larrisha privately, my grandmother and Aunt Penny both swear me up and down that Uncle Larry isn't her father.

‘Come here and give me my hug first.’ I say.

I hug my cousin and my nose tells me Larrisha has picked up a weed habit. Shouldn’t be much of a red flag, but we all think she has a little bit of my mother in her.

Jeanette gets a thousand. ‘Take care of that baby.’ I say.

I give Larrisha 500 . She says, counting the money, ‘I saw your daughter a few weeks ago.’

Aunt penny quickly adds. ‘Yep Devlyn, me and Larrisha was at Mondawmin and we saw the both of them. That little girl is so pretty. She’s yellow skinned, but I swear she looks just like her father.’

Like I said, I’ve never seen my daughter.

I would beat a man back from the dead, drag him down to hell and kill him again, to hold my little girl...

Like I said, Trina will not let me see my daughter.

‘Trina asked about you too.’ Larrisha says.

I don’t want to cry so I don’t speak.

‘She’s pregnant again. I don’t mean no harm, but that shocked the shit out of me.’ Larrisha says.

‘Shut the hell up.’ Aunt Penny mumbles to Larrisha.

Larrisha ignores Aunt Penny. She is speaking to the room, but everyone is looking at me. ‘They say Trina’s friend who disappeared turned her gay. They was in nursing school together.’

This was the first time I heard that Trina was gay. I wanted to smile or I wanted to scream. I’m not sure.

‘She’s pregnant as hell now though.’ Aunt Penny says, exhaling. ‘Her face is glowing...’

Larrisha heads back upstairs. ‘Mommy.’ She calls to Aunt Lisa.

‘What?’

‘Tell me when the food ready.’

‘Whatever.’ Aunt Lisa says.

‘Ya’ll bitches crazy.’ Guess who said that.

I am visibly upset. Any words, reports about my daughter and I damn near lose it. Aunt Penny sits me

down on the love seat and she's softly caressing my knee...

'First down!' And this time it's Brian yelling and clapping. Uncle Larry is just smiling at him.

Welcome to the family.



The Ravens game wasn't anything special. It was as cold as liquid nitrogen up in the stands where we sat, and we lost. Well more precisely, they lost. The score was 45-15 in the 3rd quarter. While the teams were changing goal posts for the final period, I was pulling Africa towards the nearest exit. Africa in a mink coat and a pair of stilettos is a sight to behold. Dating an escort becomes just that. She escorts you. Aesthetically improves you. Africa is good at making me look good.

It's not really a big deal, by the way, but Africa is a squirter.

What's a squirter? Female orgasms. G-spot stimulation. Can't keep a set of dry bed sheets with this girl. Her bed has plastic covers over the mattress like she's 4 years old. When excited she convulses and sprays a clear liquid, slightly thicker than water. She'll sort of push me off of her and then sploosh, all in my face and chest. First time she squirted me I was a bit perturbed to say the least. Then she showed me other girls squirting on the internet. There's a whole sub-genre of porn dedicated to squirting.

85 percent of all internet revenue is directly related to porn. I don't own a computer. Either I'm a Neanderthal or I'm too cautious. Show me a man who doesn't masturbate however, and I'll show you a corpse.

We're In Hooters, and Africa is eating wings with celery and blue cheese. She's giving me those Christmas tree green eyes and the blue cheese left on her lips is supposed to represent my semen. Africa, the little slut, she

always plays like this.

I don't know why they still call this place Hooters. No big tit girls in here. Not one. Just rail thin white girls everywhere, a few tiny Asians with aerosol can bodies, and a few black girls. The girlfriend of the cop serving time for the prosecutor I killed, she's behind the bar. Africa and I leave and I tip the cops girlfriend 50 bucks. She'll never know why I did that.

The Harborplace Mall sits 30 feet off the Inner Harbor. Along with the two pro stadiums four blocks west, the hotels and malls in this region represent the financial bread basket of the city. On Ravens game day Harborplace is packed. Despite the Ravens losing, this evening is no different. People stare at Africa and me a lot. Big white girl. Little apple-headed black guy. Big forehead on that guy. There is at least a mile between his eyebrows and his hairline, someone says. Africa has the baby making hips. The Betty Boop thing, it's hers. Africa wants an ice cream cone. Here we go with the symbolic semen thing again.

We've got time to kill before the comedy show starts. Africa wants to walk down by the water. Too cold for that bullshit, I say. This mall we're in, the one where Hooters is, mainly features food. A short walk away on Pratt Street is an evil twin to this mall which features more clothing and tourist stuff. Let's go there, I say.

'You're the boss, nigga.' She says.

A group of young black boys overhear Africa call me nigger. They stare, wide eyed. Now pay attention boys. This is how you're supposed to do it. Pocket full of cash. Overweight lover on your arm. A slut white girl who will swallow everything and call you every racial epithet you want her to while you nail her. Yep boys. In life, you get what you pay for. You sure do.

Pay for what you get, you surely must.

I used to pay Africa like one would any other escort. Now I pay her rent. Whenever she asks, I give her a hundred here. 200 there. Not much more though. Shit is

getting a bit tight. It's been a long time since a baseball has rolled onto my lawn...

I might have to sell my vending machines too. These gas prices are fucking my margins up.

Until you decide to marry or blow your brains out, find a girl, slut or princess, and pay the shit out of her. Tell her in no uncertain terms that you're not paying to be with her. You're sure as hell not paying her because you love her. Don't get me started. You're paying for her to leave you alone and give you space whenever you need her to. Otherwise, a woman will rearrange your life, messing up your important personal business.

At the second mall, I buy an Orioles hat and I buy Africa a purse. I'm running out of cash here. I hit the cash machine and withdraw 300 twice.

Later, Africa is tapping my shoulder. Time to go to the show...



There are zero parking spaces in front of, or on the same street as the comedy club. I circle the block a few times and Africa has an idea. She remembers that the parking garage behind the club which used to be for residents only of an upscale condominium complex, is now open for all to park for free. It's always dark in there, she says. I'm pulling into the garage and she's fiddling with my rod through my pants. No time for that, I say. Her blowjob skills are sub-par anyhow. More hand and spit than mouth and throat. Trick licking, the hookers call it. I remove her hand from my lap and now her hand is in her purse, fishing for something. A crowd of white guys are in the parking garage. Odd looking. They're standing behind the unfolded tailgate of an old blue pickup. I would have avoided them if I could've but this was a tiny two-level garage. There are no cameras I could see, and

I'm good at spotting cameras. I couldn't park so far away from them that they wouldn't have a clear view of me when I got out, and I'm not going to run or hide if they get bold. You know about me and fear.

I get out first. Africa gets out, walks over and takes my arm. Arm and arm we go and she's walking even harder than usual, click-clacking. The echo silences the white guys. To reach the stairs we have to walk right past them. Red suspenders. I think I hear a British accent on one of them. We get close and I hear something directed at us.

'Good evening sister.' One says. I don't want to stare and try to figure out who's talking. That might start trouble. Africa sucks her teeth.

'No half breed baby making tonight sister. Don't murder your own people.' British accent again.

I glance over them. Seven I count. They notice me counting.

'Pookie. What's up stick man?' One says.

'Keep walking.' I whisper to Africa.

'Crack kills.' One says.

Skinny guys are going to get '*you must smoke crack*' jokes from time to time. I should be over that stuff by this point in my life but I'm already regretting not having my pistol in my jacket pocket...



Destiny is the stage name of Africa's most trusted comrade and fellow nude dancer. A transplant from west to east, she retains only the tiniest trace of her Californian accent. The eye contacts, blue, and the long baby-doll-hair braids, that's the Cali girl still in her. Destiny says, 'Firestar! What's up bitch?'

'Hey girl.' Africa says. European style cheek kissing. Smooch-smooch.

'Hello mister Devlyn.' Destiny says to me. She kisses

my cheek and leaves a wet mark I want to wipe off. But not because I don't like her. Destiny is a little chocolate sundae. Thin but not skinny. Almost dwarf short. Bubble booty. Good pussy. Real good. Like a person drowning, it grips you, the pussy. I know this first hand. A week before last Thanksgiving, my birthday weekend, I had Africa doing her traditional reverse cowgirl. Destiny was on my face.

A local comedian is on stage. We're in a room stuffed with people at circle tables that seat four. Destiny is working. She has a white man with her who looks about 45ish. Ash blonde hair. Seventies porn star mustache, also ash blonde. He stands up and I pump his hand.

'How long you been here April?' Africa says, and we're all sitting down now. I didn't know that April was Destiny's birth name until this moment.

'We've been here for about half an hour.' Destiny says, 'The last comedian was funny as shit. This fool is okay.'

After getting off my face, Destiny had pushed Africa onto her back and went lollipop on her. I steadied myself behind Destiny. Really good inside that girl. Crooked, even. You push in your crank and her walls force you sharply to the left.

A bottle of Moet sits tilted in a bucket. Two half filled glasses sit in front of Destiny and her date. Destiny wiggles her arm high in the air. A waitress appears, a black lady, and soon we have two more glasses on the table. The seventies porn guy lights a Marlboro. He blows smoke rings. I've never figured out how people do that.

Moments into Destiny eating Africa's pussy, Africa wails loudly and squirts. A good, strong squirt too. Like the best public park water fountain and you just stick your face in there. I thought Destiny knew about Africa's squirting. I thought she was down.

Nope.

'Bitch, I know you didn't just piss in my face!'

Africa doesn't immediately respond, being weak from

that violent orgasm. Disheveled, her body is limp and flaccid, and her hair is a stinky sweat-drenched mess that sticks to her head. Africa was startled by Destiny's sudden switch to anger.

Africa manages to speak. 'That's not piss...'

'Bitch, don't nobody come like that. That's piss!' Destiny is fighting mad. I had to pull out of her, making the right turn.

'It's not pee I swear. I can show you in a movie.'

'You ain't got to show me shit, I know what piss tastes like!'

I won't even touch that one.

Africa is maybe 200 pounds even. Maybe 190. Destiny goes around 115. Regardless, Destiny pins Africa down and starts punching her in the head. Africa rolls off the bed. She covers up and she's screaming. She struggles to stand but Destiny clips her.

'Come here bitch!'

I mean, you rent a hotel room, a nice one. You get two top notch strippers, at least in your eyes. It's your birthday weekend. You have your pipe in your hand and it's throbbing even more than before. It's pulsating because these two tattooed strippers are naked and on the floor wrestling. Going at it. One has a dripping vagina that leaves wet marks wherever her butt slides. The other has a face that is dripping the first one's cum.

Yep. This was the most erotic moment I've ever had sexually. Bar none.

I didn't want to stop them. I peel off the condom and I cover the wet spot on the bed with a pillow. Then I recline. Masturbation is always an alternative.

Africa hollers. 'Devlyn! She's trying to friggin' kill me!'

Where's my video camera, I think.

'Fucking slut whore!' Destiny says, among other insults. I mean Destiny, let's not start doing the pot/kettle thing.

