

1947 Noir - Started writing February 15th 2020

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There is no cover charge – There is a two drink minimum – Don't forget to tip your waitress – Do not park in the red zone – When in doubt, vote them out – Cash only – Try the veal.

While you are reading any of these fictional stories, I am not responsible for your laughter disturbing others or your use of tissues to wipe away the tears.

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Please note this story is set in 1947, Kansas City Missouri which is on south side of the Mason Dixon line.

I am not trying to address the injustices of the period. Many other authors have covered those issues already. This is a noir story with elements of illegal romance between characters at the time.

This is significant because it's many years before the civil rights movement ever started. Racism was ingrained in much of society.

It was illegal for anyone other than a 'colored' person to have intercourse with a 'colored' person. It was the law. Marriage between the races was illegal in much of the United States.

The military was segregated.

The story is based on my imagination. The racial facts and situations are from my memories of talking with black WWII veterans and their wives who lived through those times.

(The average wage in 1947 was between \$7 to \$8 a day)

Chapter 01

It's post WWII in Kansas City. With the war over, the economy is rapidly changing from manufacturing war machines and supplies, to one of peacetime. Because of this, there are many new opportunities for organized crime to flourish.

As with any organization, there are matters of concern you take care of utilizing your own people. Then for various reasons, you require outside assistance.

Growing up in New York City, Edward Gibson knew of Murder Incorporated. Their business was murdering people and dispose of the bodies. Despite not being Italian or Jewish, he wanted to be a part of that type of organization. Before he could find a way in, World War Two started.

He joined the Marines. During training, the instructors noticed Edward has talent with a rifle only a few have. After basic training, it was off to sniper school where he honed his natural shooting ability.

He proved to be exceptional at his vocation in the south pacific theater of war, with hundreds of confirmed kills. Being a quiet man, he would never admit to enjoying seeing the results of his actions. Although he celebrated inside with the demise of every enemy soldier.

After every platoon conflict, he would look for enemy survivors. While most everyone was content to leave the enemy die suffering from their wounds, Ed had different thoughts.

After what they did to us, what's a better way to use a knife than to kill the enemy with my own hand. I can even feel them die.

With the end of WWII, the military had no use for snipers. He was honorably discharged with various citations for valor.

Unfortunately, valor and the skill of being a sniper does not help gaining civilian employment. Upon returning home, like thousands of other veterans, Edward Gibson could not find gainful employment. After all, it's not like anyone is going to advertise: Sniper wanted.

After trying everything he could think of, Edward found no entry to any of the New York Italian or Jewish mobs. He knows there's organized crime in other major cities. Still having most of his military separation money, he took the train to Chicago. He found the mob there also closed to him.

Then he heard about Kansas City having organized crime. His pre-war ex-girlfriend had family there. She used to go and visit her relatives in the summer. Edward failed there also. There's no Jewish mobs in Kansas City and not being of Italian decent, he's never getting in.

Now sick of big city bullshit, he found a small town about 40 miles outside of Kansas City Missouri. Knowing his separation money is not going to last forever and without marketable skills, he found a job working in a rural gas station. It's on a state highway leading to Kansas City. Yes pumping gas, cleaning the windows and checking the oil. Even the occasional tire repair. Across the street is Oakley's diner where Ed has his meals.

The town consists of mostly farms, a few dozen houses spread around, general store, the gas station, diner, and a 6 room hotel. There's also a boarding house for some of the locals. This isn't a bad life. It keeps a roof over his head and his stomach full until some other opportunity can be found or comes along.

It's almost 5 o'clock (closing time) when a car pulls up to the gas pump. Ed notices the well dressed passenger staring at him. The driver is a rather large man. He requests a fill up and check the oil. Ed starts fulling the tank. While checking the oil, he sees both men are watching his every move through the windshield.

He closes the hood and walks to the drivers door; “The oil is fine. That will be two dollars and seventy five cents.”

The driver gives him three dollars; “Keep the change. Is that diner across the street any good?”

“The food is pretty good. Bob Oakley owns the place. From what he told me, Sam the cook has been there forever. Breakfast is always available and the meatloaf dinner special is a good deal.”

The men drive across the street and park. When they exit the car, they're looking at Ed, talking and nodding to each other before entering the diner.

A few minutes after 5, Ed enters; “Hello Bob. The meatloaf special and coffee.”

“You come in here seven nights a week. Three or four of those nights, you order the meat loaf special. Tell me why.”

“Sam is the best cook around. Besides, you know I work for a living. When the meatloaf is on special, it's the lowest price dinner you have.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees the two men glancing in his direction. He notices the one who was the driver has a bulge in his jacket. The moment they're not looking, Ed grabs the knife from the counter and conceals it in his hand, holding it against his wrist.

While getting up from his chair; “Hey Bob, I'm not leaving. I'm only going to wash my hands before dinner.”

He stops directly behind the man with the gun as he's turning his head to follow Ed. In a flash, the knife point against the base of the man's skull; “Make so much as a twitch, I'll shove this knife into your skull, twist it and turn you into a rag doll.”

He reaches into the man's coat and removes the loaded pistol.

The man sitting next to him; “Calm down friend. Nobody is going to hurt anyone. We're all going to be friends; okay?”

Still pressing the knife; “Why are you two watching me? Tell me or the big guy is about to breathe his last breath.”

“Calm down friend. I don't carry any weapons. To show you our good faith, you can hold the gun on me if it will make you feel better. Just don't shoot me by accident.”

Ed's now holding the gun at the back of the big man's head. With one hand, he pats the man down. Not finding any other weapons, he removes the cartridges and sets them along with the gun on the counter in front of the unarmed man. (Presumably the boss)

“I'm going to show you my good faith by not turning the big man into a rag doll. Now what do you two want from me?” He removes the knife and backs up a step.

“We thought you were someone else. Because you're so quick, we know you're not who we thought you were. My name is Alex Morris and he's Mike, my bodyguard.”

Big Mike slowly turns his head and makes eye contact; “I'm glad you removed the knife. I was hoping you didn't sneeze, cough or anything like that.”

Alex is looking to Mike and points to the counter; “Pick that up. Put it in one pocket and the cartridges in the other. Is that acceptable friend?”

“Yes. Let's keep this friendly.”

Alex turns to Bob the restaurant owner; “You have a nice place here. Now that we're past this minor misunderstanding, here's

twenty dollars to cover everyone's dinners and another twenty for any inconvenience we may have caused.”

“Thank you; but why so much money?”

“I want all of us to be friends. No one needs to know about this. Is that alright with you?”

Bob is smiling; “There's nothing to know. It's a normal quite evening like any other.”

“Good.”

Looking at the pass thru window, Alex sees Sam the cook who looks frightened. (Sam is a negro who's been working at the diner for decades)

“Call Sam out here please. I'd like to talk with him.”

Bob turns to the window; “Sam, come out here. A customer wants to talk to you.”

Sam slowly comes through the door with wide eyes and a look of 'oh shit' on his face.

“Hello Sam. Here's a twenty for you. There was no trouble here. Just a normal night. Nothing unusual. Right?”

Sam slowly takes the \$20 and puts it in his pocket.

He smiles; “Nothing unusual at all. It was just another quiet night.”

“Have a nice evening Sam.”

He returned to the kitchen with a nervous look on his face. He can be seen looking at the \$20 bill with a smile on his face.

Alex turning; “So your name is Ed, Edward what?”

“Edward Gibson.”

“Let's go to a booth where we can talk.”

Turning; “Mike, stay here at the counter and eat your dinner. I see there's pies in the cabinet, indulge yourself with some desert.”

“But what about this Edward character? Are you going to be alright?”

“I'll be fine. Edward is not going to harm me and I'm sure the meatloaf is fine too.”

At a booth; “Your moves are fast. With that haircut, I can tell you were in the military. Did you see any action?”

Ed was in the process of scooping a fork full of meat loaf, mashed potatoes and peas when Alex asked the question. He set his fork down.

“I was in the Marines. I was at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Leyte, Peleliu, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. You probably heard of those hell holes.”

“Wholly shit. What did you do over there? I know you didn't get your moves because you were in the rear with the gear. I might be looking for a man with your skills.”

“I was a sniper among other things.”

“Other things?”

“In war, you kill the enemy. We didn't take prisoners because we were constantly on the move. We couldn't spare guards to watch them or food to feed them.”

Ed leans over so not to broadcast; “Can I tell you something?”

Alex whispering; “Of course.”

“I became very skilled at dispatching the enemy in silent and creative ways.”

“I thought as much.”

“Can I tell you the truth?”

“Ed, think of me as your friend you can say anything to.”

Leaning back, picking up his fork full of food; “I enjoyed every moment of it. I discovered ways to do what I enjoyed. Some quick and silent. Some to inflict silent agony for several seconds before their end. Watching the life leave there eyes was almost addicting.”

Alex sits looking into Edward's cold eyes and seeing a killer who passionately enjoyed his vocation.

“By looking and talking with you, I'm convinced you are extremely under employed. Are you attached to this middle of nowhere town? What I mean is: do you own property, have a wife, girlfriend, both? Is there anything holding you here?”

“Nothing except I have no place to go. There are so many unskilled vets in every city, I had to come way out here to find a job pumping gas so I could survive.”

“Yeah there isn't much demand for someone like you with your skills. There may be an opportunity for a man with your talents to have his own business. There are occasions where a person or persons need to have their breathing stopped among other things.”

“Yeah, I've seen how mafia bosses are shotgunned while getting out of their car or murdered while having dinner in a restaurant.”

“Those days are over. That level of violence gets the public calling for law enforcement to crackdown on me and other's like myself business activities. The need for more discrete and subtle methods is what's needed now.”

Edward is half smiling at Alex.

“Here's five hundred dollars, and my office phone number. Come to Kansas City and call me. We'll talk, not on the phone, in private. In my business, I never know who may be listening.”

While Alex is still holding the money and a note with the phone number in his hand, Edward does not reach for it.

“Why me? You have Big Mike over there to take care of any special needs you may have.”

With a sly smile speaking softly; “You're observant, but you must know Mike is mostly brawn, and a little short on intellect. With any business, most issues are handled internally. Brute force usually takes care of any issues and sends a message to others. Then there are times a business needs to hire outside professional resources. When they have to be brought in, there's always the possibility of mistakes.

This leaves the problem of a body being found, leading to a trail that can be traced. I need someone I can trust to get the entire job done. Because I know everyone in my line of business, you would also freelance.”

Edward thought for a moment before taking the money; “This doesn't mean I'm going to work for you. This only means I'll come to Kansas City where we can talk.”

“I wouldn't expect it any other way. Let's finish our dinners before Mike orders another slice of pie.”

“Sam makes the best pies. I suggest you bring one of his apple pies back for your staff.”

“In that case, I better get a few.”

“I would suggest you get one of each. The apple is good, the peach, the pumpkin, and a cherry are also good.”

From the counter, they hear Mike; “The chocolate cream is great boss.”

“Tell Bob to box one of every flavor pie he has. I'll pay for them before we leave.”

Turning back to face Edward; “I presume you would like to know the setup for the business opportunity I have in mind for you..”

“I'm sure we can discuss everything in your office.”

“You're quite perceptive. This is one of those business opportunities that are not entirely within the legal system. It would be mostly body removal and elimination.”

“Would next week be good for us to meet?”

“That would be fine. To prove your commitment to my organization, I would like to see if you can remove a pain from one of my businesses.”

“Any particulars?”

Alex writes a name and address on a napkin, then slides it across the table.

“His name is Charles Pearson. He operates a private movie studio my organization owns. The issue is, Charles is selling product I paid for and keeping much of the proceeds. This is causing a cash

flow issue for that business. The problem I have with this person is he continues to breath.”

Alex writes down a different address on a separate napkin and slides it across the table.

“Here's a place to say when you get in town. Tell the front desk you want the Iwo Jima room. I'm sure you won't forget.”

“No, I'll never forget Iwo Jima.”

“I'll contact you when you've taken care of my problem. If I'm satisfied with the quality of your work, we can do business that will be mutually beneficial to both of us and several others.”

Looking over to Mike; “I think I better get my associate before he explodes from over eating.”

“One question. I'm going to need certain things. I don't want to do anything illegal to acquire the tools of my trade, if you understand my meaning.”

“Give the hotel desk clerk a list of what you require to get started. When you've eliminated the Charles problem to my satisfaction, all your future requests will be granted; within reason of course. But first, I'm sure you can understand why I need proof of your commitment.”

“This problem you need removed; does it have allies who might take offense towards me, therefore causing me to solve multiple problems?”

“No. If there is a problem, it could be the few seedy employees he pays a modest commission to distribute his, I mean my products. They don't work directly for me. I also understand they have no loyalty to him other than their modest source of side income.”

Edward smiles at the proposal.

Alex continues; "I'm sure a man with your talent at making friends will have no problem taking care of any unforeseen problems."

"My only question is, would there be a problem if the subject was to end his breathing in a way that looked like an accident?"

"That would be an outstanding solution and I would think quite highly of you."

"I don't see any problem with this at all."

"I didn't think you would. Any other questions?"