Only a minute or so has passed. The screams are now grunts. Any next room eavesdropper must think I'm Wilt Chamberlain up in this motherfucker.

I wish I didn't have to stop this.

I pounce on Destiny and pin her arm behind her back. She stops struggling instantly, once she feels that pressure.

'Oh so you two are going to bank me?' She says.

'Shut up.' I say. 'You're out of control. She's not lying. That's how she comes. Why would she want to piss in your face? You're her buddy. I thought you knew how she gets down.'

'I've never been with her before.' She says, 'I only did this because she told me it was your birthday.'

'She's paying you, remember that.' I say and I let her up.

Africa has retreated to the bathroom. Destiny sits Indian style on the floor and she's wiping her face. Destiny starts laughing and digs an ex pill out of her purse, and 10 minutes later I'm lining up behind that left turn pussy once again.

Reminiscing on that takes me through two glasses of bubbly. I'm brought back to the here and now by clapping. The headliner comedian, she's due up next.

Destiny is smoking a cigarette. That thing about whores and cigarettes, I get it now. Destiny mounts the seventies porno star and now she's grinding in his lap. She's probably trying to change the 'hourly' escort rate she charges into an '*all-night-with-happy-ending*' rate. The seventies stud, his brother-in-law owns this club, I find out.

I go to the bathroom. When I get back to my seat, I'm greeted by a peck from Africa, and an all out assault on black men going on onstage.

The black female comedian was on the clock.

'A black man don't believe in no candlelight dinner,' the comedian says, 'unless that nigger's gas and electric is cut off.'

I stop drinking. I'm feeling the champagne a bit too much. The comedian continues.

'Shit,' she says. Brandi in her left hand, on ice. 'A nigger thinks being honest is telling you his government name.'

'...My man calls his dick Earnest. I asked, why you call your dick Roger? He said it just don't feel right letting a no-name having nigger make all his decisions.'

She compliments the crowd. We're all good looking, she says. She recounts a story about her niece who lives in the projects. Then she's back in attack mode.

'These days,' she says, 'I don't care about a niggers personal business unless he owns that motherfucker.'

'...Can't be too many niggers in heaven cause, shit, that would be motherfucking hell!'

And to think, this woman used to play a wholesome housewife on primetime television. She's still onstage going strong when I turn to Africa.

'Bathroom time again.' I say.

'No problem.' She says.

During my last trip to the bathroom, I saw an emergency exit propped open, possibly to help vent smoke. The exit faced the parking garage. The door was unattended. As I'm walking past it, I heard hooting and hollering outside and decided to be nosey. When I got outside, I looked up at the garage where I had parked and I didn't see my truck. I take two steps forward and I hear white boys. The white boys must have smashed the window and are stealing my truck.

Not the case.

I see my truck crash through the thin cables that border the parking garage at the edges. I'm standing there and I can't do a thing as my truck plunges two stories and nose dives onto the street, right in front of me.

I look up to where the truck just smashed through the wires and I can see one of the guys. His arms are raised in celebration. Then I look at my poor truck. I've got a gun

with a silencer in there. There is no one watching me besides the white boys. Later for them. First, I've got to get that gun. A silencer will get you 25 years in jail, and the police will be undoubtedly on their way.

I climb through the windshield. I snag my wrist on tiny shards of glass. Takes some digging but I got it. I unscrew the silencer and toss it down a sewer drain.

Truthfully, I try not to get upset over the loss of material things like cars or planets, and I've never particularly disliked white people. What happens next is more about my rage over the whole Victoria episode from the week before. At this moment I feel the deep need to cut a pound of flesh out of somebody...

I sprint into the garage and up the stairs. The guys see me and they see the gun. The youngest one is the last to run. He can't be older than 18.

I shoot once and gut the back of his head.

'Billy!' One hollers, and he's running back to the kid I just shot. Bad move.

Blam!

Don't play hero.

Guys are jumping over the edge, two stories down onto the street on the far side. I'm not following them down there, or at all.

This gun in my hand used to be legal. I made it illegal when I threaded the barrel and screwed a silencer onto it. Without the silencer nozzle I couldn't get a capitol charge, but the fact that the gun is modified might be a problem when the police seize it. And they *are* coming.

Billy isn't here anymore, that is, within his mortal coil. His rear reptilian brain, missing.

I look over the back edge of the garage where the other guys jumped and one guy is on the grass, writhing in pain. Well, it was either me or gravity. He made the right choice.

No fear. No regrets. You sometimes have to run in blasting and do damage control later. Back out to my

truck, my dead truck, and it's honking and the air bags have deployed. Late, hanging out the busted front windshield, they have deployed. Glad I didn't actually *need* them.

A small crowd is watching now, and Africa is among them. I call Africa over and whisper a phone number to her 3 times. I tell her to tell the person who answers to fish something out the gutter for me.

Then they show up, Baltimore's finest officers. Friendly too. Somebody reported shots being fired. The police are startled by the sight of the truck. They didn't hear about that. Damn, is that truck yours? Yep. Hands on your head sir, they say. Turn around. Where's the gun? Up there, with Billy and the other guy. Is it yours? Yep. Legal? Yep.

But of course, I have the right to remain silent...



If you ask me, we are alone. We live in a wasteland universe. No intelligent life. Maybe slime mold somewhere in the Andromeda galaxy. Possibly some form of dolphin swimming on an ocean planet in some galaxy beyond our cosmic event horizon. Trillions of suns and planets and it's just us, and we're not here either. Time hates us. Some dickhead, whoever or why-ever designed our universe, put a fucking speed limit on us. The speed of light, they call it.

If you do the right thing and go to college, the girl you want will think you're soft. Be a tough jail bird and the girl you treasure will always think she can do better for herself.

It's always something. Nothing's ever anywhere near perfect. Get your money right and your dick develops cancer. Reconnect with that special girl, the one who got away, and you're horrified to find out she's now just a proud whoring stripper.

An orgasm lasts for a moment, and that's as good as life gets. Go for another, I say. Empty the gun. Your only chance is to stay busy. Keep it moving.

Why not commit mass murder? Bring me some fissionable material and we can make an atomic bomb. We could do it together. You and me.

You can tell me about *your* Victoria. Your punk ass friends who wouldn't bail you out of jail. Your oh-so-stupid baby's mother. Your friends and family who never listen to your ideas. Your forward thinking mind.

Fuck it all. Drive too fast. Stare down police. And for God's sake don't go near any goddamn churches. I imagine every religious woman would suck Jesus' dick if he asked her to. Lick his divine balls. If Jesus decided to steal the pussy, like his father did his mother Mary, who could a woman tell? Like father, like son.

Even the sun is trying to kill us. Thousands of years of sun worshiping and human sacrifice and the sun is getting hotter. The sun, all Gods, have the gratitude of a crack whore.

I say, worship nothing.

I say, we start over from scratch.

One day the characters in our video games will try to figure out where they come from. They'll say, 'we are beings composed of tiny indivisible particles called zeros and ones.'

The Victoria in your life, you'll never get her. That's why she's the Victoria in your life. She's your glass ceiling.

Your precious daughter, forget it. You'll never see her. In the eyes of the law, children belong to their mothers.

The Victoria in your life. She could save you. One kiss is all you want.

One day to kiss your Victoria, then hold your little daughter against your chest. Perfect day. Your daughter, calling you daddy. The Victoria in your life, calling you daddy.

Go fucking postal. Leave the gym, hit the bar. Then

leave the bar and hit the streets. Show old women your crank.

Push BMW SUV's off parking garage second floors. But run before some serious nigger pops a cap in your ass.

You live, you die. Meanwhile, the sun will one day take off her clothing, her padded bra and weave, and she'll be the size of the little old earth. Her core exposed. A white dwarf, they will call her.

Eat more chicken, less fruit. Fuck these doctors. Chicken is delicious. Who the fuck am I supposed to be, Richard Simmons up in this motherfucker?

Why haven't we had a race war yet? A Nuclear war? Peace is nothing else if not deeply disappointing.

I want to be written about. What else is worth doing? That news reporter, the annoying black female one who owns the TV station affiliate, she'll describe grizzly murder after unnerving murder. Then I'll be caught and executed or some shit, and your God will make me belly laugh as he smokes weed and tells me how he got drunk 40 days and nights in a row and his beer piss flooded the earth.

We can't even have unprotected casual sex anymore. Pathetic. You give a man a penis and he can't even use it how he wants. This fact turns women into lesbians, transitively. And it turns Don Juan types into sub-100-pounders, substantively.

Fuck it. Do what you want. Just don't push my truck off the second floor of a parking garage or spit on my hamburger or grow up to be an American black woman.

And, um, don't give up on me. Not yet.



Central bookings is slow. You get in the front door, you get un-cuffed, re-cuffed to another guy. Wait. You get strip searched, then you wait. Get booked, cuffs come off, wait. Personal belongings like your belt, wallet, watch, any

money you have, gets put in a blue fabric bag with a copper zipper. You get stuffed in a smelly crowded holding cell, wait. Wait until you fall asleep. Wake up on the floor, cold as fuck, wait. Sift through a bag breakfast. Bag lunch. See the nurse, wait. See the commissioner. 75 thousand dollar bail. Charged with possession of an illegally modified firearm.

Group shower. A little plastic bag they give you contains a baby toothbrush. A baby deodorant. A plastic razor. Two bars of hotel soap. You get two white sheets and a thin gray blanket. A yellow jumpsuit. You must wear this jumpsuit at all times when outside your cell the guard tells a bunch of you. You ride the elevator upstairs. You sleep on what amounts to a plastic fishing boat. A well spoken older correctional officer says, 'The central bookings and intake facility is always overcrowded. There are no bunks available at the moment.' Take off a shoe, that's your pillow.

Wake up and wait. You see too many people you know in here. Former childhood friends and schoolmates. Where are all the black men? Central bookings. Upstate doing a googol years. Hot breakfast, finally. The scrambled eggs are delicious. You're starving. Two warm links of sausage. A cup of juice that leaves a permanent stain on the floor if you spill it there.

You call your lawyer. He tells you to wait. A few more hours, he says. You've been paying him a retainer fee for years. He'll come through, make it happen, this guy. Now you kick back. Watch TV. Keep to yourself. Wait.

Hard to keep to yourself though, when you're all over the TV.

'That's you man!' someone says. You nod in response. On TV, the black lady news anchorwoman you've grown up watching is wearing green today. Her hair is pinned up. The detainees cheer as she reports your handiwork.

The anchor lady is a lesbian, someone says. She beat breast cancer a few years ago, an older voice adds. Every-

one laughs when some guy hollers, 'I'd fuck the dog shit out of her.'

You wouldn't fuck her. Something about that lady. Those eyes. Something concealed deep. Hidden well. She says, 'And a third man is in shock trauma...'

That 3rd guy would be the kid who jumped two stories. He cracked his pelvis, shattered both his shins.