"May I presume you're not the type of person who engages in a double cross?"

"I'm a businessman. I never double cross anyone. It's bad for my health and I'm sure with you involved, Mike's health also."

"Yes. It would be fatal to anyone who double crosses me along with anyone who gets in my way."

While sitting on the swivel counter stool, Big Mike turns; "I hope that wouldn't include me; would it?"

"Can I call you Mike?"

"Sure. That's my name."

"I would sure hate to see something like that come between us."

"Why?"

"I would not want to kill someone who I want as a friend."

“Hey boss, this guy is gonna be alright. The guy who owns this place is boxing the pies now.”

Chapter 02

A couple of days later, Edward arrives at the Hotel Raven. His first thought is: *This sure isn't the Ritz, but it's definitely under everyone's radar.*

Once inside at the desk clerk; “I need a room.”

“By the hour, the day or the week, you will pay in advance.”

Ed looks around and sees no one else other than the clerk; “I understand you have a room reserved for me.”

“Reserved? Are you some kind of joker? We have no reserved rooms. You take what I give you, if you have the cash.”

“I want the Iwo Jima room and I expect your cooperation.”

The clerk smiles; “Hello Edward. I've been expecting you.”

He turns, retrieves a small suitcase from a locked closet behind him and sets it on the counter; “This is for you. Also, whatever you need, let me know. You have room three fourteen. Third floor, last room at the end of the hall. Don't use the phone. There's a pay phone in the drug store at the corner. Mister Morris doesn't want anyone taking chances.”

“Alex Morris? He has some big guy named Mike as is bodyguard?”

“He's the boss. You'll find your basic needs in this case. If there's anything else you need; let me know. ”

Ed opens the case to find two automatic pistols. One large and one small caliber, each with a muzzle (silencer), along with several rounds of ammo for each.

Then he unwraps a cloth to find a custom made, handcrafted assault knife. A satisfied smile comes across his face.

“Do these items meet your requirements?”

“Yes, these will do nicely. I'll need a few other things. Several pairs of medium size black dress gloves, a pair of sunglasses, a short thin belt, a bible and a complete priests outfit with hat and size nine shoes.”

“I'll have those items available except the priest outfit tomorrow morning. That is a different sort of request.”

The clerk writes an address on a napkin and pushes it to Ed; “Go here and ask for Sophie Brand. They will make you the priest outfit and any other clothing you require. It might take them a few days. I honestly don't know.”

The clerk slides the key to Ed's room then asks; “Why the gloves?”

“Bulky worker gloves won't do for what I have planned. It's best not to leave fingerprints for law enforcement.”

The clerk smiles; “I understand.”

He grabs the small suitcase and his athletic bag, turns right to face the stairs and elevator to the left. Seeing the 'out of order' sign, he's glad this is only a 3 story building.

Upon entering his room, he closes the curtains and turns on the radio. As the radio is warming, it's off to the bathroom. Before he returns, Glenn Miller's Stardust is heard filling the room with music.

Because of his training, He inspects both automatic weapons.

Thinking to himself; *I'm impressed. Brand new, top of the line*

weaponry. I'm going to like this job.

After checking out the weapons, he looks for a secure place to store them. He removes the bottom cover on the heating system grill and places the weapons inside. Then it's off to see Sophie Brand about some disguise clothing.

20 minutes later, he's entering the Zhou Tailor and Dry Cleaning shop. The small woman behind the counter with a thick Chinese accent; "How I help you."

"I'm looking for Sophie Brand."

"Why you look for her?"

"I'm here on business for Mister Morris. The clerk the hotel I'm staying at, told me Sophie Brand can handle special requests."

"What hotel you stay at?"

"The Hotel Raven. The clerk is a balding guy around sixty and looks sleazy."

"Follow me."

Following the woman, he walks around the counter, past racks of hanging clothes waiting for customers. Past the cleaning, ironing and steam pressing machines to a door marked: storeroom.

She opens the door and signals for him to enter. He does and she closes the door behind him. He sees a Chinese man is sitting at a garment making table.

He gets up with a measuring tape; "What do you want?"

Ed tells the man what he wants while the tailor is taking measurements of his body and telling the woman in Chinese who

is writing down that information.

A few minutes later; “You come tomorrow before dinner for final fitting and adjustments. Do you need inside pockets for weapons?”

“Yes I do. Two hand guns and a knife. One large gun and one small.”

“Guns above belt line? Knife left side above big gun?”

“That would be perfect.”

“Come tomorrow, see if you like. Now go back door. Customer in front, cannot see you come from back. I have much work.”

Ed left, entered a taxi and went to check out his target. It's in a somewhat seedy area where all kinds of unsavory things are going on. Looks like an old industrial and warehouse area. The type of area where everyone looks the other way.

The building has a store front on the first floor and an apartment on the second. The building nondescript.

Walking to the front door, he sees: 'Glasnost Productions' in fading letters on the glass part of the door. There's a curtain blocking any view inside. The door to the right must lead to the upstairs apartment. The mailbox has a name 'Resident' on the label.

Moving over to the front windows, those are painted, preventing prying eyes from seeing inside.

Returning to the business door, he tries the knob to gain entry, it's locked. A brief walk around to the rear of the building and it's apparent the back doors are used solely to empty the trash. The overhead door is locked. Tire tracks show in-out activity.

Ed turns to the front of the building for one more look around.

As luck would have it, a sedan pulls up. He turns to see Big Mike in the driver's seat. He reaches over to open the passenger window; "Get in. Alex wants to see you."

Leaning towards the passenger window; "Are you going to give me a one way ride Mike?"

Smiling; "Na. The boss only wants to have a few words with you. Nothing serious because you're his friend. The boss doesn't have me take his friends for a ride."

"No, but I'm sure you would."

"I'd like to think we're gonna be friends too. It would take a lot for me to shoot you or take you for a ride. Come on in. Sit in the back."

Edward enters and shuts the door; "Hello Alex."

Mike starts driving; "Hello Ed. I want to know if the tools of your trade meet with your satisfaction."

"Yes they do, thank you. So why are you here?"

"I was going to pay my problem a visit to give him one last warning. But since you're here, I thought, why waste my time. I thought you could use some more information."

"Yes please."

Alex writes a note and slides it to Ed; "I thought you would like Chuck Pearson's home address. I'm giving this to you because I had a thought that disturbed me."

"What was that?"

"The police seeing Pearson's body in front a business I own may

cause an unnecessary investigation. I want to make sure you understand my concern.”

“I understand completely. Now that I have his address, I've decided Mister Pearson is going to have a fatal accident in his home.”

“Oh Edward, you truly are the thinking man I thought you are.”

“Question. What about the three people distributing your product?”

“They're local talent he hired. They'll find new employment on their own or Mike will deal with them.”

“Concerning Mister Pearson; if he has any cash, may I take it as a bonus?”

“I have no problem with that; but why?”

“His, I mean your business is cash only. Because I don't want to rely on you for working capital, I'm going to need my own to spread around to make the new business work the way I have in mind.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“The three thugs who are now making money from selling porn will come to work for me. We charge a flat rate get rid of any evidence and the body. I'm thinking two thousand per removal.”

Alex smiles; “I'm more thinking five hundred each.”

Edward has a smile; “A grand for each removal is good.”

“A grand each is good for everyone. I know we're going to have a beautiful relationship.”

“Another question, who lives in the apartment above the studio

storefront?”

“The skanks, actresses if you can call them that, live upstairs. Charles supplies them with a place to live, food, and a modest supply of narcotics. If they didn't live there, his recruiter would have to recruit new actresses every day.

I'll send the so called talent on their way when you've completed your obligation. There's also a matron who oversees the talent. She makes sure they're fed and their needs are taken care of. Because I trust her, I'll give her a fair settlement in cash to go away.”

“Give me information on this recruiter.”

“He's a greasy looking character who goes by the name of Thomas Curto. He hangs around the bus station and picks up runaways the same way pimps get their girls.”

“Will Thomas be a problem I'm going to have to deal with?”

“No. He's a cute girly boy of you get my drift. No offense, but if someone threatens him, he'd piss on himself. Mike will inform Thomas he needs to find new employment.”

“How about any male actors showing up?”

“Charles, the soon to be departed has a flare for different forms of lesbianism so there won't be any males coming around.”

“Oh.”

“So, is there somewhere we can drop you off?”

“Could you drop me off somewhere quiet?”

“Sure. I thought you might want to see where your target lives.”

“I do, but I don't want to take any chances of you or Mike being spotted. I'll catch a taxi and have him drop me off a couple of blocks from the target's house. I'll walk from there.”

“I like a man who's careful; especially one who's looking out for my best interest.”

20 minutes later, Ed's walking towards his targets home. It's a modest single family, bungalow style house. He notices a large granite sign on the lawn: Faith Over Fear

Thinking to himself; *A producer and distributor of pornography is a religious nut? Talk about double standards.*

Not too obviously looking at the house, he sees nothing out of the ordinary except there's a large crucifix on the front door. Ed walks back to the main street where he uses public transportation to return to the hotel.

The following day, Big Mike takes Ed around and introduces him to the various organized crime Lieutenants of the local organizations. He needs to learn the who's who in his new environment. No need to piss people off by making mistakes before getting established.

Mike also informs Ed on the various corrupt politicians, their go between people and cops who are willing to provide information and protection for a price. Ed and Mike are developing a good friendship.

Late that afternoon it's back to the tailor. The fit is good, only needs some minor adjustments. An hour later, the suit is ready.

He returns to the hotel to find everything he asked for and a few extra items on the bed. Including a Kansas City police detectives badge. There's even several changes of new clothes.

After inspecting everything, it's off to dinner at a nothing fancy neighborhood restaurant. Return to the hotel and start preparing for tomorrow.

Chapter 03

Using public transportation, Edward is on his way to send Charles (Chuck) Pearson to join his ancestors. 45 minutes later, dressed as a priest with a bible in his left hand, he arrives at his destination.

While wearing this dress gloves, he uses the door knocker to announce his presence. Almost a minute passes before the door opens.

A borderline morbidly obese man in his late 50's appears first with a scowl on his face, then changes to one of welcoming. The man is only wearing a sleeveless tee shirt and pants. He's barefoot.

“Oh. Hello Father. I thought you were a door to door salesman trying to sell me something. I've already made my monthly donation to the church; so what brings you here?”

With a big smile; “No, I'm not here for the church. I'm not even from the church. I'm here to see that you atone for your evil doings.”

“What the hell are you talking about? You need to go back to the asylum you escaped from.”

While Pearson was talking, Ed removed his gun from his pocket and placed it under the bible. It's now poking Charles in the stomach.

“Let's go inside so we can conduct our business privately. You will give me what I want, then you can continue with the remainder of your life.”

Without a word, Charles backed into his home. Upon entering, Ed shut the front door with his foot.

“Is there anyone else here?”

“No. We're alone.”

“Good. Have a seat. I'll make this quick and easy for both of us.”

Ed removes his hat and places it on a chair near the door.

“What do you want? Are you sure you want to do this? I have some very powerful friends.”

Ignoring the threat; “I want to know where your safe is and the combination. I'm going to liberate your cash and then I'll leave.”

“The wall safe is in the next room, behind the drawing of the three mast sailing ship. The combination is thirty one right, forty one left, fifty nine right.”

“That's good. Now let's go to the kitchen, we need a few things.”

“What to you want now? You better not expect me to make you breakfast.”

“No. I need two coffee cups with saucers and spoons.”

“Fu** you. I'm not going to be humiliated by some punk.”

“Would you rather me shoot you in the knees and leave you in pools of your own blood on the floor crying out in pain?”

“No.”

“Then get the cups, saucers, and spoons.”

Chuck gathered the items and the two men walked into the dining room containing the safe.

“Have a seat in the chair and put your hands on the armrests.”

Ed placed a saucer, cup and two spoons on the back each of Chuck's hands.

“Now here's what's going to happen. I'm going to open the safe, take the money and leave. During this process, you are not going to move. If I hear anything juggle or fall, I will put a bullet in your forehead. Am I clearly understood?”

“As crystal.”

“Now what's the combination again?”

“Thirty one right, forty one left, fifty nine right.”

Ed removes the painting from the wall. He proceeds to open the safe and place his windfall into a cloth shopping bag he brought with him. Turning to face Chuck, he hears a female voice coming from another part of the house.

“I'm not waiting all day for you. I'm leaving you worthless piece of shit. I have other things to do back at the studio. I gotta make sure the women are alright and not doing anything stupid.”

Chuck calls out; “Don't leave Dee! Go back upstairs and I'll pay you double. Just give me a few more minutes down here.”

“You're going to pay me double? Are you for real?”

Now in a full sweat; “Yes! Please go back upstairs right now.”

“It better be double in cash. That's eight dollars.” as the voice drifts off before a door is heard closing in the distance.

Ed looks at the man sitting in the chair; “You really disappoint me. You said the house is empty.”

Two muffled gunshots are heard. The coffee cups, saucers and

spoons fall to the floor. Setting the canvas bag of cash on the table, Ed walks upstairs.