When you were an adolescent, this TV anchorwoman hosted a science based educational program. You hated the way she spoke, her voice and tempo, but you loved the show. All the cool scientists from public television were frequent guests on her program.

She introduced you to outer space. Taught you what a black hole was. Why the moon is receding, moving away from the earth at a rate of one inch per year. Conservation of angular momentum, she called it.

She was the master of the great ending. 'Every electron in your body,' she had said when ending your favorite episode, 'every electron within you could be its own universe. Imagine then,' she said, 'the infinite possibilities... inside yourself.'

Now she's telling everyone your birth name. Saying police are still investigating the circumstances behind the double homicide. Before you got to central bookings you were in a police station. You were sitting comfortably at a table and you hadn't had a cup of coffee that good ever.

'So do you want to tell me what happened?' the white lady cop asked calmly.

'Yeah. Let's do it.' You said, then you fell silent. This cop and her sunglasses-indoors-wearing partner had tried to use the good cop/bad cop routine on you. You think you pissed off the bad cop when you ignored him. This lady sitting before you was the good cop.

'Okay Rambo, spit it out.'

'Well officer, I went out to my truck to get breath mints.' you said. 'Then they smashed my window. They tried to pull me out.'

This lady had an abnormally high number of stress lines on her forehead. She said, 'Okay, so they tried to pull you out. I'm going to take a leap of faith and guess that you fought back. What happened after that?'

'Somebody hit me and almost knocked me out I guess. When I sort of regained myself, I was being rolled toward the edge of the garage.'

'They were going to push you over the edge?'

'Yes ma'am. I keep my gun in the glove compartment. I grabbed it and rolled out the door before my truck went over the edge...'

The cop lady could have been 25 or 45, it was hard to tell. 'These were the Baby Skinheads,' she starts. 'A bunch of little punks. This is the first time that they tried to kill someone. They picked the wrong guy to start with, I'll tell you. You're pretty efficient with a gun. No wasted rounds. You hit that one kid dead center in the back of the head.'

'He turned suddenly, I think.' You said.

'So where's the silencer?' She said.

'Huh?' you reply, and there's really nothing else you should say about that.

'It doesn't take a genius to figure out you use a silencer. The chamber has been threaded. I'd say you use a seven inch silencer capable of slowing a bullet a meter or two per second below the speed of sound.'

'Do I need my lawyer?' And you're smiling now.

'No not yet.' She said, 'We're just going to book you for the gun modification. It's only a class C felony without the silencer. Something funny about all this though. The timeline is a bit off.'

'They started running at me. It happened really fast.' You said.

'Yeah-Yeah. I don't blame you. I probably would have shot those kids too, just for fucking with my BMW.'

She got up, fetched the empty coffee pot, and left the room. When she returned, the coffee pot was filled with water. She said, 'Are you camera shy?'

'Most of the time.' You replied.

'Well hon, it sucks to be you. What do you say we drink some more coffee and then we'll run past the news cameras together. Just the two of us. Lucky for me I got my hair done.'

'Lucky for you.' You said.

The cop stared at you. You didn't blink while she did this. Not once. Pouring water into the coffee maker she said, 'You're real cool Devlyn. Most people would be shaking at least a little bit after blowing away two young boys. You're just chilling over there.'

'I'm still in shock. I, I really can't believe this happened.' You said.

'Whatever.' She said, 'Either you're some sort of real serious killer or, I don't know. You ever been in the military before?'

'Not me.'

'You ever been a hit man?'

You didn't say another word. Then, after another cup of coffee for the both of you, the cop walked you outside and there were cameras everywhere. Big story for the local news. National headlines, this might make. Black man shoots two Baby Skinheads who tried to push him off the second floor of a parking garage. Four of the Baby Skinheads are being sought for questioning, and their current whereabouts are unknown. One Baby Skinhead remains in the hospital, and he refuses to cooperate with police. Something about being true to his white brothers. The same white brothers who left him to die.

You watch TV on the 3rd floor of central bookings and it's a big news day for the TV anchorwoman. The so-called lesbian. She was once married to the richest man in the state. He was from Texas, and he had heavy ties to arms manufacturers and long dead middle eastern dictators. This man died in his sleep about five years ago, on Saint Valentine's day...

A correctional officer, a Nigerian woman with bad

skin like she showers in sulfuric acid, she says the four words you're waiting to hear:

'Devlyn Herman. Bail release!'

Don't leave town, the white lady cop had told you. But for some reason you really, really want to see Victoria.



The little things, they collect and clog open places. No filter is fine enough. The effect is unavoidable. The natural wear and tear on a pair of angel white Nike Air Force Ones. A smudge happens first. You walk to and from the corner store and after a good while the heels start to lean. Entropy. The second law of Thermodynamics.

My lawyer tells me that the police have me marked as a "person of interest" in the murder of Elise Rogers. My first kill. It may be more than a coincidence that my apartment burns down the same day she vanishes. And it is curious that Elise Rogers was the associate and reputed bisexual lover of my daughters mother.

For some reason I feel relieved. The endgame is getting closer.

My lawyer is an older Jewish man who smiles like he knows he's smarter than you. He hates white people. Every white man with a mustache is Hitler to him. There are no white people on his legal team. None. All black women, actually. He says the police are looking into the firebombing of Latisha Martinez, the Molotov cocktail victim. Also the shooting and burning of several gang members. One witness says a gray car was seen speeding away from the scene. The next week I report my car stolen. My lawyer smiles again.

My lawyer thinks I'm guilty, but he's my lawyer. I wonder how he knows all this. The police aren't obligated to tell him anything. Chicken George put me on this lawyer, saying he had connections. I figured he meant he

played golf with judges. I underestimated both he and George, it seems.

‘Don’t run,’ my lawyer says. ‘They’re watching you.’

By “they” my lawyer means men in unmarked Crown Victoria’s. In Scooby Doo Mystery Machine vans with crack squads of police geeks inside. Shaggy with a set of headphones, tapping every wireless telephone call within a half mile radius, isolating each signal by running the calls through a program designed to filter cell phone carriers. Then they eavesdrop on those isolated lines and tighten the net. Should watch what I say, where I go, my lawyer says.

‘If you did these things,’ he says, ‘chances are they won’t nail you yet. They’ll wait for you to do something else and catch you doing that. Then they’ll try to get a confession or offer you a deal. They always try to get you to rat on somebody.’

We’re in his car. I stink bad. I never used the central bookings deodorant. Now, the fancy 24 hour deodorant I had applied Sunday morning was on its 55th hour. My lawyer smokes cigarettes, the skinny brown kind. I’ve never seen him smoke in the car, but the car smells like ashes. Smoke has discolored the headliner. Directly above the driver’s seat, once bright gray, the headliner is now black. The little things, they give you away. It is impossible to consistently perform a perfect murder. It’s about percentages and entropy. If you smoke in your car, how can you keep the smoke from blackening your headliner? It’s the same principal with murder.

My arms are folded against my ribcage. I can really smell my armpits. My lawyer, though it’s winter, his window is all the way down.

I say. ‘How long have they been watching me?’

‘Hard to tell. I’ll get back to you. There’s something else going on.’ He says. ‘Somebody real high up likes you. My inside guys either don’t know or won’t say. And my inside guys are *my* inside guys, if you know what I’m

saying.'

At the last New Year's Eve party in New York I met a criminal lawyer, a black guy, who said he was going back to college to take up nursing. He said that the bad thing about being a black lawyer is that your bread and butter clientele, your own people, they don't trust you. Not the 'keeping your secrets' sort of trust, he said. He was speaking of how no one really thinks the average young black lawyer can be effective, or has any real connections. He said that black people want him to work at a discount rate, and that sort of defeats the purpose of being a lawyer. I told him that everybody was getting into nursing these days.

The big things you can't worry about. Too late then. Just throw your hands behind your neck and ride it out. Might not want to throw your hands behind your neck if you have funky armpits, however. The little things, they really fucking stink.

My lawyer stops at a rental car place. I don't go inside. After he rents me a car, it takes me 25 minutes to get home. Pulling into my driveway, I see a cable van parked down the street. Cops I bet. I walk to my door and try as hard as I can to ignore the baseball in my front lawn.

When a baseball shows up, the procedure is: 5 days later I meet Chicken George. So here I am 5 days later, and I'll leave for the club to meet George in an hour. I'm in my living room, sitting on the floor, staring at this phone and I want to call Victoria.

The only issue is, if I call Victoria now, the police tapping my calls may connect me to the murder of Gwen Holmes, the reality TV star. There have already been several TV show documentaries made which call into question the timeline and circumstances of the murder. The former marine, no one, not a single person who knew him, thought him capable of such an act. The entertainment TV conspiracy theorists concocted wild theories. Perhaps Gwen was on drugs and owed someone money. Perhaps there was a second shooter. Gwen Holmes was becoming John F. Kennedy with fake tits and drag queen eyelashes.

Victoria.

If I tell her how I feel, then maybe...

I've been staring at the phone like this for the better part of 5 days.

Last I heard Victoria is single, by default. That hunky boyfriend won't be getting out of jail anytime soon. He recently was remanded to a New York state penitentiary for manufacturing and distributing cocaine. As it turns out, he was the main supplier for several hundred hard partying celebrities residing in lower Manhattan. A washed-up movie starlet, a tough guy rapper, they both turned states witness against him.

After the kiss from the cross-dresser on New Year's morning, Victoria had backed up a step or two and looked.

'What the hell?' She says.

The cross-dresser smiled and blushed until Victoria punched her in the forehead. The cross-dresser recovered quickly and threw up her dukes. So did Victoria. Victoria's friend, the one with the big butt, she has big fists too. She throws a haymaker that knocks the she/he to the floor. Then it got nice and ugly.

Girls in heels shouldn't stomp people, especially in the face. I'm standing there, still smarting from not getting my kiss, and I'm falling even more in love with Victoria. The cross-dresser has a pool of blood where her face used to be. Blood has ruined her beige sport coat.

After things have calmed down, the big butt girl is talking to me. She has to shake my shoulder before I decide to actually listen.

'Victoria wants to know if you would take her home.' She says. She could have said this maybe 5 times. I'm not sure.

'Yeah. Anything you want.' I say.

New York people typically don't own cars for reasons too numerous to name here. Victoria is fuming, and her nipples are like baby bottles. She's drunk too. Her breath is hot rubbing alcohol as she stumbles into my arms.

For my daughter, I would ride a rubber raft to hell, right down the river Styx, to rescue her. But once my

daughter was safe in heaven, I would go back to hell and overthrow the devil himself. I would stay if I had to, in hell, to be with Victoria.

Some say alcohol is a truth serum. Just to be sure, I should have killed a bottle of Cristal myself. Victoria was chatty. She had a lot to say to me, to anybody, I guess. The little things, the tiny moments. I'm telling you...

'Devlyn, I did *not* invite that gay girl, I swear to God.' Victoria is almost pleading her case. We're cruising downtown-wards, and I'm in no hurry whatsoever. She's busy studying herself in the visor mirror, adjusting it with one hand, pulling her hair into a crude ponytail with the other.

'Who invited her?' I ask.

'I have no idea.' She says. Frustrated, Victoria shakes her hair out and gives up trying to pull it back. She continues, 'I don't even know her name. Whoever the hell she is, she pretty much knows now that I don't get down like that. I'm strictly dick-lee.'

Victoria lives in Brooklyn. A long way from 147th street in Harlem. 'I like your new truck.' She says.

'Thank you.' I say.

'And thank *you* once again for the ride Devlyn.'

'You're welcome. Always.' I say.

Victoria says, 'It seems like every New Years Eve something crazy happens, and you're right there to pull me out of it.'

I say, I come up here each year only to confess my love for you. Once again, I'm only speaking to myself. Once again, I'm the friendly cab driver. The holiday hack.

'Why don't you ever bring your girlfriend?' She says and she's back at trying to pull her hair up.

'I'm single these days.' I say.

'Well now I'm embarrassed.' She says.

'Why, do I look like I'm married or something?' I say.

Victoria says half-mockingly, 'I don't really know how a married person is supposed to look...'

'Point taken.' I say.

‘No Devlyn, it’s just that I always figured you had a girlfriend. You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to. It’s cool.’

Someone. Any one of you. I beg you. Please, *please* come jam the blade of a rusty pocketknife into my retina. If that doesn’t kill me, shoot me in the forehead with a .44 Magnum. Would that be too much to ask?

We’re marooned in thick midtown Manhattan traffic for a while. Then we have to make a series of confusing turns to avoid the barricades set up for the New Years Eve ball dropping. While we inch along, Victoria tells me about her days as a background singer. When I ask her to talk about the really juicy details and stuff, she says she was still young back then and didn’t get to go to any of the wild after parties. Victoria talks about the long-awaited debut solo album that she’s been working on forever. There are fan-sites dedicated to her on the internet, she says, yet all she has produced as a solo artist is one single. The major label imprint that she released the single under has never paid her. Looking towards the future, Victoria however, remains optimistic.

At one point, perhaps when we were stuck somewhere in SOHO, I turn my head towards the driver-side window and I cry, unprovoked. Meanwhile, Victoria is drunk-singing a song she hears on the radio. After she finishes, I continue to stare out the driver’s side window, covertly wiping away tears.

I say. ‘You think that girl is going to call the police?’

‘Who cares?’ She says, ‘Whatever happens, happens.’

Victoria totes a giant bag made by some European designer. It’s black soft leather, ever-so-slightly worn and cracked. From deep inside, after fishing for a moment, she produces a blunt, half smoked.

‘Is it okay if I smoke in here?’ She says.

‘Go ahead. Be careful.’ I say.

‘Be careful of what? We don’t have anything to worry about. The police are *really* busy tonight. It’s New Years in

New York.'

'True enough.' I say.

Traffic is moving again, and Victoria lights the blunt, takes a pull. She takes several more pulls before she turns to me and says, 'This weed is phenomenal.'

'I wouldn't know.'

'You never tried it?'

'Nope.'

'That's messed up Devlyn.'

'What did I do?'

'Devlyn, what if this weed had been laced with PCP, like that crazy stuff my cousin from DC smokes? Or what if the weed had been mixed with poison? You know, 3 girls in your home town died in a nightclub from drinking a drink that some psycho laced with rat poison.'

'It wasn't a nightclub, it was more like a bar. That was years ago.' I say.

'Bar, nightclub, swingers club, whatever, you should have tested the weed out before you gave it to me. I mean, forget about the weed potentially killing me and all. What if the weed was like, inconsumable garbage?'

'I trust the guy I got it from.' I say.

Victoria laughs and points at me. She says, 'Why aren't you smiling? Cheer up. You're always so grim. You have *got* to know I'm only messing with you, right?'

I nod.

She says, 'Have you ever smoked weed before?'

I consider lying for a second. I don't.

'Nah.'

'You're self employed right?'

'Yeah,' I say. 'Vending machines.'

'Are you on probation?'

'Nope.'

She offers me the blunt.

'You know I'm not used to this New York driving,' I say. 'I don't want to kill us both. I might flip the truck off the Wilmington bridge or some shit.'

Victoria switches the blunt to her right hand. The left hand finds my knee. The Aunt Penny spot. She stammers a bit, almost nervously, then she says, 'Devlyn, if I trust anybody these days, I trust you. I remember that night when I first met you. I didn't know you from Adam, and I trusted you then. Everybody was running around crazy, I was about to poop on myself, I was so scared, and there you were, just chilling like nothing could ever phase you. I don't think a little weed will phase you now.'

I don't speak. I take the blunt from her and I take two pulls. I hold the smoke in for awhile, about as long as I see most people do. Then I cough like people with tuberculosis must.

Victoria claps, laughs, 'Good job Devlyn. Good job. Now maybe I can get a smile out of you.'

I want her to replace her hand on my knee. I want a family with her. Little, brown haired, big fore-headed kids. A son. A daughter I can actually help raise.

Victoria hears herself on the radio and turns it up. 'This is me. That guy's manager still hasn't paid me for singing on this record.'

The song is okay. I tell her I think it's hot.

'It's okay.' She says, 'That guy might be the worst rapper in the history of rappers. He sells records though, and these days with the internet and stuff, nobody sells records anymore.'

'Is that normal, not getting paid on time?'

Victoria says, 'It's normal for a lot of people who work off contracts, I guess.'

'Not everyone.' I say.

We're crossing into Brooklyn. The weed is taking effect, and the fear that normally overwhelms me when I'm around Victoria is in hyper-drive. Paranoia, some people call it.

'Devlyn,' she says, and she's talking through a mouthful of smoke, 'you need to come to New York more often. Like, *for real*. More often. Even though every time I see

you, you act like you're afraid of me or something.'

'That's silly,' I say. I'm not looking at her.

She touches my elbow, and she's halfway laughing.

She says. 'Devlyn, you can tell me the truth. Are you afraid of me?'

'No.' I lie.

Victoria laughs at me for about a minute, then she holds still and she stares at me, shaking her head. She stares at me for a while and she's smiling so big that I could count her teeth if I wanted to. She's still somewhat drunk, regarding me closely through squinted eyes.

I say, 'I liked the party. Until you went, you know, ape-shit.'

Victoria says, 'I have a feeling you loved watching me go ape-shit.'

I can't help but to laugh. 'No comment.' I say. 'I was just watching the whole thing unfold.'

'I *saw* you watching the whole thing unfold. You were standing frozen, right there in front of me when that girl kissed me.'

'Yeah. That's crazy right?' I say.

She exhales, 'But that's it for me. I know I say this every year, but this time I mean it. I'm out. Next New Years Eve, I swear to God I'm not going to that party.'

I'm having heart palpitations. I heard this happens to people when they first smoke weed. This is also a symptom for another malady that starts with the letter "L". I'm snapping my fingers. It's on the tip of my tongue but I can't think of it...

She says, 'I've been thinking about moving to Africa.'

'Africa?'

'Yeah. I was over there last year, no, the year before last. I forgot it's a new year. Anyway, I loved it over there.'

'The only place I've ever been is South America.' I say, 'I've never been across the ocean.'

'You would like Africa Devlyn. Maybe next time I go you could go with me. It's not too expensive.'

Atlantic avenue is bumper to bumper traffic. Victoria tells me to make a series of turns and we are now beneath a subway overpass.

At one point I feel brave. I say, 'So, what are you about to do?'

'When I get home?'

'Yeah. Are you going to go to sleep, maybe work on some music or something?'

'No. It's still early too early to sleep. I'll probably end up relaxing and smoking some more of your weed. You're welcome to come inside if you want. I must warn you though, my apartment sucks. I mean like, it newborn baby sucks. Want to come up?'

Come up? God yes. Buddha yes. Big bang theory yes.

'Sure.' I say.

We reach her apartment building. There is a rusted green door without a lock. Next, we board a cramped elevator that smells like equal parts of piss and bleach. Then the 9th floor, through a thick burgundy door and into Victoria's apartment. Once inside, Victoria kicks off her heels and hurries to the bathroom. I cop a squat on a couch. For the next ten minutes she vomits. I mean this sounded, from behind a closed door in another room, like projectile vomiting. Victoria hurls, and hurls, and hurls. Then the running of water I hear, followed by the swishing sound of brushing teeth. Then she's back in the living room. She plops across from me in a big ancient leather reclining chair.

'Sorry about that. I'm a bit of a mess right now.' She says.

'Never a mess. Not you.' I say.

Victoria is always smirking it seems. She says, 'Stop lying. I know you're scared of me and all, and you're trying to be nice, but believe me, I *am* a mess right now. I think I just tossed like, a half-ton of shrimp scampi into my toilet.'

'If you're a mess, then I cannot begin to tell you what I

am.' I say.

Victoria is silent for a moment before she says, 'Well I know what I am. Thirsty. The trouble is, I'm afraid to move. I hope it's not because of that seafood pasta I woofed down earlier.'

'Let's hope not. I brought that seafood pasta.' I say.

'I know you brought it. That's why I ate it. I always eat the food you bring, besides the time you brought those bean burritos.'

'You eat the food I bring. For real?'

'I wouldn't lie to you. I'm going to pop up and surprise you in Baltimore one day and force you to give me some of those crab cakes you brought last year.'

'That would be cool.' I say.

By the way, this was the best night of my life.

'You say that now. We'll see when I show up at your door.' She says, and she's rubbing her stomach.

I've made many women suffer, but none so beautifully.

She catches me staring at her helplessly and offers me comfort. She says, 'Don't feel bad Devlyn. I get a weak stomach sometimes.'

'I get a weak stomach sometimes too.' I say.

She throws her head back and moans for a bit, still rubbing her stomach. Then she says, 'Devlyn, I know I'm being a shitty host, but could you get me a water?'

'Sure. Where are your waters?'

'In the refrigerator. The left shelf.'

With one hand she points, the other hand never leaves her stomach. All the time she's rubbing her stomach, I can every so often see the bottoms of her perfect breasts. The crest of a golden areola.

I fetch Victoria a bottled water, and when I come back I don't see her, but instead I hear another round of projectile vomiting coming from the bathroom. This time, when she's finished throwing up and brushing her teeth, she joins me on the couch.

‘I’m going to rest my eyes for a little while.’ She says.
‘Twenty minutes tops. Wake me up.’

‘Twenty minutes.’ I say.

‘Don’t forget to wake me up. Twenty minutes.’

‘Twenty minutes.’ I say.

Then Victoria stretches her legs across mine. 300 dollar denim against my linen pants. There is cross-dresser blood on the cuffs of her jeans, and her feet and toes I palm gently as she curls into me. She takes a series of deep breaths, and she sets and resets her head several times before she snuggles hard into my chest. She’s asleep soon after that. Her hair gets into my mouth. She drools and I catch it with my finger at one point, and I want to lick the drool off my finger so badly, but I don’t. I don’t wake her up. She sleeps all night but I don’t sleep. I just sit there holding her.