Open one door, empty bedroom. Open a second door, another empty bedroom. Thinking to himself; *'I should have checked the end of the hall first. That's where the master bedroom would be.'*

He rapidly opens the door, fully prepared to kill whoever's there. With his weapon pointing at the potential target, his trigger finger freezes in place. He sees who he considers the most beautiful woman he's ever seen sitting fully clothed on the edge of the bed.

“You're not scumbag Chuck. Who are you and what did you do to my boss? You wouldn't be up here unless he's dead.”

“Chuck is no longer breathing. Are you a working girl?”

“I don't care for a white man calling me girl. No I'm not a prostitute. I'm a working woman because I have a real job. A disgusting part of my employment was entertaining my now obviously dead boss on occasion. Why?”

“You worked for the late Mister Pearson?”

“Yes and could you please stop pointing that gun at me?”

He lowers the weapon, but does not put it away.

“So what kind of work did you do for the newly departed?”

“I manage his actresses, if you can call them that. I'm sure you know the business his is, I mean was in. The so called movie stars live above the studio. I make sure they're clean, have food and whatever else they need. I also make sure they're safe.”

“How did you make sure they're safe?”

“I have phone numbers to call if there's a problem.”

“Does, I mean did the job pay well?”

“I was paid twelve dollars a day, seven days a week, plus room and board. I was also paid four dollars to service that piece of shit now ex boss on occasion. That's fantastic money for a woman of color.”

“Yeah that's good money. I was making seven dollars a day at my last job.”

“So can I walk out of here? Neither of us were here. I never seen you. I don't know you and all that good stuff. How about letting me live to see the sunrise tomorrow.”

“I heard the scumbag call you Dee. I take it you have no loyalty to the newly departed.”

“I would have shot the son of a bitch if he didn't pay so well and wasn't connected to the mob. Take my word as gospel. Having sex with that disgusting, fat, white piece of shit was the only way I could keep my job.

Because he's so fat, it only involved my right hand if you understand my meaning. Thank the lord I only had to come here once a week.”

While Ed's removing the muzzle from the gun; “I know from Alex, you will be unemployed today. You'll receive cash as a parting gift. So how would you like to work for me in a totally new occupation? Sex will not be involved.”

“I figured you're not a priest. At least not with that haircut. Other than that, nice disguise.”

He removes the collar and places it in his pocket, then partly opens his shirt; “No I am not. I also wear a hat as part of the disguise.”

“Are you sure I won't have to have sex with you to keep my job? I mean with me being what you people call colored, that's an issue. It's illegal for whites to have sex with Negroes.”

Smiling; “I'm only interested in business. I know I'm going to need someone who I can trust and has my back. I promise you two things, I will never lie to you and having sex will never be a condition of your employment.”

“Why me? You don't even know my last name.”

“When I was in the corp, I learned real fast who I can trust to watch my back and who I can't. I know I can trust you. It's a feeling I have. So what do you say partner?”

She stands up; “Well now partner, you know my name; what's yours?”

“Edward, Edward Gibson.”

“Well Edward Gibson, first things first. Because you came in here to kill me, you scared me something bad.”

“So?”

“I need to use the restroom as soon as possible. I need to pee!”

He smiles; “Sorry. Please go and relieve yourself.”

They exit the bedroom. Edward stands in the hall while Dee opens a door where a toilet can be seen. She shuts the door and opens the window for her escape. Halfway out, she changes her mind.

I'm on the second floor. That's a long drop. I could fall and break my neck. Na, this isn't going to work.

Through the door; “Are you alright in there?”

“Yes I'm fine. I didn't fall in if that's what your asking.”

“I thought you may need me to find some toilet paper or something.”

“No, I'm fine. It takes ladies a bit longer than men.”

“I understand. It's only when I heard the window open, I thought you didn't want to be my business partner. If you want to leave, you're free to go. I won't stop you.”

“You won't?”

“No. I think Alex would be upset with me if I killed someone he trusts and likes.”

“Really? I can walk away right now and you won't shoot me?”

“I ... I ... I could never hurt you.” with emotion in his voice.

Dee opens the door; “You're serious aren't you?”

He's looking at her like a man in love; “No I could not.”

She smiles; “Well now, I actually believe you.”

He shuffles his feet like a teenager in love and is blushing.

She's thinking; What the hell is wrong with me? Why am I feeling this way about a white guy? We look to be about the same age. He's treated me pretty good so far. He didn't kill me when he had the chance. Stop it! What's wrong with you? Well he isn't bad looking. He actually is kinda cute. Now what are you thinking?”

“Edward, we have a big problem. What are we going to do with the body?”

“Call me Ed if you'd like. Come with me for your first lesson in our new business.”

On their way downstairs, She asks; “Which our new business is?”

“Disposing of bodies that would be best the authorities did not find.”

“Can't have a murder charge without a body. No body, no murder.”

“The police solve murders because there's always evidence, the body and other forensic materials. My idea is you and I remove the body before the police arrive. No body, no crime.”

He leads her to the basement; “I like your idea. We need to work out the details and I have some good ideas to make this work. Now first, what are we going to do down here?”

Using the shut off valve at the meter, Ed turns off the natural gas. This causes all the pilot lights in the house to go out. Range, oven, furnace and hot water tank. Because both units are old, there's no safety valves, allowing the free flow of gas when anything is activated.

Returning upstairs to the kitchen, Dee turns on the hot water faucet. This will cause the water tank to call for heat. Ed goes to the dining room, turns up the thermostat, causing the furnace to call for heat.

With both now in the kitchen; “Dee, do you smoke?”

“No. I can't stand the smell. But Chuck does, did. Why?”

“I need a cigarette and a book of matches.”

“I'll be right back.”

Less than a minuter later, she returns. Ed opens the book of matches, lights the cigarette, places it in the match book, next to the heads.

She looks and chuckles; “Cigarette burns down, catching the matches on fire, house will be filled with gas by then and boom!”

“And we're far away when it goes. Turn on the oven and range burners, then follow me. I need to pickup our new business startup capital.”

Dee does as requested and follows Ed to the dining room. He reaches into his bag, pulls out a packet of currency and hands it to his new partner.

“Wow! Are you sure you want to give me this?”

“Would you prefer I didn't give you anything?”

“No no no. I've never even touched a pack of bills. What's this for?”

“I'm sure my new business partner can use an advance on her first share of our new business.”

“There's a hundred dollars here.”

“Put that in your purse and let's get out of here. We have about five, maybe ten minutes before the cigarette burns down to the matches and all hell breaks loose.”

They're out the door in moments.

While waiting for public transportation minutes later and blocks away, a loud boom is heard. The two look at each other and smile. Looking down the street, here comes the city bus.

Dee goes to the rear. Ed sits next to her.

She whispers; “Go up front or you'll have everyone staring. We don't need that kind of attention.”

He moves to the front and sits down, noticing a few ugly stares directed at him.

Chapter 04

Later with the city bus trip over, they return to the studio to find Big Mike sitting in the porn studio office; “Hello Dee. Don't you have some talent to attend to upstairs?”

“I'll stick around here to see what's going on.”

Mike has a slight smile on his face; “Mister Morris knew there was going to be a change in your future. He's fine with you leaving Chuck's employment.

And you Ed, the boss and I both feel you did a fine job of getting rid of that annoyance. Seeing Dee leaving from Chuck's house with you made both of us glad she wasn't collateral causality.”

“Dee proved to be valuable and convinced me of her being trustworthy. I hope Mister Morris, Alex don't mind if I steal one of his former employees.”

Alex Morris enters the office from the back studio; “Hello Ed, nice work. By the way Dee, I've shutdown productions here.”

She looks on with surprise; “Oh? I assumed you would have someone else run the studio.”

“No, that won't do. The talent working here would do almost anything to be in front of a camera. They wanted to be movie stars no matter what.

When Charles felt they wouldn't do certain vulgar sexual acts for the camera, he introduced them to narcotics to loosen their inhibitions.”

“I was never a part of that Mister Morris.”

“I know. I asked the ladies myself.”

Changing the direction of his eyes; “Ed, if your new found friend here would have been involved in supplying narcotics, Dee would have been your second cleaning job for me.

Because she had nothing to do with any of that, Dee shall continue breathing in what I presume is her new occupation with you.”

Dee looks like she's about to start sweating bullets. Ed thinks it's time to turn the temperature down a bit; “Why don't we all sit down to continue this conversation.”

Alex turns to Mike; “Get up and use one of the other chairs. I want the comfortable one you're sitting in.”

A few moments later with everyone now seated, Dee asks; “So what's going to happen to the ladies upstairs?”

“They are no longer your concern.”

With a look of sadness; “What did you do to them? Did you have Big Mike do anything to them?”

“Oh don't panic. I gave each of them a hundred dollars and told them to get off the dope and go home. All of them left while you two were on your way here.”

“What about Thomas?”

Ed asks; “Who's this Thomas?”

“He's a disgusting pimp like character. What's going to happen when he brings around more so called talent?”

“Mister Thomas Curto will be passing away in his apartment from a drug overdose soon after we leave here.”

Big Mike reaches into his left jacket pocket and removes a black

case. He opens it to expose a syringe and a vile of liquid.

“What about Bruno, Larry and Albert? They're creepy and seedy, but what about them? You're not going to have Big Mike do anything to them are you?”

“If they would have stole from me like Charles did, they would be in garbage landfill now. Lucky for them, your former boss kept detailed records of every dollar each one of them took in. They didn't take anything from the sales other than their pocket change commissions.”

“Good. Now what's going to happen with them? Are they going to work for you as street thugs doing low level shit Big Mike won't touch?”

“I thought Edward here would need some extra employees for his new business. There all yours Ed. Along with them, you can have this building.

My attorney will be here later to have you sign the title and deed papers. I need to sever any connection between me and this property. Legally, you just purchased this building for thirty five hundred dollars.

As Dee knows, the entire second floor is an apartment with three bedrooms. I also took the liberty of naming your new business for you. Specialize Waste Disposal.”

“I like it. Thank you.”

“There's a truck inside the garage portion of this building. There will be a sign painter to letter the truck later today. Now all you have to do is arrange to get rid of the bodies I and others will be sending you on occasion. Not too often, but enough to keep both of you gainfully employed.”

A loud stomach grumbling is heard. Alex turns to face Mike; “Are you hungry already? It's not even nine o'clock in the morning.”

“I didn't eat breakfast this morning boss. You told me to pick you up early and I overslept; so I didn't have time to eat.”

Alex turns back to Dee and Edward; “Mike has been with me from the beginning. When I was on the street collecting past due loan payments, a customer refused to pay and tried to knife me. Mike happened to be walking by and seen us struggling.

The knife that was intended for me, ended in his throat. That's why he sounds like a gravel road. He saved my life and the rest as they say is history.”

Calmly Ed asks; “What happened to the bad guy?”

Big Mike smiles with a look of being proud; “I broke his neck like a chicken bone. After I heard it crack, Mister Morris helped me get in his car and brought me to the private hospital. He saved my life. I've been with him ever since.”

Alex adds; “I need someone covering my back all the time and I see you know that too. Although I'm surprised you selected Dee, someone you barely know. She's been taking care of the so called talent for several years now. I think you made a good choice. She's loyal and honest.”

With a smirk; “Well a colored woman gotta do what she needs to do to survive.”

“Dee, you know I don't approve of that word and the other vulgarity people use to describe anyone of color.”

“Why? It's what I am.”

“I've told you before, you are Miss Dee Mullins, a woman, period.

I don't call Larry, Negro or Colored Larry. Or Albert, Caucasian Albert. Now stop your shit and let's get this new business going.”

“Sorry Mister Morris. ”

“I'm still Alex to you and I always will be. Now take Ed and show him the special hospital.”

“What's the special hospital?”

“Dee will show you. In our line of business, going to a normal hospital with a bullet or stab wound would raise way too many questions and get the police involved. So we, as in others in our line of business created and fund our own medical facility. One where nobody asks questions.”

Alex tosses Ed a set of keys; “These are to the building and the truck in the garage.”

Alex throws Dee a set of keys; “Both of you are going to need transportation. There's a black coupe out front. It along with the building, are registered in your new business name. Both of you have a busy day ahead. The sign painter and attorney should be here around two. Now go and good luck.”

They left the storefront. With Dee driving, Ed asks; “I take it you live upstairs of what used to be the pornography studio and is now our new business?”

“Someone had to stay with those girls or they would leave looking to party or whatever. The last thing I needed was one of them having a boyfriend coming around causing trouble. Then Big Mike would have to get involved.”

“I understand. So may I presume there's plenty of space for me to move in?”

“There's plenty of space. You can have either of the two other bedrooms, not mine. I sleep alone. Am I clear on this?”

“Perfectly. I'll take the one farthest away from yours. Would that make you feel better about us living together?”

“We're not living together. We're sharing an apartment with plenty of separation.”

“Got it. Now on to business. Removing bodies and cleaning up crime scenes is only one part of this. Do you have any ideas about disposing the bodies, other than digging a ditch and dumping them somewhere in the country?”

Dee has a huge smile on her face; “I thought you would never ask. After I show you the hospital; do you like pulled pork?”

“Absolutely love it.”

“Good. After our hospital stop, we'll go see my uncles. Howard owns a restaurant that has the best soul food in town. Herbert owns a funeral parlor that has a crematory and a hundred and fifty acre cemetery.”

“You've got to be kidding me.”

“Nope. Howard makes the best pulled pork sandwiches in all of Kansas City. Herbert helps his brother Howard because the funeral business doesn't make much money.”

“Why's that?”

“Most Negroes can't afford a funeral, so the county buries most of us for free. No body cares one bit about a negro funeral home or cemetery. The city and county ignores us. I'm sure my uncle will be open to some cash for services rendered.”

“Like hundred dollar cremations?”

“Oh hell no. Don't offer that much. Offer fifty dollars. Herbert will laugh and say a hundred or no deal.”

They both chuckle at themselves.

“I believe I made the right choice for a partner. You and me are going places.”

“I like you Ed, but remember to keep your hands to yourself.”

“For our mutual benefit, we must stay professional.”

“Why? In spite of that awful haircut, you're not a bad looking man.”

“If we were to become romantically involved; someone may hurt you to get to me. I can't have that.”

“Yeah, I guess that could happen. I was thinking it was because you're white, that wouldn't happen because there's too many barriers. Not to mention it's illegal.”

“Pull over for a minute.”

Dee finds a open spot to park; “So what's wrong? Did I touch a nerve? What's the real reason? You don't want to be seen having a romantic relationship with a *'colored woman'*? Are you afraid your white friends wouldn't approve?”

“You're a beautiful woman. There's no doubt in my mind. I also haven't been romantic with a woman since the first and only time; never mind. We would draw too much attention, and that's the last thing we want. We can only have business between us.”

She looks at him with determination before; “You're right. People

would stare and that would not be a good thing for either of us when we're trying to stay unnoticed. Besides, how could I ever be attracted to a white man with that haircut.”

With a smile; “You're an amazing woman who I'm so glad to know. Maybe I should let my hair grow out. It's been short for so long, I may have forgotten how to comb it.”

“If you do, I'll help you remember.”

“Thank you. For now, let's see this hospital. After that, we can see your uncles and get some lunch. We have to be back to the office by two.”

Dee continues driving and a couple moments later; “So what's your story? I was born here. I heard you came originally from New York City?”

“I was born August seventeenth, nineteen twenty three. My parents were functional alcoholics. We moved from one place to another. A few months after I graduated high school, the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. I was eighteen and signed up for the marines. I served all over the Pacific during the war as a sniper. Tried to find work in New York and Chicago. Now I'm here. What's your story?”

“I was born August twenty sixth, nineteen twenty three also. As you probably have guessed by now, my grandfather was some white guy. I have no idea who he was. My grandma had children with three different white guys. That's where my lighter shade of skin and Caucasian facial features came from. You'll see this in my uncles too. They're a little lighter than me.

When the black sperm downer found out my Mom was pregnant, he vanished. Mom died when I recently turned thirteen, her two half brothers took me in. That's enough of my history. You don't need the rest. It would scare you away.”

“There's nothing you can do to scare me away. I ... I ... I really have strong feelings about you.”

The mutual attraction bug has seriously bit both of them. Unfortunately, neither of them will admit their feelings to each other. Not even to themselves, yet.

They arrive at the *'hospital'*. It sure doesn't look like any medical facility Ed's ever seen. Above the front door is a sign that reads: Sisters of Life Care monastery.

Dee asks; “What do you think?”

“This has to be the first monastery that has an eight foot high brick wall around it. Bars on the windows and that front door could stop a tank.”

She chuckles; “It's all to keep prying eyes out. Besides, this is a rough neighborhood. What till you see who answers the door.”

She presses the door bell only once; “It's almost two minutes later when the door finally opens. There's a giant of a man wearing faded black slacks, a sleeveless tee-shirt and a poorly fitting priests collar on his neck. He has to be close to six and a half feet tall.

He takes one look at Edward; “Go away. You're not wanted here and starts to shut the door.”

Dee yells; “Hey Carl. It's me; Dee Mullins. Alex Morris told me to bring the new guy here to meet you and some of the staff.”

“Oh, hi Dee. I didn't recognize you because you don't have any of those ladies with you. Come on in.”

Turning to face Ed; “Now don't start any shit while you're here. You look like a nice guy. I wouldn't want to hurt you.”

“Carl, this is my friend Edward Gibson. He's a good guy. Alex likes him and I think you will too.”

Edward extends his hand. Carl was a fullback in high school football. Ed's hand is probably half the size of the hand he's shaking.

Almost wincing; “Pleasure to meet you.”

“If you're a friend of Dee, you can be a friend of mine.”

She tells Ed; “Carl is Big Mike's older brother.”

“You know my little brother? Then you must be a good guy. Little Mikey is real picky on who his friends are.”

As they're walking to an office, Ed wonders how long it will take for feeling to return to his nearly crushed hand.

Introductions are made and small talk ensues. While getting ready to leave, an Asian woman walks in wearing nurses scrubs. She's a former high school flame of Ed's.

“Well as I live and breathe, Edward Gibson. It's good to see you survived the war. How have you been?”

Dee asks; “You know him?”

With a huge smile; “We go back to high school In New York.”

“Hiroshi Sada, it's a real surprise pleasure to see you. I've been well. I heard you left the country just before the war. How did you get from New York to Japan and then here to Kansas City?”

“When my dad was recalled to Japan, naturally my mom and I went with. The war started and I went to school there to become a nurse. After the war, I wanted nothing to do with NYC. I honestly

came here to see if I could find any of my relatives. They were sent to internment camps and probably resettled elsewhere.

While looking, I made a few friends. One of them told me I could make real money if I knew the right people. I met them and well, here I am.”

Dee is becoming impatient; “We need to get going. Say goodbye to your old girlfriend.”

“Oh don't worry. What Ed and I had was over a long time ago. Goodbye for now. Let's get together soon and reminisce about the good old days. We were really good for each other. Ya know, you came so close to being my first.”

Edward is tongue tied; “I'm, I'm, I don't know what to say.”

Dee is not having any of this; “Edward is involved in a new business. He won't be having time to be with you; that's for sure.”

Hiroshi gives that: *'Wow! I'll stay away from your man look.'* followed the *'I got your message' nervous smile.'*

“Goodbye Hiroshi. I'm sure we'll see each other again.”

Dee with a snarl; “Don't bet on that happening anytime soon.”

“Oh don't worry about Ed and me. I found being a lesbian is better for many reasons. No boyfriend beating the shit out of me, no STD's and I don't have a man rolling over and falling asleep after sex.”

“Wow. I would have never guessed. You were so hot in school.”

“I may be a lesbian, but I'm still a woman with needs. Maybe we can get together and pickup where we left off. I don't hate men, I just prefer women. You can find out what you missed.”

The jealousy from Dee would have been clear to a blind man.

“Ed, we need to leave right now.”

As they're about to turn, they hear Hiroshi; “I've seen that look on a women's face before. I think you're going to take care of him before I can.”

They leave the building and enter the car. During the drive to her Uncle Harold's restaurant; “Is everything okay between us?”

She snaps; “Why?”

“You were a little huffy with Hiroshi. I'm wondering if everything is okay between us.”

In a snotty voice; “There is nothing going on between us. Everything is fine. I'm fine, you're fine. Everything is just fine.”

“Okay. I thought you were cross with me is all.”

“Why would you think that? Because you were talking to your ex and her wanting to pickup like old times? That's fine. Why don't you do that while trying to start a highly illegal business. Yeah, tell me how that's going to work.”

“Hiroshi and I were good for each other at the time.”

“I suppose you two were having fantastic sex all the time?”

“No. Our lessons together never made it that far. Came damn close though.”

Dee is calming down; “That's good. I don't want you bringing her or any other woman to the apartment. Am I understood?”

“Completely. On that subject, I never asked; will I be meeting your

bro man, boyfriend or boyfriends anytime soon?"

"Why would you ask that?"

"I wouldn't want your man or men to think I'm moving on his or their woman. I'd prefer to avoid that kind of a situation. It would not be good for our partnership if a boyfriend of yours is our first disposal."

She turns her head and with a sly smile; "There's no bro man, boyfriend or boyfriends. There hasn't been any male in my life for a long time."

She returns to watching the road and exhales a deep breath; "And before you ask, I don't want to talk about it."

"Then we won't. So how long to your uncle's place?"

"We're almost there."

"Good. I'm hungry."

Chapter 05

Dee parks the car behind the restaurant. When Edward exits, he sees a guy with a gun sticking out of his waistband.

“Hi James. I just got this car and I don't want anyone stealing it or my tires.”

“No one's gonna touch your car Dee. Who's this? Is he okay?”

“He's my business partner. We're starting a new business.”

“I was wondering if you were ever going to get yourself a man. No offense; but you get yourself involved with a white guy?”

“James, you're you're not my keeper. His name is Edward and we're only business partners so mind your manors.”

Edward moves to the man; “Hello James. I know Dee is a beautiful woman. I would have to be blind not to see that. But our relationship is only business.”

While James is shaking Ed's hand; “It would be impossible to do better than her.”

The handshake stops and James pulls Edward closer; “Don't ever hurt her. She's been hurt way too much to be hurt again. That would make me angry and you won't like that.”

Ed whispers; “I could never hurt or allow her to be hurt by anyone or anything.”

James turns to face her; “I like this guy. He's going to be good for you. Go on inside. Your uncles we'll be glad to see you.”

Once inside, two biracial men who looked to be in their late 50's or early 60's see Dee and are all smiles; “Well as we live and breathe,

our favorite niece finally comes to pay her uncles a visit.”

“And she brings a surprise guest with her. Welcome to H and H, that's us. I'm Harold and he's my brother Herbert. I own this place and by brother helps out when his undertaker business is slow, which is most of the time.”

“You can call me Herb. So our favorite niece; what brings you here with a welcome, but unexpected guest?”

“I'm your only niece so I must be your favorite. So Uncle Herb, how's the undertaker business?”

A somewhat sour look comes over the mans face; “As you know, there's no shortage of our kind dying. It's only there's too few who can pay, so the county buries most of us.”

Harold asks; “This isn't personal mister; but with that haircut, you must be ex military. Marines I would guess.”

“Yes I was in the corp. Once a marine, always a marine. I'm here with Dee to offer Herbert a business proposition.”

He asks Dee; “Is this guy okay or is he setting us up for something that will cause me to loose my license?”

“Nope. Edward is serious. We started a cleaning business that will require us to get rid of a corpse or more every now and then. Being you're in that business, I thought you could use some extra, off the books cash for your services.”

Herbert directs them to a open rear corner booth where he asks Dee; “Honey, would you get us get us four pulled pork sandwiches and four bottles of beer. We need to discuss this over some food and refreshments.”

Dee has been standing next to Edward the entire time. She turns,

gives him a look that almost melts his heart; “Are you gonna be alright with these two old geezers?”

Without thinking, he gently grasps her right hand; “I’ll be fine. I promise I won’t go anywhere without you.”

She’s smiling as Edward is holding her hand the entire time.

“You have to let me go so I can get our food.”

“Sorry. Holding your hand just felt so good. Don’t forget our beer.”

When she’s a few steps away, Herbert with a smile; “I would have never guessed she would ever fall for a man, much less a white guy.”

Harold adds; “Considering her history, We’re damn shocked. She definitely has eyes for you. We’ve never seen her like this with anyone before.”

“If I may ask; why? What happened to her?”

Harold and Herbert tag teamed their answers.

“Nobody knows this but us.”

“Don’t ever let her know we told you.”

“We never had this conversation.”

“When Dee was thirteen, she was gang raped.”

“That happened while her mother was being treated for cancer. When her single mother, our sister died two weeks later, Dee came to live with us.”

“Both of us are divorced.”

“Dee became pregnant from the rape. When she was three months along, she started bleeding real bad down there.”

“Being an unmarried, underage pregnant negro, when she went to the hospital, they took the unborn baby from her.”

“They also took out her uterus.”

“She's never been the same since. She's never had a real boyfriend.”

“Maybe for couple of days at most. As soon as the boy would make some kind of advance, it was over.”

“She been that way since she was violated.”

“The most we've ever seen was her holding some boy's hand once in a while.”

“Yeah. That was before the boy must have said something that caused her to slap him and have her running into our house.”

“Shush. Here she comes. Don't tell her we told you anything.”

Edward gets up as Dee arrives. He stands while she's taking the food and beer off the serving tray and setting it on the table; “So did you two tell Ed all the family gossip? Not there's much because there's so few of us.”

“You know us better than that Dee. Two old geezers and a marine have plenty to talk about. Now ain't that right.”

“Your uncles and I were only talking a little local history.”

She has a smile of her face as she looks to her uncles. Loudly; “I want you two to learn a lesson.”

Both men look confused; “What's that sweetheart?”

“When I came back, Ed stood up until I sat down. That's the sign of a true gentleman. You two act like you're glued to your chairs.”

There's rumbling from a couple of people in the restaurant. One comment was: “At least he has manors. Not like some people.”