The next morning, real early, the big butt girl is banging on the door. I slide away from Victoria, who is still sleeping, and I open the door. The big butt girl is grinning because she thinks I fucked Victoria. It wasn’t until that very instant that I realized I could have. I didn’t wait for Victoria to awaken. I just grabbed my things and left...

So that afternoon I’m driving home, running back to Baltimore, and I’m all tears. I’m mad as hell at myself, and I’m crying like a little girl because I’m always so afraid of getting exactly what I want.

I’m staring at the phone now. I don’t call Victoria. I grab my jacket and head off to see Chicken George.



Africa isn’t at the club. I haven’t called her, but more interestingly she hasn’t called me. I’ve been having the thought as of late, like maybe the police got to her. I know she probably did what I asked her to, calling Chicken

George, but what if the cops sat her down and interviewed her? They may have told her that her 'boyfriend' is under investigation. Asked her what she knew. If she'd seen anything suspicious. Anything that could help them, as they always say. Maybe she says to the police that we were both in the Fells Point party bar the same night those three girls were poisoned...

Destiny is at the club, but she never sees me. I've been drinking more lately. Brown liquor. Crown Royal every day, on ice, maybe 2 glasses a day. Maybe more. That's me these days for some reason. Every night since I last saw Victoria, I just stare out the window in my living room, holding a glass of Crown Royal, and I cry. Really weird. I order a double shot on the rocks and stand in my usual spot, beside Chicken George.

'Got change for a ten?' He says.

'Sure do.' I say.

'Yeah,' he says, 'everybody needs change.'

'You ain't asked me for change in a long time.'

'People say you went too far last time.' He says.

'What is that supposed to mean? You said send a message. I sent a message.'

'Yes you did. But the Master had a lot of love for that little bird you set free.'

The ice in my drink is melting. I kill my double shot until I taste water. 'So is this why it has been damn near a year since you asked me for change?'

'Part of it.' He says, 'I wanted to make sure nothing was going to happen to you.'

'Oh really.'

George says, 'You know how it is for guys like you. How it ends up. Getting taken out, you know, by guys like you.'

'Be hard to do George. Not many guys like me out there.'

'Well, you're not the same kid who used to sell steroids, I'll give you that. I heard about your little incident

last week. You're on the news.'

'It was one of those nights, you know?'

Chicken George isn't drinking or smoking tonight. He says, 'I didn't figure you was the black power, kill whitey type.'

'It was just something that happened.' I say.

'Indeed. The Master was impressed.'

I inspect the ten dollar bill he gave me. There is no writing on it, no extra markings whatsoever.

'What's this?' I say.

'Blind job.' He says. 'It could be an old lady. It could be the mayor. Black or white. Male or female.'

'Always some new shit these days, I'm telling you.' I dig my hands in my pockets, 'I don't know man. I'm hot as shit right now. I'm under investigation.'

'We're on top of that. You do this job and I promise the police and DA won't be able to connect you to any past crimes. The little gun charge you got now. You'd still be on your own.' Not once has Chicken George smiled or made eye contact with me.

'Okay. I'll do it. But I want triple. And I want straight cash. Hundred dollar bills. I might be going away soon.'

'Cash huh? No coins this time?'

'Nope. I'm getting out of the vending machine business.'

'Smart move.'

I wrinkle my brow, 'Meaning?'

'Getting out of the business.' He says, 'The Master says to conceal your intentions. You can never be sure if the Master isn't doing just that.'

An awkward pause. A stripper offers and we both, George and I, say 'No' in unison.

Then I ask, 'Usual procedure still? The jacket pocket of the second jacket, third rack from the back left in your nephew's clothing store?'

'At 4pm sharp your instructions will be there.' He says. 'Your money too, this time.'

I turn to leave. He grabs my shoulder gently. Eye to eye contact for the first time. 'Devlyn, that white girl you had call me. You can't call her anymore.'

Maybe she *is* talking to the police, I think.

'Why not?' I say.

Chicken George doesn't smile. He presses his lips against my ear. 'Because she won't answer my friend. She won't answer anyone ever again.'



After I picked up my cash and instructions, I went home. The cable van that had been working on the same goddamn underground line for a week, the one parked up the street, was gone. The unmarked Ford Mustang that had been tailing me to and from the grocery store was also gone.

Home Depot has a slogan: You can do it, we can help. One night, just before closing time, I wear dark sunglasses and a fake mustache and I buy what I need. No wasted movements. I'm in and out in ten minutes. The baking soda, the bucket with ice water in it, I've already got that at home...

Africa was found dead in her apartment. The toxicology report from the autopsy revealed that she had died from an overdose of heroin. Injected. I never saw Africa do anything more than smoke weed.

I mixed 10 parts hydrogen-peroxide with one part sulfuric acid, then I called Victoria. She told me I should come up to NYC for the big butt girl's birthday party. I told her about the Baby Skinheads. Self defense, I told her. She told me I did what I had to do. She told me I should still come. She told me I could stay at her place if I wanted. She told me she would kick my ass if I ever left again without hugging her goodbye...

I let the hydrogen-peroxide/sulfuric acid solution cool

in the bucket of ice water. Then I heat up a TV dinner. After the ice water, I add acetone. This is the primary ingredient. What I'm making is AP. Acetone Peroxide. Mixed correctly, it yields the same explosive force as its equal weight in TNT.

This is my last job, I tell myself. I'm finally going to get what I want. I'll get my kiss and then Victoria and me are going to Africa.

Poor Africa...

The autopsy suggested Africa was raped. Flesh was found under her fingernails. Neighbors had seen a white man fleeing the apartment. Shirtless. It was very poetic. A white man raping and killing Africa.

The acetone is mixed in, in small amounts. You let it cool completely and then you add another batch. A half part per batch. You should wear a surgical mask and gloves. Light a cigarette and it would be bye-bye sparsely furnished house I live in. A white powder develops. Stinks kind of. I filter out the white powder with a coffee filter. Very meticulous process. The little things, they can blow up in your face. I dissolve baking soda into the water. Not fully. The baking soda crystals should be still visible in the solution. Solute. Solvent. Solution. You fuckers should have paid attention in chemistry class.

The white powder AP, I mix 10 parts of water in and add baking soda again. This turns the solution green. More filtering. I let it dry all day.

The instructions from Chicken George, or whoever writes this shit, were: *Use cell phone and hot circuit wire the detonator.* Then I turn the page and there are hand drawn schematics. In the big folded manila envelope with the instructions was also my cash, a tiny green motherboard, wires, and a pre-paid cell phone. I wonder how the Master got rid of the cops. The Master might *be* a cop, for all I know. Or the Master might be a 3rd string NFL middle linebacker. In my business, the less you know about these things, the longer you live.

The target house is in a suburb a few clicks outside Baltimore. It's an isolated home, with not another house for a quarter mile. Driving up to plant the AP, I damn near hit a deer. By now, I've switched rental cars a few times.

The house is big. Four car garage. Genuine brick face. The AP will blow the roof off this motherfucker though, literally. The family isn't home when I get there, exactly as my instructions had predicted. I splice the bomb wires into the outside phone line, inside the little gray box, then carefully cover it with AP, and shut the box. A person can live in a home 20 years and never open that gray phone box bolted to the side of their house. The fire department inspectors will have a difficult time tracing the origin of this blast. AP burns clean. There will be little to no trace elements remaining to implement me.

Calling the house will only arm the detonator, the instructions say. Hanging up, will trigger the explosion.

On the way back to the city, Victoria calls. She gives me a precise time for the birthday party. It's going to be a surprise party, she says. After I blow up this house on Friday night, I'll sneak off to NYC on Saturday. It'll be a weekend of surprises.

I can't go home. Too much energy. Poor Africa. Besides myself, nobody outside her birth family came to the funeral. I remember staring at Africa's mother. Long medusa braids and she's at least 50 something. This lady didn't cry at the funeral. She didn't look at anyone, not once.

When we bury our children we have failed. People deal with failure differently. Africa's mother wasn't wearing black. Her younger children had curly hair, beige skin. Half breeds, the Baby Skinheads call them. No black father in sight however.

27 thousand dollars and nothing to do. The thing about being a contract killer on the eve of retirement is, you don't have any friends. Never had a real girlfriend, at least not as an adult. You're behind the wheel of a rented

Dodge and you're just driving.

I can't go to the strip club. Not yet. I still want a white stripper who squirts and calls me nigger.

I can't go to New York right now like I'd love to. Not yet. One more job to do. One more anchor to pull up before I can set sail.

What if I tell Victoria that I love her and she says: 'What took you so long Devlyn? I love you too!' What then? I'm facing two years in jail. They still could charge me with those 2 murders if they wanted. Either way I'd be gone for a while. Women like Victoria don't wait for degenerates like me.

I figure I'll retire, and maybe I can get some sort of plea bargain deal. Then go to school. I wouldn't mind becoming a tax consultant. Perhaps a nurse. Are you kidding me? Everybody's a nurse these days, that's where the moneys at. The money is in watching people die. Babysitting them up to their final moments. I obviously have a lot of experience doing that.

I finally sit in a park and relax, and I go over my plans for Victoria and me. I think about making the move from Baltimore to NYC, and I mull over the boring, mundane details. But it's not all bad, for as it stands now, Victoria is in the details. But then again, they say the Devil is in the details also...



I had set up the explosives on Wednesday. Thursday I slept all day, and drank a little too much that night. On Friday I had planned on relaxing until it was time to do the job, but my grandmother called and begged me to come over. I tell her I'll be over before it gets dark...

When I arrive at my grandmother's house, I leave the cell phone in the car and knock on the door. She answers. For once I don't smell alcohol on her breath.

'Come in knucklehead.' She says.

I say, 'What's wrong ma?'

'Nothing.' She says, 'Ain't shit got to be wrong for me to check on you.'

I'm still a bit suspicious, 'You sure you don't need some money or something?'

She smiles, 'Negro I always need money. But that's not why I called you. I wanted to tell you that your mother called me last night. She's in Philadelphia, about to go into rehab.'

'Get out of here.' Is all I can manage. I mean, rehab is not my mother's thing at all. My mother had once told me, 'Re means you're doing something again. Shit,' she said, 'I ain't never been *habilitated* in the first place.'

Grandma today looks old. 'Yes. Your father got her into the program.'

'My father.' I say, 'I still don't remember him.'

'Shit Devlyn. You was only bout...' she stammers for quite a bit then says, 'You were only 2 or 3 years old when he left Lynda.'

I've been standing until now. I sit on the love seat and say, 'How'd they hook back up? Is my father in Philly?'

'Yes. Your mother told me he's an ordained minister. I looked him up on the internet, and I found out he is co-pastor of his church. He's got two boys by his wife, a white girl, and three girls by another woman before that.'

I'll tell you dead straight. I'm not a fan of anything concerning the man who is supposedly my father.

'I mean, grandma why are you telling me this?'