The lunch went quite well. By the time it was finished, all the staring at Edward had stopped. Now the duo has a place to dispose of the bodies. Depending on the volume, the bodies could be buried in under new plots or cremated.

Edward offered \$50 each. Like Dee said earlier, Herbert wanted \$300. They agreed on \$150 each. Then there was one hiccup.

“There's just a little tiny bit of a problem. The crematory furnace.”

“Uncle Herb; why is there always a problem when I ask either of you for anything? The car won't start, the truck is outta gas, there's a flat tire. You can't find the keys. It's always something with you two.”

“Now Dee, we've always somehow done right for you. We always made sure you had a roof over your head and good food on the table.”

“And we always made sure you had good shoes and clothes to wear.”

“We sent you to Lincoln College all the way in Jefferson City so you could get that degree in accounting you wanted.”

“And one of us always walked you to school and back home every day after those boys ...”

Dee almost jumps from her seat. With an angry voice; “Stop!

Enough! I don't ever want to talk about it. Not here, not anywhere.”

“Sorry. We always did what we thought was best for you.”

“That's what uncles are for, so don't be cross with us.”

Edward has to step in and change this toxic subject; “Gentlemen, what's the problem with the crematory? Tell me so we can get it fixed.”

“The crematory furnace needs to be repaired. The repairman told me it would cost maybe a hundred and fifty dollars. If things were real bad, maybe up to two hundred dollars.”

“As a show of my good faith in our new partnership, I'll give you two hundred and fifty dollars. Will that solve the problems?”

Herbert blurts out; “Three hundred would be even better. I could spruce the place up a little.”

“Uncle Herb, listen to you. No, because I know you'd do something foolish with the extra money and I know bad things would happen after that. There isn't a damn thing that needs sprucing up.”

“Sorry. You've been gone for so long, I forgot how well you know me.”

While she's smiling, Uncle Harold asks; “So how long have you two known each other?”

“I met Dee under some rather unusual circumstances this morning. After a get to know you chat, we found we work well together.”

“You two developed a partnership and all this in just a few hours?”

“When I met Edward, I honestly thought: I'm gonna die!”

“What the hell do you mean by that?”

“I'll explain. Dee was sitting alone in a room. I knew there was a woman was in the house and I was completely prepared to end her life. No talking, no begging for her life, just two slugs in the chest. Then I'm on my way.

When I seen her beautiful smooth face for the first time, those eyes looking at me, I froze. I was looking at the most beautiful woman in the world. There was no way I could have pulled the trigger or done any harm to her.”

“You were going to kill her just for being in a room?”

“The job required no witnesses. Like I said before, something came over me that instant. She cast a spell over me.”

“That was it? You fell for her that fast?”

“Was it love at first sight for both of you?”

Edward is blushing. Dee is smiling when; “We've only known each other for a few hours now. We don't even know if we're going to get along.”

Herb turns to his brother; “Do you see the look on their faces when their eyes meet?”

“Oh hell yes. I do declare I can see love bolts shooting between those two.”

“Both of you stop it. Neither of you see anything of the sort. I thought there may be something in his eyes.”

“I know our niece is going to be in good hands with you young

man.”

“Thank you. I will never harm or allow her to be harmed by anyone.”

Now turning even more red faced; “I think I've said too much.”

“Why do you say that? We're all adults here.”

“I don't want to say anything that might embarrass Dee.”

“I think this man is in love with you and is getting deeper by the moment.”

Dee has the warm smile of a woman in love. Edward makes a couple of confusing motions with his hands like he's about to say something. A moment later he decides against it, exhales a deep breath and takes the last drink of his beer.

Dee follows by lifting her beer towards her uncles; “To you my favorite uncles who have perfect incite into peoples hearts.”

Ten minutes later, and another round of beers, nature calls Ed; “Please excuse me. Nature is calling.”

As he gets up, Dee asks; “You're coming back aren't you?”

He places his right hand on her shoulder. She reaches across with her left hand placing it atop his.

He leans forward; “I have to come back. You have he keys to the car.” He follows this with a gentle back of his fingers touch to her cheek.

As he steps away, her uncles ask; “How exactly did you meet him?”

“Why are you really with a white guy?”

“Are you being held against your will?”

“What's really going on with you two?”

“And don't give us that it's only business crap.”

“No I'm not being held against my will. You two are like old hen's the way you want to gossip.”

“This ain't gossip. We worry about you and what to know what's going on. How did you meet this guy?”

“I was over at my now former boss's house. Both of you know the business he was in.”

“You were never in front of the camera were you?”

“Never. Anyway, I was at his house about to do him a service. I might add he paid me quite well.”

Both uncles are wide eyed in shock looking at her. Seeing this;
“No no no, nothing like that. Besides he was too fat to do that.”

“Wow. You had us thinking some real bad thoughts.”

“No. That hasn't happened since ... that day back then.”

“Sorry, go on. Now how did you meet Ed?”

“I was in assholes bedroom waiting for him when the door flew open and there was Ed. Pointing a huge gun at me with his finger on the trigger. The look on his face made me think I thought I was going to die that instant.”

“You didn't die; so what happened?”

“He asked me if I was a working girl. I told him I don't like being called girl by a white man.”

“You said that to a white man while he was pointing a gun at you?”

“Yep. It was like I couldn't stop the words from coming out. After a couple more questions, we talked. Ed had murdered my boss and left him sitting in a chair downstairs. We arranged to make the murder look like an accident.”

“That's it?”

“That's it. I'll be honest. At first I went along with him because I figured if I play along, he won't kill me. I tried to jump out the bathroom window, but I figured I'd break my neck from the fall. Then it was something in his eyes that changed me.”

“And what happened after that?”

They didn't notice Edward has returned; “I thought since Dee is now unemployed, I should offer her a position in my new company. I think we both realized we would be good together.”

He sits down; “Right partner?”

She has a mischievous look when; “I'd give you a kiss to seal the deal, but you know.”

“Hum. Why not?”

“I've never kissed anyone but my uncles, and that was on their cheeks. Besides, I don't know how you'd react. You know, the whole different color thing and all. Then being here, in public and you know.”

His body language and expression on his face turned nervous; “Oh, maybe not in public or in front of your uncles.”

He's now almost shaking; "I'm sorry. I'm at a loss for words."

Uncle Harold smiles, leans over and softly; "Is this your first time son?"

"First time? I don't understand what you're asking."

Herbert is more direct; "Never mind the color of her skin. Is this your first time in love with a woman?"

Ed instantly turns red with embarrassment. After a couple moments of fidgeting, he leans over and whispers; "I have never felt this way about a woman in my life."

Harold asks; "Do you like the feeling?"

Still whispering; "Gentlemen, I can't even find the words."

He sits back; "Dee, we need to leave."

Once standing, he regains his composure; "Thank you gentlemen for the lunch and our new business relationship."

He reaches into his wallet and gives Herbert the \$250.

Both uncles apologize for the sometimes embarrassing conversation. Edward waves goodbye and remains silent.

Once in the car, Dee drives a couple miles to a city park and stops the car; "Let's get something straight between us. We are different races. When it comes to anything between us, it's illegal in Missouri and many other states, you better keep that in mind." After her speech, she has tears forming. The emotion on her face is profound.

Edward isn't doing much better; "It's been an emotional day for both of us. As long as we're parked and no one is around, I really

want to get something settled between us.”

She turns while wiping a tear and leans slightly towards him; “Okay. What's so important?”

He moves closer to her; “This.”

With both hands, he grabs her head and plants a kiss that takes both their breaths away.

Afterwards, she leans back against the drivers door; “Wow. Are you finished?”

Trying to pull himself together; “Yeah. I think so. I'm not sure what came over me other than I had to do that. ... Whew. Yeah, I'm finished, for now I think.”

“Well I got your message loud and clear. Now let me tell you!”

She leans over and gave him a soul kiss that makes him light headed.

Afterwards; “Okay. Now with that out of the way for now, let's go to your hotel and pick up your stuff.”

“I'm so sorry for coming on the way I did. I've never felt this way about any woman the way I feel about you. I'm so giddy, I don't know what to say or do!”

“Calm down and relax. We'll figure this out as we go along. I know we're going to somehow make this work.”

He's all smiles; “I really hope so. I wish I could find the words.”

“How about I love you?”

“I love you Dee Mullins.”

“It's Miss Dee Barbara Mullins and for the record and I love you too. Now let's get your things from the hotel.”

“Can we do one thing before we go?”

“We're not going to the back seat if that's what your thinking.”

“No no no. Can we kiss again? I want to make sure this is all real.”

“Oh it's all real honey.”

Later when their lips are becoming sore, they leave the park and are on there way to the hotel. Both of them can't stop grinning at each other.

After they retrieve Edward's possessions, they go to the apartment above the once pornography studio.

After selecting one of the two unoccupied bedrooms, they go downstairs to see a note on the desk. It reads: Come to Angelica's Restaurant on 8th street at 6 tonight for dinner to meet the rest of your crew.

Dee and Ed spend the balance of the afternoon planning on how to operate the new business and buying supplies. Mops, buckets, bleach, flashlights, gloves, etc.

The truck sign painter arrives with the attorney. 20 minutes later, Edward officially owns a building with a storefront with a 2nd floor apartment. A business, a car and a truck.

Chapter 06

That evening Dee and Ed arrive at Angelica's Restaurant to see the 3 men who used to distribute the now late Charles Pearson's pornography, seated at a table at a rear corner.

After Dee introduced Edward, he laid out his plans. Each man would be paid \$75 for each body and related evidence removal. The three men will split any cash the newly deceased may have in their possession.

Absolutely no personal positions like rings, watches, money clips and so on of the deceased can be kept because it may link them to the departed. Those things will be given to Dee and she will destroy them. The three men agreed.

Larry is the only somewhat dissenting voice. He faces Dee; "Are you really okay with all this?"

"What do you mean?"

"I didn't mind selling those movies for Chuck, it put some extra money in my pocket. But this is some serious shit.

Pointing a finger at Edward; "You know how his people treat us. I'll bet he kept the sign on the back studio bathroom that says *Whites only.*"

Dee looks like she's about to explode. Edward places his hand on her shoulder; "I'll take care of this."

"Mister Williams, this is a business discussion. We are not here to listen how you think I'm a racist and out to screw people of color. If you feel I've done or said anything to give you that impression, you may leave right now. It was a pleasure meeting you. Goodbye."

Dee is almost vibrating; “You are one of the reasons why white people treat us the way they do. Your hatred shows like a flashing billboard! And their ain't no whites only sign anywhere. Ed removed it when we got back from lunch. So there's none in the studio or in our apartment!”

“I'm sorry Ed. I've been beat down so many times, called so many names, I thought you were like most white people.”

Dee is still angry; “You're goddamn sorry, that's for sure. This man is offering you more money for a little work than you make in a day and a half. Then you call him a racist? Get your sorry ass outta here.”

“Larry, like you, I'm my own man. Like you, I want to make lots of money, live a comfortable life and hope not too many people fu** with me.”

He smiles; “No, your not like me. You and I are different in one respect. I wouldn't have that haircut if you paid me. Other than that, I think you're an alright guy.”

Relief came over everyone. Even Dee starts chuckling with everyone else because of Larry's comment.

“If I ever see any of you with a haircut like Ed's, your fired.”

Everyone laughed at her comment, then ordered another round of drinks.

After they finished their dinner, Dee notices Edward hardly touched his food; “Are you feeling okay? You were fine at lunch.”

Albert asks; “What did you have for lunch?”

“I had a couple bottles of beer and a pulled pork sandwich at Dee's uncle's place.”

Bruno looks to Larry; “Maybe he can't handle soul food.”

“Screw you. He's not looking good. He's pale for a white guy.”

Dee puts her hand on Edward's head; “Shit! He's burning up.”

“It's down in my gut. I'm not sick, but it's beginning to hurt real bad.”

“Let's go home. You'll feel better after a good nights sleep. I'm glad I put fresh linens on your bed earlier.”

One of the others asks; “Are you two living together?”

“We're sharing an apartment. I have my bedroom in the front and he has his in the back. Not that it's anyone's business.”

Larry helped Edward into the car. Dee drove them home where he had a hard time walking up the stairs.

It's a little after midnight, wearing only a cloth robe, Dee enters Edward's room to see if he's okay; “Are you alright?”

Dee can only hear his shallow breathing. She gently shakes him. Only a low level moan is returned. She shakes him more vigorously this time.

With a stressed voice; “It hurts ... real bad.”

She touches his forehead. He's burning with fever. To the bathroom medicine cabinet to retrieve a thermometer.

Returning to his room; “I'm putting a thermometer in your mouth. Don't bite it. Do you understand me?”

He squeaks out a weak; “Yes.”

Close to a minuter later, she reads the results.

“Oh shit! A hundred and four? You're burning up.”

She goes to the kitchen, empties a tray of ice into a towel and places it on his forehead.

Now thinking; *Something is seriously wrong. I got to get him to the hospital.*

Edward is not a big man. He's average at best, but too much for Dee to help down the stairs. Call an ambulance? No. The police may get involved.

A moment later, she's dialing the phone. When the person on the other end answers; “Who the hell is calling me at this hour? This better be a life or death matter. If this is a wrong number...”

“Larry, it's Dee. I need help and really fast. It's Edward. Please come over right now.”

“Where are you?”

“I'm in my apartment above the studio.”

“I'll break that little honky sum bitch in half if he hurt you.”

“No no no it's not that. He's real sick and I need to get him to the hospital fast.”

“Call an ambulance.”

“You know what downstairs used to be. Half the police department will show up thinking there's half naked porn stars to be seen. Larry, I need your help.”

“You're lucky I only live three blocks away. I'll be there as soon as

I get my pants and shoes on.”

It's less than 10 minutes later when Larry arrives with Albert.

“Why is he with you?”

“Albert is living with me for a few days. Shirley threw him out of their apartment again.”

“Ed's upstairs. I don't know what's wrong other than he's burning up with fever.”

She leads them to Ed's room. Larry takes one look; “Damn, he looks like shit.”

“He was puking earlier. He couldn't get out of bed to make it to the toilet. He's really sick. ”

Larry pulls down the bed sheet.

Albert is staring; “Look at the bulge on the right side of his stomach. I think he's got appendicitis.”

Not a deep thinker, Albert lightly presses on the bulge. Edward almost deafens everyone with his scream.

“Dee, wipe the vomit from his face. We'll roll him up in the bed sheet. I'll carry him downstairs.”

“I'll help you.”

“Just prop him up. I'll carry him myself. Albert, go down and open my car. Dee, make the call to our hospital so they know we're coming.”

Albert asks; “Why bother with the sheet?”

“How would it look if I'm carrying a naked white man to my car? Besides, as sick as he is, I don't think getting pneumonia is going to do him any good.”

Dee asks; “Should I take this bottle of pills?”

“What are they?”

“It says Quinine. Take three times a day during flareups.”

“Shit. He's got malaria too. Bring the bottle with. We better get him to the doctors fast.”

30 minutes later, Edward is on a gurney with a doctor barking to the orderlies: “He's running over a hundred and six degree fever. Get him into the soaking tub with cold water and as much ice as you can find. We need to get that temperature down to prevent brain damage.”

Nurse Hiroshi Sada is there also. She tells Dee; “Ed's in good hands. Doctor Itou will take good care of him.”

“How do you know he's a good doctor?”

“Well technically he's not a surgeon or doctor.”

“What!”

“Calm down. He was a doctor and surgeon of internal medicine before he lost his license to practice when the government put anyone Japanese or of Japanese decent in internment camps. Now he's going through the process to get his license back, but it takes time.”

The women stand there in silence before Hiroshi suggests; “Dee, Albert, Larry; go home. Edward is not going anywhere anytime soon. He's going to be here for a couple of days at least.”

Dee is having none of that; “They can go, but I’m not leaving him no matter what you say.”

Albert and Larry say their goodbyes and leave.

Hiroshi looks to Dee; “You look like you could use some coffee, come with me. We can sit for a few minutes while Doctor Itou plans what to do next.”

They walk to the break room.

While sitting across from each other; “I was screwing with you yesterday. I seen the looks you two were giving each other. It was clear to a blind person you love him. Now admit it.”

“Yes and I don’t know why. The first time we seen each other, he came through the door ready to kill me. I honestly believed at that moment my life is over.”

“So you’re here. What happened next?”

“With a gun pointing at me, he froze. Then he removed his finger from the trigger and asked me if I was a working girl. I told him I don’t like the term girl from a white man.”

“Damn you are gutsy!”

“I was scared to death. He asked a couple questions. It was then I started to see something in him. I was frightened that he was going to kill me and at the same time I started to be attracted to him.”

“You? Attracted to a man is odd enough. But to a white guy?”

Now smiling for the first time; “Yeah. By the time we left Chuck Pearson’s house, I knew he’s the man for me.”

“How does he feel about you?”

Dee blushes; “Ed tells me he wants to get something between us out in the open. I didn't have a clue what he was talking about.”

“Well come on already! What happened?”

“While we were in the car, he gently grabbed my face and kissed me.”

“On the cheek like a relative or something a little better.”

“I felt the passion flowing from his lips to mine. When he moved back, both of us were out of breath.”

“Oh shit; did you slap him?”

“Oh hell no! It was so good, I had to return the kiss with double the passion.”

“Oh my god woman. Have you two been together yet?”

“We share the apartment above the studio.”

“That's not what I'm asking. Are you two connected at the hip? You know, been intimate? Shared each other? Exchanged bodily fluids?”

“Of course not. I hardly know him. We kissed in the car twice, that's it. Then tonight after dinner, he got real sick.”

“And you're in love with him? You two have a long way to go.”

“Hiroshi, can I ask you a woman to woman question?”

“When you call me by my name to ask a question, I know this must be serious. Sure, go ahead.”

“Are you still romantically or sexually interested in Edward?”

With a huge smile; “Oh gosh no. My heterosexual days are long past. My first which became my last male was a nightmare. The first time was horrible. Thankfully it was over in a few seconds. Because he ejaculated so fast, he beat the shit out of me because he thought it was my fault for his few second performance.

I've always been attracted to women, but society says that's a no no. So I tried to fit into everyone's normal. All I got out of it was a sore crotch and a broken nose. In two words; never again.”

Over the PA system; “Trauma Team to the OR stat. Sada, Barrett, Faulkner, to the OR stat.”

Hearing this, Dee becomes frantic; “What's happening?”

“They need help in the OR. Stay here and as soon as I know anything, I'll tell you. Just stay here.”

About an hour and a half later, Hiroshi arrives back in the waiting room wearing scrubs along with who appears to be the doctor she seen earlier.

“How's Edward? What's happening with him? Is he alright?”

“I am Doctor Itou. I operated on the man you brought here. He is extremely ill because his appendix burst. The surgery went well and he will have to remain here until his fever breaks from the infection. After that, you can take him home. Nurse Sada will give you the details. I'm going home to finish sleeping. Good night.”

The doctor turns and walks away.

A nervous Dee asks; “Can I see him now?”

“Ed's under sedation. He won't come around for several hours at least. Go home and come back sometime after breakfast.”

“We came in Larry's car. Ours is at home. I'll stay here until Ed wakes up.”

Smiling; “I somehow knew you would say that. We put him in a room on the second floor that happens to have a extra bed. Come on, I'll take you up there.”

While waiting for the elevator, Carl, the man who answers the front door asks what's going on.

“Dee is going to stay here tonight in Edward's room. I'll tell everyone I see so they leave her alone.”

“Okay. Since he's the only patient here, I'll tell Jeff when he cleans the floors upstairs to keep the noise down.”

Dee looks spent; “Thank you. I'll figure everything out when I have to. Right now my brain is not working.”

Hiroshi puts her hands on Dee's shoulders; “Damn lady, you really are in love with him.”

“I don't know what came over me. This has been like a whirlwind. I've known him for less that a day and I ... “

“And what? You were saying?”

“It's like he's the missing piece of my soul and now it might go away.”

Hiroshi drops her hands from Dee's shoulders and onto her arms; “Do you think he's serious about you?”

“When he kissed me, I felt my heart melt.”

“Oh my! Then?”

“I grabbed his head and kissed him with every bit of passion I didn't even know I had in my body. Oh shit that was so damn good!”

Hiroshi is smiling; “Because of your obvious differences, do you think his being white will cause any problems?”

“We had lunch at my uncle's place and there wasn't any issues other than a lot of nervous stares.”

“I would have loved to have seen you and Ed there.”

“Well there was one asshole while I was getting our food. He wanted to know why black men aren't good enough and why did I bring a white guy there.”

“What did you say?”

“I told him: I want to be treated with respect and as a woman. Besides, Edward is my business partner.”

“I'm going to let you get some sleep. He should be out for several hours from the sensitives. I'm going home so I can get some sleep. I'll tell Nurse Rhonda Sanders, she's the nurse on duty that you're in his room.”

“Thank you. You're a real friend.”

“This is quite an improvement from this morning.”

Smiling; “I'm so sorry for coming across as a bitch. I thought you were, well you know, trying to make a pass at Ed.”

“I seen you're a woman in love so I couldn't resist. Good night.”

“Good night and thank you for everything.”

The next morning, Edward is still unconscious. Dee is awakened by Nurse Sanders; “Dee, wake up. It's Nurse Rhonda.”

After a few moments gathering her thoughts; “How is he?”

“I've already checked his vitals. Edward is doing quite well. His temperature is slowly coming down. At this rate, he should be able to go home tomorrow or the day after at the latest.

Do you know where he lives? Is there someone to care and watch him?”

“We're sharing an apartment. He's going to be well cared for.”

“Looking at you, I can see he's going to be very well taken care of.”

Chapter 07

It's two days later and Dee has been staying with Edward almost constantly. She's been to their apartment only to rush a shower and change clothes while Ed's sleeping.

During the time they're together, they've talked and talked. The bond between them is growing stronger every day. They never discussed her as a young teenager being gang raped, related pregnancy, forced abortion or sterilization.

She has no idea her uncles told Edward everything about her. He will never do anything to harm the woman he's in love with.

On the third day after being admitted, they exit the 'hospital' and return to the apartment late morning. After a slow journey up the stairs, Edward welcomes the sofa. Then the doorbell rings.

Dee tells him; “You stay put. I wonder who the hell that is?”

About a minute later, Big Mike enters the living room; “I heard you've been having a tough time. It's good to see you're looking well. Maybe not too well, but you're still breathing.”

“I think I'm on the mend. At least I feel like I am.”

“Alex sent me here to give you a message. You're hospital bill has been taken care of.”

“That's almost the best thing that's happened all day.”

“Then what's the best thing?”

“The woman is standing over there smiling at me.”

Mike looks to Dee, then turns back to Ed; “Oh. I understand. Anyway, the six organizations picked up your hospital costs. They

feel you're a good investment in their combined futures.”

Ed grabs his right abdomen; “I'm sorry Mike. The pain killers are wearing off. Every now and then, it feels like I'm being cut open.”

“Yeah, I understand. Every time I'm shot or stabbed, the healing process is hell. Take your time and get well.”

“Please thank the organizations for me.”

Turning to Dee; “Make him some of that chicken soup you used to make the ladies when they were sick. He looks like he can use all the help he can get.”

“I will. He hasn't had any solid food in days.”

Mike reaches into his pocket and pulls out a fist full of bills and hands them for Dee.”

“What's this for?”

“This is from me to you two. Since neither of you are working and won't be for a while, I figured you can use some cash.”

“I'm good for this. I'll pay you back and soon as we get on our feet.”

“No you won't. This is my gift to you and him. Heck, I may need a favor or a few bucks someday and maybe you can help me out.”

“You're an angel Mike.”

Turning to face the now snoring Ed, he turns back to Dee; “Say goodbye to your partner for me.”

“Those medications for the infection and pain knock him out. One minute he fine and then he's out cold.”

Over the next couple of weeks, the romantic affection between Dee and Edward grows at a snails pace. Both of them are somewhat afraid of making serious advances to each other. The most they've accomplished is hold hands, put there arms around each other and kissed while on the sofa. And that's only happened recently.

Today, Edward is walking around on his own. He feels his oats. With the assistance of the kitchen table to hold on to, he calls Dee.

She enters the kitchen; “I see you finally dressed yourself and you look like you're ready to take on the world. Well maybe one careful step at a time. You also look like you have something on your mind. Are you going to tell me you don't need my help any more? That better not be it.”

With great effort, Edward lowers himself to the floor. When he lets go of the table, he almost tumbles face first. Dee catches him.

Now red faced; “This is not happening like I thought it would.”

“What the hell are you trying to do? Clean the floor? I cleaned the apartment yesterday. Did you drop something? I'll look for it.”

When he becomes stable on his knees; “I know I've not been the example of the man you deserve.”

“Oh be quiet. Now come on and get off the floor. I'll help you up.”

He waves his hand signaling no.

While looking up; “I have a couple of questions for you.”

“Well spit them out before my hair turns gray.”

“Would you ever consider sharing your life with me?”

“I am sharing my life with you fool. Where else can I go?”

She folds her arms across her chest, placing one hand across her eyes to cover the tears as she turns to hide her face.

“I mean sharing the rest of your life with me as husband and wife?”

“Why on earth would I ever want to do that?”

“Because I love you and I know in your heart you love me.”

Still facing away; “What's the other question?”

“Could you help me up? I'm afraid I'll tear open the stitches if I try to get up by myself.”

Turning; “Well okay. I'll help you get up.”

He sees tears flowing down her face.

While lifting him; “You're right on tearing that wound open.”

On the way up, he grabs a small towel from the kitchen table; “Did my asking you to marry me make you sad? Is that why your crying?”

She grabs the towel from him, half crying; “These are tears of joy you knucklehead. I've never experienced anything like this in my life.”

She sniffles; “This is so soon. We've only known each other for a couple of weeks. We're not even the same race.”

“How about when I'm healed in a few weeks. I'll propose to you again with a ring and all the honor you deserve.”

“Thinks might change by then. We might change.”