'Nigger cause you need to hear it!' She yells me back to 6 years old. 'You out here shooting people. You ain't even try to contact your daughter recently. But you're shooting white boys on TV. You know who you remind me of right?'

I know where she's going with this. 'Don't start grandma.'

'Your goddamned grandfather. That's who. He was

the same as you. Wild as he wanted to be. He hit that white boy upside the head with a baseball bat and I ain't never see him again. That cracker judge gave him 70 years in jail. How is a man supposed to do 70 years in jail?

'I'm only facing like, 2 years ma.'

'Just like a nigger,' she says. 'Ya'll think ya'll can handle everything. But it's not always you who suffers...'

We say nothing for a long time. Then she says, 'Okay boy. Give me some money. Don't make me have to get my shotgun. You know I keep a big one.'

I shake my head and dig in my pocket. The little things, for certain that's all we really have.



The sun, that big mean ball of incandescent gas that will one day burn us right off this planet, had set hours ago. Really the sun never sets. We spin, the earth, and now instead of facing that big yellow goofball sun, we were facing the James Bond cool galactic center.

Deep inside that galactic center, hidden from view, is a super-massive black hole. A nigger. A really, really pissed off angry black man.

Valentine's day. All afternoon on the radio I've been hearing diamond-jeweler commercials. Give her something to let her know you care, the commercials say. Show her how special she is. A diamond, they say, lasts forever. Liars. Half a googol years from now, the element carbon will have decayed into disparate puffs of helium smoke.

I'm sitting in a utility truck. I'm out of eyesight of anyone who may be inside the house, but I am very close. An hour ago, a Nissan pulled into the driveway. That was the first car I was to watch out for, the Nissan. I wanted to just blow up the house now and hit 95 north to New York. I was instructed to wait for a Ford Mustang however.

The moon is nowhere in sight. People make such a big

fuss over the Moon, but it's actually just a large ball of ash. It's the result of the ancient collision of our earth and some Mars sized planet...

I call Victoria with my personal phone, but I get no answer. Countless homicides and acts of unspeakable violence I've committed, and I still grow tits and a vagina every time I wait through 4 rings for that girl. Each ring is horrifying. Each ring is its own AIDS test result. Let Victoria answer that phone, and it's lottery ticket bliss every time.

Bingo. The Ford Mustang shows. Time to get closer to the house and drop this poor family a line. I was told in the instructions that the phone has to be very close to the detonator. After the phone hangs up, count to 4, get low, and cover your ears.

The sun, that asshole, is classified as a yellow dwarf. Yep. It will never explode or collapse into a black hole. A runt, it is. The mighty sun is just, sort of, here for nothing.

I'm not wearing a mask. Whoever sees me won't see me that long. Phones ringing. My personal phone. Oh shit. It's Victoria. I press the reject button. I feel so bad doing that. You don't slam the door on those Publisher's Clearing House people.

Valentine's Day and Africa is dead. Some white man turned an escort session into a murder. He probably offered an insane amount of money to her. Africa had never been with a white man before. She told me this more times than I can count.

I think I'm close enough to the house now. Once the detonator is armed, I'll just run. I take out the pre-paid phone.

This is ballgame. After this, no more killing. I can go to school and study extra-solar planets. Big-ass gas planets with no solid surface that circle their parent stars in like 4 days. Hot Jupiters, they call them.

I dial the number. There's only one number programmed in the phone anyhow. 3 rings I wait through and

I'm cool as intergalactic space. Then a white man answers.

'Hello?'

Voices are in the background. I remain silent.

'Who is it baby?' A female voice.

'Hell if I know.' The white man laughs, says, 'It might be that crazy bitch again. She did say last time that she was coming over to talk to you. You want the phone?'

Shuffling sounds and now the female voice has the phone. 'Hello?'

The voice makes me move closer to the house.

'Hello?' She repeats.

I have something I'm supposed to say, some script. I forget it momentarily.

'Who is it mommy?' A child's voice. Sounds like a little boy.

The female voice is calmly irate now. Familiar that way, 'Who is this? Stop playing.'

I remember the script. I say, 'The Master loves you. But I don't.' I know. Just doing my job people.

I'm about to hang up the phone but someone is looking out the window. A black woman who used to be a black girl. Thinner face now. Same person. Same woman. Same American black woman. She spots me. We're still connected, on the phone. The front door opens and there's no fucking way.

Trina.

I hold the phone from my ear. The little things. The most important little thing I've ever not known is now standing beside her mother. She comes to her mother's armpit. She's a cute, frail little girl. She has a big forehead, just like her daddy.

Trina recognizes me. She looks 10 tons, she's so pregnant.

'Devlyn?', and it's like a whisper.

Speak. Warn her, I think to myself. But times like the car rides with Victoria every year, those were dress rehearsals for moments like these.

‘Mommy. Who’s that man?’ and I will never forget that voice. I will never forget that little hand tapping on her mother’s arm.

At this moment I’m a million times angry, but a googol times sorry.

I helped create that voice. My sweet little angel.

Trina says, ‘Honey, that man standing out there is your father.’

‘My father?’

‘Yes sweetie.’ Trina says, and she sounds so grown up and parent-like.

‘Hi father!’ My daughter says, and she waves at me.

Trina hangs up the phone. She nudges my daughter towards me, and my little girl is about to run to me when it happens...

The little things, they are nowhere to be found when it’s the moment of truth.

All that talk of me rescuing my daughter from so many hordes of demons in hell, and I don’t even lift a finger to save her when I have brought hell itself to her doorstep.

Of course, it makes perfect sense that I would bring hell to my daughter. I am, after all, the Devil.

Hiroshima couldn’t have been this loud.

GOD!

MY GOD!

THE BIG BANG...

MY DAUGHTER...

DID I JUST KILL MY DAUGHTER?

Don’t tell me I just killed my...

Daughter.



Some things are impossible. I mean, you can’t commit suicide twice. You can’t kill a dead person. You can’t fly

faster than a radio wave. To do so would mean you could receive a signal before you sent it. Violating the law of causality, this is called. You can't live forever. You can't go sideways in time.

Your Jesus, he told his disciples: 'Follow me.'

But how?

You can't play God and lay divine healing hands on the tiny fragments, a charred arm, segmented fingers of your only child. You can't reassemble that child. Humpty-Dumpty that child.

It's all absurd. Your bible. Your universe. A 78 light-year wide wasteland universe. You can't wish a stupid woman back to life so you can kill her again for not letting you ever hold your daughter.

You can't wake up a dead woman and slap her disembodied head until it rejoins the body. You can't revive her and beg her, please let me see my daughter. You can't know what would have happened if you had simply *asked* to see your daughter one more time. You refused to ask her ever again, because you can never let go of that "black man" pride.

You stand there, ears ringing. You stand there and you want to hold your daughters hand. It lies right there. Conveniently dismembered for you, by you. Portable.

Want to trade your life for another? Won't work. Want to take it all back? In hindsight, want to *not* have sex with her best friend? Want the schematics on how to build a time machine?

Man oh man.

Where did it come from, this hate? So easy it is for me to hate. Poor little me so way back then. Baby mama drama. Federal prison. I had to be the first guy to ever go through that.

I'm not finished killing either. I thought I was finished, but that's impossible now...

I've got something lodged in my left thigh. Something from the explosion, I suppose. Could be a big splinter.

Wood. Could be a wrist bone of my child. A femur. A clavicle.

Many things are impossible. Calming me down, yep, you get the picture.

It's the sun's fault. That butt wipe sun. Had the sun been 20 times bigger, it would have burned through all of its nuclear fuel and exploded years ago. Supernova, they call it. The earth would have been atomized billions of years before the dinosaurs roamed. Or possibly our beach ball sun would have collapsed to form a black hole. Perhaps it did collapse and it became me.

You choose fear. I choose action. You choose love. I get real quiet then.

Had I done something horrible, or had I cleaned my slate? Had I eliminated everything that bound me to my hate, by eliminating that which I love? I know that it may sound unconscionable, but I'll never have to worry about Trina or my daughter again. The little things, my daughters first steps, her first words, the fact that I missed all this means little to nothing now. The only thing that has meaning to me at this moment is my revenge. The little things, right now they lay in front of you, inches before you. Little things wearing a little pink bubble gum machine ring...

The county police don't stop me. They see the green and white BGE hat, the bucket utility truck and they flag me through. The fire trucks too. They pass me and just about every fireman waves.

It's midnight or close to it. I park a block away from my destination and mount the bucket. I extend the arm up along a pole, 50 feet in the sky, and I can see over the tops of houses. I spot the house I'm looking for. Lights are on upstairs.

Being an independent contractor of my sort is about contingency plans. The AK-47 I had just in case the Latisha Martinez SAM ordeal got out of hand, that was my contingency plan. So as it turns out, buried a foot beneath an abandoned soccer field in Druid Hill park, five paces behind the south goal, is a box. Inside the box is a 9 millimeter, 3 clips, and another silencer. Also there is a Kevlar vest and amphetamines. I figured I might be wounded and on the run one day and need some extra

energy. Well, I'm not on the run, but I'm wounded. The piece of whatever in my leg gives me a limp. It's deep in there too. I take two pills and the effects are immediate.

Suicide doesn't have to be you killing yourself. Suicide can be you killing your life. Career suicide, they call it.

There wasn't a change of clothes in the box. I put on the Kevlar vest and over it, an orange and yellow utility vest from the truck. In a few minutes I'm at my destination. When taking revenge, one must be like a rock thrown through a window. The rock doesn't hesitate once it is thrown. It doesn't care. It just breaks the window.

Home invasion. Shoot the lock. Kick in the door brandishing a pistol loaded with modified hollow tip rounds.

'Chicken George?' I say calmly. I'm in his living room. I don't see anyone. A few seconds later I'm climbing the stairs toward his bedroom. I'm about to fuck up his night.

The bedroom door is closed, yellow light spilling out the bottom of the door like the sun is inside. I kick in the bedroom door and Chicken George is half dressed. A transsexual, dark and ugly, is stirring in the bed, shaking off sleep. I would have shot George in the heart, my plan, but there is a wire and a microphone taped to his chest. I don't shoot. I just stand there, aiming. George is pulling up his pants.

'I'm going to kill you.' I say.

George puts his hands in the air, surrender style. 'Devlyn. What's wrong? What happened?'

'Why didn't you tell me?' I say.

'Tell you what? What the fuck is this?' He says.

The shemale awakens suddenly, sees my gun and says, 'Oh my motherfucking God.'

I ignore the shemale. The shemale then tries to run past me. I aim the gun at him/her.

I speak. 'Calm down and you can leave.'

When the tranny is past me, I spin around and shoot him in the back of the head. I don't see, only hear the

tranny tumbling down the steps.

'What the fuck man!' And Chicken George is yelling. 'What the fuck was that for?'

'Shut up,' I say. 'That faggot might have told somebody I was in here.' I sit on the bed, gun again aimed at George. He leans against the dresser, his hands still in the air.

I say, 'My daughter. My baby's mother and her unborn baby. I just blew them up.'

Chicken George drops his hands, 'I was hoping you didn't see that.'

Silence for a moment then I say, 'And what's up with the fucking wire? Are you a police informant or something?'

George smiles and sits up on the dresser. No shirt and dress pants and those ashy feet. Black wire on his chest. A tiny microphone terminates the wire at his right nipple. He says, 'Well, I might as well tell you now.'

'Tell me what?' I say. The gun is getting heavy, or maybe my arm is.

George lights a cigarette he had somewhere on the dresser. He says, 'I've been wearing a wire for the past 30 years. I'm not a snitch Devlyn. I work for the government.'

The little things, they hide. They go unnoticed.

'What do you mean George? You FBI? ATF or some shit?' I'm using the barrel of my gun to scratch my nose.

'Worse.' He says, 'I work for the NSA.'

Oh boy...

If you don't know, the National Security Administration, or NSA, is headquartered in Maryland. When driving past their facility on route 32, you pass Canine road. They call it Canine road because for anytime, for any reason, they, the NSA, have the authority to pull you out of your vehicle and put bomb sniffing dogs on you. The dogs aren't trained to sniff for drugs. Plutonium though, will probably get them barking.

George continues, 'I've helped to overthrow govern-

ments. I've shipped every drug you can think of all across the world. Just me telling you this would normally mean you'd be dead within 24 hours. Of course I shouldn't say that to a young man holding a pistol.'

'I don't get it. Why would the government want Trina and my daughter dead?'

'Not the government. That was the Master. I've been working with the Master for a long time. For the past few years I've been setting up a case to hand over to the feds. All those hits you did, they were for reasons you wouldn't believe. But forget that Devlyn. You can help yourself now. Give us a written statement documenting every murder you ever did.'

'What?' I say.

'Believe me, if you help me. Help us, I mean, we can set it up so that you can walk completely away. No more being under police investigation. You could even forget about the gun charge you're facing.'

'George you fucking faggot.' I say softly. 'All those drugs. Everybody goes to jail and you get to lay up and suck dick for a living.'

George smiles. His cigarette is gone and he chains another. 'Devlyn listen to me. This is how it has been most of my life. I remember when I was three weeks out of NSA field training and my boss told me to do whatever I had to. He said kill people. Sell drugs. Pimp woman. Pimp men. He said the deeper you are in crime, the more effective you'll be in identifying terrorist cells.'

I squint, 'So the Master is a terrorist?'

George sneeze-laugh, 'You have no fucking idea do you?'

'Don't make me mad.' I say, 'Keep talking.'

'The Master is old news now. Your friend Paulo in Peru has been trying to get nuclear material to use against the Peruvian government. He may have some by now. The idea of some drug dealing little spic with a rod of plutonium is horrifying. You know his little gang, those MS-13

guys, they started out as so-called freedom fighters.'

I've lowered the gun by this point. 'Rebels I heard.' I say.

'When you came to us with your Peruvian cocaine hook up, my bosses in the Administration figured you might become an asset one day. They figured right. The Master is who the feds want. But fuck the feds. The CIA wants Paulo and that nuclear material.'

'That is crazy.' I say.

George says, shaking his head like I'm just so naïve. 'Devlyn, remember Saddam Hussein? People think the war against him was over the twin towers. Some say it was over oil. Nope. It was about heroin. Saddam and his sons were my best suppliers for years. Good brown pure shit too. Then Saddam got stupid and started trading tons of raw heroin for weapons grade uranium. Then, well you know, the higher ups, they did what they had to do to jump start a 'war on terror'. Remote control planes into the towers in New York. A drone hit's the pentagon. Shit like that.'

'That's bullshit. What happened to the people on those planes?'

'The Pacific ocean. They might be deep in the Mariana trench. Or maybe they ended up in some aircraft hangar in Nevada with bullets in their heads. Who cares? You see Devlyn, the NSA stays out of the action end of the business. We're voyeurs. We're like surgical interns. We get paid good money just to watch.'

I'm damn near trembling. Terrorism. Conspiracies. And I just came here to kill George, 'I still don't understand. What's all this got to do with my baby girl? The Master, why did he want Trina dead?'

George lifts his right ass cheek off the dresser, farts. He says smiling, 'Excuse me.' He fans toxic flatulence then says, 'The Master isn't a *he*, Devlyn. He's a *she*. A black *she*.'

The little things are so ironic.

Whoa.

I can't say a word. I mean, you wage a holy war against black women, and you find out the war has been sponsored by a black woman. Kind of takes the 'holy' right out of it.

George is back to getting dressed now. A black button up shirt covers his fat. Black dress socks, both of them, in one hand as he speaks, 'Everybody at the NSA got a big kick out of all this. We were like, he probably thinks he's killing snitches and crusading politicians and shit. But Devlyn, you were just killing ex-lovers. Yeah. The Master has a real hard time trying to let go of her girlfriends.'

'The Master is a lesbian?' I say.

'Yep. You know her too. Well, at least you've seen her. You might remember her husband, Prescott Perry.'

'Laura Perry? Laura-fucking-Perry is the Master? That TV news anchor lady? The one who used to have that science show?' And my voice is so high I nearly choke and go into a coughing fit.

'You got it.' George says.

'What the fuck man...'. And I can't manage anything else.

George is slipping on black loafers, standing into them. 'You know,' he says, '75% of all contract murders are ordered by pissed off lovers. And of that 75%, more than half of those are women. Mad ass women.'

The little things, they add up to exactly 75%.

'So Trina,' I say, 'and the Master, I mean Laura Perry, they were...'

'Fucking, that's right my friend.'

'Every hit I did? The reality TV show girl too?'

'Everybody's gay these days. Look at me.' He says.

'Toss me a cigarette.' I say. George does. Then I say, 'You know I killed that girl who they say turned my baby's mother into a lesbian.'

'We figured what you did Devlyn. We just don't know where you put the body.'

I shake my head, 'And what about that lady prosecutor I shot. You NSA guys just sat and watched that cop plea to a crime he didn't do and go to jail. I thought you cop types look out for each other.'

I hadn't lit the cigarette, just had it dangling from my lower lip. George tosses me a lighter and I fire up.

George says, 'We have to get that cop out of jail. The whole pen is trying to kill him up there.'

'Too late now.' I say.

'Not really.' George says, 'If you give the NSA a written statement talking about the murders you've committed, and you include in that statement that you personally bought drugs from Paulo, you'll get immunity. And you have my word that we'll seal your confession so tight the President couldn't see it if he wanted to.'

I cough again. I think I tried to inhale the cigarette smoke like I did the weed with Victoria. I say, 'All you want is Paulo and Laura Perry?'

'Fuck Laura. She's almost dead anyways. We don't care about her. Paulo is a must. You are the only person we know of who exchanged money for drugs with him first hand. We need you to say that in a signed document so the higher ups can get a sealed indictment against him. That statement is all we really need, you writing down the killing stuff you did is just to make sure you don't try to cross us or write a book about me or something.'

'Why didn't you come to me before I killed my daughter? I probably would have taken the deal.' I say.

He says, 'We were waiting for you to go to jail honestly. Either I was going to turn you over to the feds with Laura, or the local courts would have given you time for that gun. Then when you were in jail, we would have come with the deal. That's a place where a dangerous young kid like you isn't so dangerous. We could make jail really uncomfortable for you if we wanted to.'

Four inhales and I have the cigarette thing down now.

'And you say you don't care about getting Laura

Perry?’

‘Nope. She has secrets that would ruin people. She’ll possibly even try to get me killed when she finds out about this. She might put a million dollars on my head. That old maid is more powerful than anyone knows, besides me. *I* know her. She’s a very sick woman. I’m telling you I don’t care, the NSA doesn’t care about her now.’

‘I understand, but you won’t have to worry about her putting a contract out on you after I get a hold of her.’ I say.

Chicken George fastens his second suspender. Slips on a blue sport coat. ‘We have to move quickly. If you’re going to give us the confession,’ he says, ‘then I have to get to Canine road and set this thing up. I can retire behind this shit. Yes sir. I’m going to take my black ass straight to Thailand. You just watch me.’

In the scheme of things, good guys and bad guys I mean, I guess George is one of the good guys. An upstanding, if not deeply committed government agent, he must be. Thailand is infamous for underage male prostitutes, by the way.

I drop the cigarette on his carpet, stamp it out. ‘You’ll get your statement. Filled with every little detail. I have to visit your friend Laura first, though.’

Chicken George nods his head. ‘I know. You’re a very violent person. Too violent for my tastes. Do what you do. You can use my car if you want. I’ll get rid of that utility truck for you. And shit, I have to remember to send somebody out to get rid of that body at the bottom of my stairs. That bitch had good tail. Her asshole was tighter than hamster pussy.’ He says.

We leave. How much truth was buried in the bullshit Chicken George had just told me, I may never know.



Laura “the Master” Perry is an American born black woman. Chicken George said that she had been dealing in crime, namely drugs, extortion of government officials, and murder for passion, for decades. Her late husband Prescott Perry married Laura when she was in college. He reportedly gave her a hundred thousand dollars a month allowance. Too much money for a bi-polar, manically depressed, paranoid schizophrenic, George said.

Griselda Blanco, Miami drug queen during the golden age of coke, George says she and Laura used to human traffic underage girls from the Philippines. ‘They would sell most of the girls to politicians’, he said, ‘and keep the really cute ones for themselves.’

Laura Perry could not have children. As a young girl she was raped continuously by her truck driver stepfather, an Italian man, who at some point gave her syphilis. The syphilis made Laura mentally unstable, George said, and the disease ruined her pipes so she couldn’t have any babies. She got the disease around age 10, and she got it treated around age 21, while in college studying broadcasting, he said.

Involving herself in the trafficking of children, and selling them to senators, top level police officials, judges and attorney generals, has served to insulate Laura Perry from investigation. Where that failed, her husband’s money protected her from those who wanted her dead for knowing too much about them. Normally, Laura has her emissaries patrolling gay and lesbian bars, hunting young women. Once identified, the young women are brought to Laura and she licks them clean, and pays them well for their silence. Every so often Laura falls in love with one of these girls, but as it turns out Laura is insane and impossible to be with. When a woman crossed Laura is when I was called.

‘You were the Master’s personal hammer. Whenever some girl walked out on her, Laura would call me up and say: *Get in touch with the kid*. I mean, you could have asked

for a hundred thousand dollars a hit if you wanted to.’ George said, ‘She can afford it. Laura Jocelyn Perry is made of, she is literally constructed of, secure long term investments and crisp one hundred dollar bills.’

Chicken George used to patronize the gay club scene himself. There he met one of Laura Perry’s woman hunters. A short while after that, he met Laura.

‘Laura likes me,’ he says. ‘She never knew I was NSA. At least she never acted like she knew. When I hooked up with her, my bosses made me turn in all my other case files and concentrate on her. Then the thing with you and Paulo fell into our lap.’