“We will be the same. I guess the only thing that would change for me is I will love you even more than I do already.”

She wipes her eyes; “We'll talk about it then. Right now I need to get you in the bedroom and you to lay on your back. I need to take care of you.”

His eyes open wide; “I would really like that, but maybe ... are you sure?”

“No we're not going to do anything like that. You're bleeding through your shirt. I need to change those bandages.”

Two weeks later, one evening around eight, the phone rings. Dee answers, she hears a male voice; “I have three carpets that need cleaning. My address is nine thirty nine Wolfish Avenue.”

“Do you need us now or what time will you need us to make the cleaning?”

“Nine thirty should do nicely. Park in the rear. I'll come and get you when you and your crew are needed.”

“I will require payment on arrival.”

“That's what I understand and will be arranged.” Click

She calls, Larry, Albert (who's now living at home) and Bruno. She tells each one of them to come over for their first job. Bruno starts his shit.

“I'm not sure I want to get involved with this. You know I need my sleep and I have to work tomorrow.”

“You lazy so and so. How much money do you make?”

“Ninety cents an hour before taxes.”

“Tonight you're going to make two hundred and twenty five in cash for maybe an hours work. No weapons, just man a bucket and a mop that I supply. Now if that's too hard for you, I'll find someone else.”

“Two hundred and twenty five in cash? I'll be right over.”

Dee's next call is to Uncle Herbert to tell him they'll be there sometime around ten tonight with his first customers..

Everyone gathers at the former studio. They check the back of the truck for supplies. Bucket, wringer, mop, 10 gallons of a water iodine mix, boxes of surgical gloves, flashlights, and army surplus blankets. (to roll the bodies in)

Because Edward is still healing, he's sitting in the front passenger seat with Dee driving.

They arrive at the rear of a warehouse. Three men start to approach. Two stop several feet before reaching the van. It's clear they're armed. The third man walks to within a few feet of the front of the truck.

“Who's in charge?”

Edward exits the truck; “I am.”

“Where's the crew?”

Ed turns; “Everybody out. We have a job to do.”

Albert is first, then Larry with a mop and Bruno with a bucket. Dee is last.

The man hands Edward a bag; “Three for disposal. You realize this is very expensive don't you?”

“If you want the bodies found or you want to dispose of them yourself, we'll leave. No charge to you.”

“No. Too many things have gone wrong before. That's why Alex recommended you. Check the bag so I can leave.”

Edward looks in the bag. It's full of cash. He nods and everyone goes to work.

“I assure you the three grand is in there. It would be bad business to play games with a service many of us need.”

“Pass the word around, use gloves when loading automatic weapons. Just in case we don't find every shell casing. Fingerprints you understand.”

“All my people use revolvers, but I'll pass the word around.”

Bruno searches each body and passes the contents to Dee before Larry and Albert wrap each of them in a blanket.

Bruno spreads some of the water - iodine mix on the floor, then mops it around to destroy any evidence.

Within 30 minutes, they're on there way to the funeral parlor.

When they arrive, Herbert, Howard and Cousin James are waiting. The bodies are loaded onto gurneys. Dee and Edward double check for watches and any other jewelry.

Herbert tells them; “The crematory furnace and controls are all fixed. Everything is working perfectly. Each body takes about 3 hours and another hour for the furnace to cool down. Your three friends will be gone before lunch time tomorrow.”

Dee looks to Edward; “I'll stay here tonight to make sure nothing goes wrong. You go home and get some sleep.”

“No, I'll stay here with you.”

“Why? Do you think I'm not safe with my uncles”

“No, that's not it. I want to be with you is all I meant.”

She has a look on her face that Ed can't figure out; “If you insist, there's sofas in the parlor. This is going to be a long night.”

Herbert tells them; “We have two burials scheduled. One tomorrow and one the day after. Let's cremate one now. By the time that's finished, it'll start getting light outside.

James will deepen each of the grave plots another couple of feet. We'll put a body in each plot and cover them to the six foot line. Nobody will ever know they're there.”

Edward is curious; “Are you sure?”

Howard smiles; “Now why would anyone ever dig up the grave in a negro graveyard? No body cares about dead Negroes.”

Edward agrees and is about to pay Herbert when Dee interrupts; “No. We pay after every thing is done.”

Howard and Herbert both object. She's having no part of their objections; “We will pay you in cash by the job. Our crew gets paid by the body and so will you.”

There's some grumbling, but Dee will have her way. She and Edward go to the office to pay each of the crew \$225 each (\$75 per body). The newly deceased had a total of \$45 on their persons. The three man crew split it between themselves. The crew left with the truck and returned it to the cleaning business garage.

Dee and Edward took the money clips, watches, rings and any other jewelry. They borrowed Uncle Harold's pickup, drove to

Long View Lake where they dumped the jewelry. Wallets and other flammable positions were incinerated along with the body.

They returned to the funeral parlor where Herbert, Harold and James, just after sunrise, placed the bodies in the now deepened grave plots where they are now covered with soil.

Dee paid her uncles. Harold brought them to their apartment where she made breakfast for herself and Edward.

Afterwards, they sat at the table discussing their good fortune. \$750 to Herbert. \$675 to the crew. A \$100 in supplies left them with a healthy profit for a nights work. (The average wage in 1947 was \$7 to \$8 a day)

With Dee watching, Edward divided the money equally and pushed Dee's share towards her.

She looks down. With some attitude; "What's this?"

"Your half."

"No. We're still partners, right?"

He looks into her eyes looking for a clue; "Yeah, I thought so. That's why I gave you half."

She pushes her money next to his; "Then this is our money. Is that okay with you?"

"That's fine with me. I only didn't want to offend you."

"You are the strangest man I ever met. I'll put this in a safe place for both of us."

"You understand, this is going to change me."

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I love you Dee Mullins even more today than yesterday.”

She hits him with that smile that melts his heart; “I'm going to take a shower ... alone. Then I am going to bed, alone. Am I making myself clear?”

“I'm so tired, I'll shower and hit the sack.”

“And?”

“And have dreams about the woman I wish would marry me.”

“You won't want me as your wife when you know the truth.”

“And that truth is what? You're secretly a white woman with one hell of a tan?”

She shakes her head; “Take your shower. I'll take mine after you. Now go.”

After Ed took his shower, he looks to Dee. She's wearing a long robe; “I promise I won't look through the keyhole.”

“I know you won't. There is no keyhole to look through.”

“Damn! Hahahaha.”

After his shower; “Now take a drink of water, then go to your room and lay on your back.”

“Can I leave my towel on the floor?”

“No you may not. I need to put new bandage on your wound.”

“Oh. I thought because you've given me some of the most

wonderful kisses, I thought we could ... you know, get to know each other a little better.”

A look of sadness comes over her face; “I don't think we are ever going to get there. There are things in my past that will break us apart. If we keep everything as it is, we'll be fine.”

“I love you and I wish you would trust me. There is nothing about you that could ever turn me away from you.”

“Oh yes there is.”

“What could that be? You're really a man?”

She's been standing in the kitchen with her arms folded; “So you think I might be a man?”

Dee fully opens her robe to expose her well toned, groomed, fully nude body; “Do you see any man parts?”

Edward's eyes look like saucers. She closes her robe; “This conversation is over. I'm going to take my shower, wash my hair and shave my legs.

When I'm done, you better be finished with what men do. Then be on your back with the towel covering what needs to be covered so I can put a new bandage on you.”

“How do you know I'm not really a woman?”

“The haircut is a dead giveaway. The hairy chest and if you look down at the front of your towel, it's obvious you're a man.”

Ed looks down and turns red faced; “I'm going to my room now.”

With a chuckle in her voice; “I think you better. And take a wad of toilet paper with you.”

“Yeah.”

Dee walks to the bathroom chuckling.

Chapter 08

fob

A few evenings later, they get a phone call. It's their second job. Edward is now fully mobile so once the crew is assembled, he drives the van.

They reach their destination in Asia-town and are escorted inside a large home. There's six bodies in various locations. Clearly there was one hell of a fight.

Dee goes to the Asian man who led them into the house; "Do you have the payment?"

"No. I no pay now. We pay later after job done. Maybe tomorrow or maybe next week."

Dee turns to face Edward and the crew; "Don't unpack. We're leaving. He doesn't have the money."

The man who originally had a thick accent, now speaks perfect English; "I'm only kidding. Here's your money."

He hands Dee a paper bag. She removes the contents. 10 packs of \$10 bills; "You're quite a bit short. Like five thousand short."

"The money has to be here somewhere. Just search the house for it. I have to leave."

She hands the bag back to him; "You're on your own."

"Fu**ing black bitch! Don't you walk away from me. Your gonna clean this up or I'll put a bullet in your fu**ing head!"

What stupid forgot is, Edward had left to find a bathroom when they entered. Unfortunately for Mister Stupid, Edward is now behind him.

Moments later, Mister Stupid is a rag doll lying on the floor.

Albert lets out with; “Wholly shit!”

Big man Larry adds; “Shit man. You actually twisted the knife in the back of his head!”

Bruno follows with; “That's cold man.”

“Threaten to kill one of my crew? Now he can say hello to his fu**ing ancestors for me.”

Albert still looks surprised; “What do you mean?”

“As a marine in the south pacific, I sent hundreds of his kind to join their ancestors.”

With a cynical voice; “The knife is quick and silent.”

Edward looks up and sees the crew looking at him with surprised looks on their faces.

He looks down at the newly departed; “Well this isn't a total loss. Asshole here paid for his own funeral. Let's wrap him up.”

Later, Dee paid each of the crew their usual \$75. She paid her uncles for the cremation. Afterwards, they returned to the business and everyone went home from there.

In their apartment, Dee is quiet. Unusually quiet.

Edward notices; “You've been awfully quiet. What's wrong?”

“I watched you kill that man. I watched the life go out from his eyes as he went limp and fell. How could you do that?”

“He was going to kill you. So I did what I had to do.”

“But you never blinked and you were almost smiling while you did it.”

“When I was in the South Pacific, I seen what the Japs did you our guys. I developed a skill to return what they did to us. I'm ashamed to say I enjoyed it. That's all long ago in the past now.”

“Is that the secret you've been holding back all this time? You enjoy killing?”

“No, I do not enjoy killing. That scumbag was going to kill you. I took pleasure in stopping him from killing the woman I love.”

She looks slightly more at ease, so he continues; “Let me put your mind at ease. I have no desire or will to go around killing people. We were at war with an enemy who's sole purpose was to kill us. The war is over. Those days are long over.”

Dee exhales a deep breath; “Maybe I should come clean and bare my soul to you. But I'm so afraid you will despise and hate me when you learn the truth about me. I can't risk that.”

Edward comes forward and hugs her tight; “You will never have anything to fear from me. When you're ready and you feel the time is right, we'll talk. Is that okay with you?”

She leans back slightly so their faces are only a couple inches apart; “If we were together, you know as man and wife; would you want children?”

“Oh my. In our line of work, I don't think that would be a good idea. I can just hear us; 'Be good children. Mommy and daddy need to go out and pick up some dead people. They were murdered and we need to clean the crime scene. We'll be back in a few hours.' I can't see us doing that.”

She chuckles; “No silly. I'm asking if you would want children?”

“I'm fine with or without. Maybe more prefer without. But that would be your decision. If you don't want children, we won't have any. Even though it's illegal here, I still want us to get married.”

She wipes her tears; “No children? Oh that is such a relief. ... I'm going to bed. Goodnight.”

“Hey! You forgot something?”

She turns; “What's that?”

“My goodnight kiss.”

They embrace, then the passionate kiss. During the kiss, Ed's left hand ventures where it has never gone before. It finds the cloth covering her right breast. Dee does not resist the gentle squeeze of his hand.

Moments later, his shirt and her blouse have fallen to the floor. With Dee's assistance, her top undergarment also falls to the floor.

A minute or so later, she pushes Edward away. Covers her breasts with her remaining arm; “No! We can't be doing this.” and quickly goes to her room and closes the door.

Edward having partially explored her upper body, goes to her door; “Are you mad at me? I didn't mean to hurt you. I love you and I will never hurt you.”

Through the door; “It's not your fault, it's mine. Go to bed. Leave me alone.”

“I love you and I think I deserve more of an answer.”

“No. If I told you, you would think I'm some filthy used up whore. Then you would hate me.”

“I could never be angry or hate you. Please come out and talk to me.”

“No. When you find out the truth, you'll hate me.”

“Why would I ever hate you? I couldn't.”

She slowly opens the door. Edward sees her bloodshot eyes.

“There is no reason on earth for you to be upset with me. I want to be your husband forever and ever.”

“Did you know a woman's room is her sanctuary?”

“Yes. I figured as much by looking around here.”

“Sit close next to me.”

Edward sits touching her. He grasps her hands with his; “We can't have secrets between us. They will tear us apart sooner or later.”

She sniffles; “When I was thirteen, I was gang raped by eleven boys from school in some abandon house. So I must be disgusting filth in your eyes.”

“No. You were a victim all those years ago. Now you're a grown woman who has moved along with her life. That horrible time has nothing to do with us.”