He said, ‘The Latisha Martinez firebombing fiasco, that was for Paulo. Latisha had just been “sexed” into the MS-13, which basically meant that she had traded a gangbang for membership. She had been seeing Laura, of course, before this, and somehow Paulo found out. Paulo and I were talking one day on the phone about Laura, and Paulo said that he would pay you himself to kill Martinez. I told him killing her was out of the question. Paulo never liked Laura, he hated that we call her the Master, and he resented having to keep the fact that he knew her identity a secret. Maybe he just never trusted her. Part of me thinks he went through with financing that SAM job you did, just to spite her.’

George said, ‘That was the only assignment I ever gave you that was not ordered by Laura. Laura *really* loved that girl. After she died in the hospital, Laura wanted you dead. That’s why you didn’t get any jobs for almost a year. I kept telling Laura to calm down and wait. It’s good for you that she listened...’

Laura Perry lives in a tiny timber-framed hamlet, nestled deep in rural southern Maryland. She of course owns several insanely huge mansions,

the largest in Baltimore county, but if she isn't hosting a party as 'TV news anchor and network affiliate owner Laura Perry', then she is in southern Maryland as the Master.

A mile long paved road, one car thin, splits off from another skinny road and winds up to her cabin. There are no guards. No Doberman pinschers with foaming mouths to chase you. The house is two stories high, dimly lit and there are no trees to be seen, no bushes cut in the shape of oxen, just flat grassy land for 10 acres in every direction.

Chicken George had a gift for me when I dropped him off at the NSA complex. He got out and went into a building, then returned to the car but didn't get back inside.

'Pull the pin,' he says handing me something, 'seven second grenade.'

I look around as I take the grenade, as if I could get arrested. 'Will I need this?' I say.

'Yes. Don't try to shoot your way in. Laura's little cabin is small, but the door is reinforced titanium alloy. Behind the door are two guys with M-16's. You want to toss the grenade in the left window.'

I toss the grenade through the window. All those instructions, schematics, and sniper angles and all manners of military-like details, I wonder if George got all that from his NSA experts.

I climb through the window and the grenade has killed two men. I can't tell if they were black, white, or Asian. Now they're both black.

I think of my daughter. The blown off arm. The bubble gum machine ring. I head upstairs.

'There are no real bedrooms in that house.' George had said, 'That bitch must never sleep.'

The upstairs loft is smoky. Incense, the relaxing, middle eastern kind, is burning somewhere. Otherwise, there is silence and red darkness.

'I had a person watching you earlier tonight. You did

an excellent job.' I know that voice. So, I suppose, does most of Baltimore.

I can hardly see her, I see more the shape of her, and I point my gun at that shape. Hands I see moving, pushing herself upright in a chair. My eyes start to take in more light, and eventually I can see her clearly. She is perfectly still, sitting in a puffy brown leather chair. She's wearing a red Kimono, and her feet are hidden within the material somewhere. Her hair, usually pinned up and all business, was now free and long. Laura Perry, TV anchor, never looks like this.

'I only made love to her once. And I never loved her, despite what I had you tell her on the phone.' She says.

'Who?'

'Your little ghetto baby's mother.'

'I'm not here to talk about her.' I say, and I sort of wiggle my gun at her.

'I am not afraid of anything you could do to me. Remember, I could have had you killed but I did not.' She says, 'I have beaten cancer in these recent years. It has come back again, much stronger, but I will beat it at its own job this time. Did you know mister Herman, that back in ancient Japan, great warriors like you and I would commit Seppuku?' She says.

'I know about Seppuku. Dishonored Samurai used to jam daggers into their chests after their master's died. I don't see how any of that applies to you miss Perry. You're not a warrior.' I say.

'And you are?' She laughs, 'When George told me you wanted to specialize in killing black woman, I thought you were just another useless fool. But no Devlyn Herman, you're not useless. I personally reviewed your high school transcripts. You were very strong in math and science. What you were not strong at was focus. Yes, you seem to have the ability to focus on mundane details, but you mister Herman, never see the bigger picture. For example, you're not focused on what's happening around you as we

speak.'

'I don't understand.' I say.

'You will.' She says.

Unlike any person I've ever been around, I strangely feel relaxed around Laura. Welcome.

I say, 'Any more questions for me before I shoot you?'

'I most certainly do have a question young man. Do you believe in God?'

'No, but God doesn't believe in me either. So we're even.' I say.

'What about the Devil?'

I repeat, 'What about the Devil?'

'Do you believe in the Devil mister Herman?'

I chuckle. 'You see it's funny, because my mother always told me I *was* the Devil.'

'And after what you've done tonight, you believe her now, don't you?'

'Somewhat.'

She says, 'I suppose I should have been killed by an abortion clinic doctor, like my father wanted, but you will do. All your actions over the past few days were meant to lead you here, to me. Killing me will be your final contract assignment. Then, as was done in ancient Japan, I suggest you also kill yourself.'

She *is* crazy, I say to myself.

'I'll help you. I'll kill me with you.' Laura says. She slides out of her chair and onto her knees. From the sleeve of her Kimono, Laura produces an ancient looking dagger.

She says, 'What do you think of suicide?'

'If I ever lost a leg or something I might consider it. I always felt that only constant repetition makes perfect.' I say, 'The thing about suicide is, you can't do it a second time to improve your technique. That is, ignoring all the questions of shared identity and Everett's many worlds interpretation.'

'Everett. I'm impressed.' She says.

'That is what I remember from episode 35 of your

science TV program. I had the whole series on VHS when I was a kid.'

Laura says, 'Indeed. Your strength in matters of science is why I decided to employ you. What I found most impressive however, and tragic, was that you were once considered to be the 2nd ranked high school second baseman in the country.'

I say, 'So that's why you always used a baseball to call on me. You researched me. I get it.'

'You get it. Good for you.'

'So what do you think,' I ask, 'about parallel worlds and 5th dimensional identity and stuff?'

'I am betting on Everett being right. I suspect the Christians are right though. It would be so ironic.' She says.

I say, 'We'd both better hope the Christians aren't right. If they're right we're screwed.'

Laura smirks. 'If you're mother is right about you mister Herman, then you have nothing at all to fear.'

Laura laughs a bit and smiles but she never looks at me. She has that thousand yard stare. Her eyes remain hard forward. She says, 'George called me and told me you were coming. He said you were very upset with me, as we anticipated you might be after you discovered I had you kill your daughter. Personally, I thought you'd only find out that your daughter was in that house after I, or some other local news reporter, told you on television.'

'What did our good friend Chicken George think?'

She says, 'George has predicted everything that has happened so far. You seeing your daughter. You coming to him first, then him leading you to me. I told you what I think you should do. You will soon find out, like many others before you, that you should have never trusted Chicken George. Who do you think told Trina about you cheating on her? Who do you think convinced her to go to the authorities?'

'George knew Trina?'

'George knew *you*. He knows how to use other people to get to you. As usual, he looked uninvolved as your now dead baby's mother handed you over to the federal government.'

'Why me?'

She says, 'George owed a favor to someone in the FBI. You were that favor.'

'So I guess that favor got me screwed huh?'

'Technically, you're still being screwed now, mister Herman.'

I say, 'Mrs. Perry, you're so rich and you are obviously very intelligent. Why even get involved with drugs and murder when don't need to?'

She says, 'Are you asking *me* that question mister Herman, or yourself?'

I think for a while, then I say. 'Well, neither of us answering that question will bring my daughter back.'

'Yes. You are correct. She remains dead.' She says.

I ask, 'Did you ever see my daughter, in person?'

'Yes, four times if I recall correctly.'

'Did you know her name?'

'Of course. You never knew?'

'I, I never asked.'

'Her name was Lynda.' She says. 'Named after your mother.'

I've heard enough for one night. For one lifetime. I point my pistol at the floor.

'Kill yourself.' I say.

With no words, just a brave smile, the Master peels off the upper portion of her Kimono, which takes a while, the Kimono has a lot of layers. Then there are her exposed, mismatched, sagging breasts. She steadies the dagger tip against her naked abdomen and inhales deeply. Then she exhales and stabs herself. I wait a short while before I finish her off with my pistol.

I went downstairs and climbed out the window. I was in Chicken George's Cadillac when I saw the FBI agents in

SUV's. I heard a helicopter above me. I had been set up. I would find out later that the story about Paulo and nuclear weapons was complete bullshit. Making matters worse, every local news affiliate was present, eagerly waiting for me at the end of that skinny mile long driveway. I should have committed Seppuku. I should have put the barrel of my pistol into my mouth, squeezed the trigger, and swallowed. I should have ran. I should have done something...

Instead I did exactly nothing when it truly mattered, like I always do.

Chicken George obviously had his eye on retirement. He screwed me over to go screw little boys in Thailand, but I am not angry at him. Only because I want people to know my story have I agreed to present this confession. It is my desire to someday have my confession published for the commercial benefit of my surviving family, even if this happens posthumously. It is my secondary desire, if the first request is deemed unreasonable, that a copy of this confession be given to Victoria Sequoia, so she may finally know how I feel about her.

The rest of the story of how I came to be sitting here cuffed at the ankles, you already know.

This concludes my official confession and statement of facts. Full disclosure. Though I welcome leniency, I know it is highly likely I will be sentenced to death. I know some are wondering if I regret my actions, or if I am entirely apathetic in the face of what I have done. Truthfully, I have only done what I have always wanted to do: waste my life. It is, of course, mine to waste if I want. I may have talents that could have benefited me legitimately, but that kind of success was not what I wanted.

Somewhere along the way I became fond of crying. Really big, breath-holding sobs. That's all I do these days. I stare out my miniature rectangular window and I cry. The kind of crying desperate soldiers do when they are pinned deep in enemy territory, outnumbered, with no way out.

The type of crying a man does before he goes off to fight, knowing that even if he fights harder than he has ever fought in his life, he will still lose it. Since I last saw Victoria, I've known that perfect level of crying, and have tried to achieve that level of crying every day since.

Most so-called madmen want to be Jesus. The light of all the worlds. The son of man. The lamb of God. I've never wanted to be him. My ambitions have always leaned hard the other way. I've always preferred to be *anti*-him...

I am not delusional. I know what this confession will mean for me. I fully expect to be convicted of at least 13 murders, and sentenced to death. I fully realize that I deserve it.

When I finally have my moment of truth, it will only return me to hell. When I get to hell, I'll spend a while catching up on matters and, if she is not already there waiting for me, I will await the arrival of that woman I never kissed in life. I suspect I have *never* kissed her in *any* mortal lifetime. She is my hell on earth. She is the immovable object I struggle to push. She is the impenetrable fortress I attack with primitive weapons. Despite all of this, seven full lifetimes I would wait, just for one chance to kiss her.

It has been my single-minded dream since the moment I saw you, to kiss you, Victoria. To kiss you and hold you in my arms beneath the sparkling milky way and the infinite multi-verse, and to cry and finally tell you *I love you* on New Year's morning.

The little things, me dying without you, the big things.