“But we can never be together. I became pregnant that day. A couple of months later, I started bleeding. One or more of them gave me a sexually transmitted disease. Uncle Howard brought me to the hospital.”

She breaks down. Edward wipes her eyes with his tee-shirt.

When Dee regains control; “They took my unborn baby and

performed a hysterectomy on me. While I was in recovery, I remember the doctor telling the nurse: No welfare babies the public will have to pay for coming from this one. Then they laughed!”

“I am so sorry that happened to you. If there was a way I could go back in time and change things for that thirteen year old child, I would. I would gladly kill them all.”

She looks him square in the eyes; “So are you leaving me to look for a more complete woman who hasn't been used and abused?”

“Yes I'm leaving you because after this, I need to use the bathroom. I need to pee. But first, can we kiss one more time for tonight?”

“And what's going to happen tomorrow? Will you still be here?”

“I'm going to demand several kisses everyday for the next fifty years.”

Chuckling with tears; “And after fifty years?”

“You and I are going to look at our relationship and see if we want another fifty years of the same.”

Wiping the tears away with a smile; “We'll be in our seventy's then.”

She smiles; “Get out, go to the bathroom and then go to bed.”

Without another word, Ed kisses the love of his life and silently leaves.

The following morning while having breakfast, Big Mike pays them a visit; “Alex wants to see both of you right now.”

Mike gave them an out of the way location in some industrial area.

He's standing outside his car with a well dressed Asian woman next to him. Her three body guards are silently watching.

Alex starts the conversation; "So what went wrong last night? There's six bodies waiting to be discovered by someone. Why are they still there?"

The 50's something woman asks; "And where is my man Taro? He was supposed to meet you there and pay for your services."

Dee is about to speak when the woman interrupts; "I don't want to here from you. I want to here from the man I was assured the job would be professionally taken care of."

"Your man Taro offered us a thousand dollars for a six thousand dollar job. As business people, my business partner Dee politely refused. Taro said he would pay us tomorrow or maybe next week. We were to leave when your man threatened to put a slug into my partners head."

"Continue."

"I came from behind, shoved a knife into the base of his skull, twisted it a couple times, turning him into a rag doll. I kept the thousand dollars he offered as payment for making him vanish."

"And you felt killing him was necessary?"

"Try to cheat me, I'll walk away. Threaten to kill one of my crew by pointing a gun at their head, the result will always be fatal."

"This makes me incredibly angry. He was given ten thousand dollars because we did not know how many individuals would be needed to be removed. He was instructed to pay you one thousand dollars each for their removal and complete disposal."

Alex tells the woman; "If you want, I'm sure Edward will return

and finish the job. Pending your assured payment of course.”

“Those bodies cannot be found. It will start a war that nobody wants. I will have another ten thousand in cash at Alex's office before lunch today. Is that acceptable to you young man?”

Ed looks at Dee, she nods affirmative.

“I'll assemble the crew and go back there. If there's police or anyone there, we leave.”

“Agreed.”

An hour later, the crew is at the house. No one is in sight. They enter, perform their tasks and are about ready to leave when Edward mentions; “I still have the keys I took from assholes pocket last night. That must be his car parked out front.”

They go to the car. Sure enough, Ed has the keys to the car. Dee instructs the others to bring the bodies to her uncle's funeral parlor.

Wondering where's the missing nine thousand dollars Taro was given, they search the vehicle.

Edward calls out to Dee; “I found something in the trunk.”

She comes to the back of the car; “I found this. The missing nine grand.”

“Should we keep it? Finders keepers or give it back?”

“Let's first get rid of this car. We can park it somewhere and leave the keys in the ignition. Someone will take it and we'll be done with it.”

“What about the money?”

“After we get rid of the car, let's find a payphone and call Alex. I'll tell him we hit a slight snag. We need to meet with him and that Asian woman he was with this morning.”

“And? The suspense is killing me.”

“We collect our six grand from the Asian lady. You and I give that woman back the nine grand we found in the trunk.”

Dee smiles; “You know we're going to look like hero's don't you?”

“I sure hope so.”

Over the next hour, their plan went perfectly. When they met with Alex and the Asian woman where, things went slightly different than expected.

Dee tells the Asian woman they removed and disposed of the six bodies. Only a six thousand dollar payment is required. The Asian woman's bodyguard hands her a stack of ten packs of bills. She hands Edward six of those packs and returns the remaining four to her bodyguard.

“Thank you for a job well done and I apologize for the inconvenience for you and your crew. The next time we do business, I know it will be much smoother.”

“Our fee is a thousand dollars a body. We expect some inconvenience to come with the work we do.”

The Asian woman smiles, and remains silent.

Edward adds; “Before you leave, I found this in the trunk of your man Taro's car. I'm returning your missing property to you.”

She looks inside the bag and is surprised; “Alex told me you keep whatever money you find on the bodies. Why are you giving this

back to me?”

“The money was in the car, not on his person. If it was on his person, it would be a different story.”

Alex is all smiles; “I told you he's honorable.”

The woman smiles; “Alex, once again your recommendations have paid well with unexpected dividends.”

She and her bodyguard leave without another word.

It wasn't a minute later, the bodyguard returns. He hands Edward four packs of bills; “Miss Green said this is to compensate you for any misunderstandings you may have. She looks forward to doing business with you in the future.”

He turns and walks out the door.

Dee asks; “Who is that woman? Miss Green?”

“She oversees all the Asian crime organizations. Her word is law to all of them.”

Big Mike who's also there; “You two did good. Word of what you two did is going to get around to everyone. Nobody is going to screw with either of you again.”

Dee and Edward left the meeting and returned to the office. Bruno, Larry and Albert are there waiting to get paid. Edward gives each of them their normal \$75 per body, plus a \$100 bonus each for leaving work to do a day job.

Then it's off to visit Dee's uncle Herbert; “You two gotta stop this. I'm here with only Cousin James to help and your people dropped off six bodies. What do you think I am? You're trying to work me like a mule.”

Dee peels off \$1500 and gives it to Herbert; “I’m sorry for the sudden pickup in business. That’s two hundred and fifty dollars for each body, like we agreed.”

Then she peels off \$500 more; “Will this get you over your grief? I mean after all, they did come in the middle of the day when you and James were most likely weren’t doing a damn thing.”

He’s shocked at first, then smiling; “I guess this will make up for my unexpected extra work load. Maybe working like a mule isn’t so bad after all.”

“Goodbye Uncle Herbert. Pass some of that to James.”

“I will. Goodbye my favorite niece in the whole wide world.”

“I’m your only niece.”

Edward is smiling at the situation; “So long Herb.”

“So long young man. It’s been a real pleasure doing business with both of you.”

Dee and Edward returned to their apartment where she made tea. They sat across from each other. After a few sips of tea, Dee broke the silence; “A penny for your thoughts?”

With a sensuous smile; “Would you give me two pennies for two thoughts?”

“I’ll give you anything you want for your thoughts.”

“Wow. First off, I think we’re really in solid with Miss Green, Alex and the other crime organizations.”

“Well Sherlock has nothing on you. What’s your second thought?”

“I want us to get up and undress each other.”

“Oh really? And then what?”

“You decide if we go to your room or mine?”

She arises with Edward almost knocking over the table getting up.

Dee walks over and starts unbuttoning his shirt. When she's finished with the third button; “What are you waiting for? A written invitation?”

He's shaking and almost hyperventilating unbuttoning her blouse.

Less than a minute later, there's two piles of clothes on the kitchen floor and the owners are in Dee's bedroom.

Chapter 09

Later, there's two extremely satisfied people lying on the bed.

Dee rolls onto her left side. She has a huge smile on her face; “I think we broke through every barrier we had between us.”

“My love, we are one with each other.”

While she's drawing circles on Edward's chest hair; “There's something we need to talk about that's bothering me.”

“Oh? Did I do something you didn't like?”

“You didn't do anything wrong. Everything was wonderful.”

“Then what's wrong? Is there something I can improve?”

“No silly. It's your bathroom habits that need to be fixed.”

“Ah ... huh?”

“When you're done, put down the seat. I do not enjoy my ass hitting the cold porcelain in the middle of the night.”

“Oh. Okay. Is there anything else I'm doing that displeases you?”

“Yes. When you replace the toilet paper roll, the sheets must be facing front. Not the back.”

Now thinking he's cute; “And what if I don't lower the seat or put the toilet paper roll on the way you like? What are you going to do about it?”

“How was our sex this morning?”

“It was wonderful beyond words. Thank you again.”

“Good. I hope you have a good memory.”

“This morning was something I'll never forget.”

“I'm glad. Because the next time you leave the seat up or put the toilet paper on wrong; when you want sex, things will change.”

“What's going to change?”

“When you think we're going to have sex, I'm going to put an aspirin between my knees and hold it there.”

He's looking at her with a totally confused look; “I don't get it.”

Rolling her eyes back first; “Knees closed means what else is closed to you?”

After a moment, Edward starts to leave the bed.

“Where are you going?”

“I'm going to check to be sure the toilet paper is facing front.”

“Get back in here. I changed it this morning.”

He calms down and returns to bed laying on his back; “I almost had a heart attack.”

Dee returns to rubbing her fingers on Edward's chest; “So tell me what you think of me?”

He rolls over facing Dee; “Oh my god. You are so good to me, I can't find the words. Thank you so much. I love you. But there is something we need to do.”

She pulls back; “There's something to do? We had great love making, you say thank you; but there's something else? What the

hell else could there possibly be? Are you going to tell me your leaving? There's another woman in your life?"

He places his arm on her, she almost violently removes it with a scowl on her face.

"You misunderstand. We need to go shower. I think a change of sheets would be a good idea too. I think I dumped a quart of sweat."

She busts out laughing; "You're a real piece of work. After a couple of hours of what had to be the greatest sex in the history of the world, you think of the sheets."

"I love you Dee, but I'm at the point I think I see vapors rising from me. I don't want to offend a goddess."

"Oh stop it."

She sniffs a couple of times; "I'm smelling more than sweat. Go take a shower. I'll change the sheets and shower after you."

They both exit the bed and are standing a couple feet apart.

With an over exaggerated look on his face; "I'm afraid."

"After what I've seen; what could you possibly be afraid of?"

"You've heard of the boogeyman. I'm afraid the boogey woman might be in there and get me."

"I'm your boogey woman and I'm gonna get ya again and again. Don't you think this is over honey. This was only the get to know you starter round ... sugar."

With a huge teethe smile; "You promise?"

“Absolutely! ... Ya know, the sheets can wait. Let's get in shower. I'll wash your back.”

“I'm the luckiest man in the world. I'm in love with a goddess who I hope is in love with me as much as I am with her.”

She puts her hands on her hips. With a smile; “How could you have any doubt in your mind? You don't think I would give this body to just anyone do you?”

“Oh hell no.”

He walks to her, lowers himself to his knees, wraps his arms around her butt and pulls her close. He starts humming.

Smiling with her hands pushing his head gently forward; “What do you think you're doing down there?”

He stops and looks up; “I'm telling your body how much I love you.” Then continues.

“Let me tell you, the message is coming through real clear.”

A few moments later; “Stop! I need to use the toilet right now.”

Half an hour later, they finally leave the shower. (The hot water ran out). With both of them in a total state of nature, the phone rings.

Dee answers; “Hello.”

“Hi Dee. It's one of your favorite uncles.”

“Hello Uncle Herb. I don't mean to sound rude; but what do you want now?”

“Oh I don't want anything now that business is really good. I need to talk to your partner; if you let him come to the phone.”

“If you're gonna ask for more money are you?”

“No, that's not why I'm calling.”

“Okay. Ed will be right with you.”

She giggles; “We just got out of the shower. Ed won't talk on the phone unless everything is covered. I personally like him all natural.”

“Oh my lord. Girl, I'm so glad you finally came out of your shell. But now it's more important than ever I talk to him.”

She hands the phone to Edward; “Herbert; what can I do for you?”

“I'm going to guess you and Dee are finally connected at the hip.”

“Yes that's true.”

“I need you to come alone to the parlor at your earliest convenience. I have some information that you need to know. The sooner the better for Dee's sake.”

Edward cups the phone; “Honey; can I go see Herb for a while? He needs me for something.”

“Sure. I need to clean the place and you being gone will make it easier. Do you want meat loaf or would you like to try my lasagna for dinner?”

Removing his hand from cupping the phone; “I've had enough meat loaf to last me for years while. Let's have your lasagna.”

“Lasagna it is. I'm a good cook. With six women living here, I had to do a lot more than fired chicken every night.”

Turning his attention back to the telephone; “I can be there in

twenty minutes.”

In the background, Dee is speaking loudly enough for her uncle to hear; “I lived that that old geezer and his brother for almost ten years. I've heard all his old stories a few times too many. He probably wants to tell you all those worn out tales.”

Herb laughs; “Oh she is her own woman. I'll see you soon.”

Edward arrives almost 30 minutes later. Herb has a slightly nervous smile; “I asked you here to update you on a few things.”

“Okay. What's up?”

“I told you about the boys that violated Dee, the leader is living not too far from the restaurant. He came in asking about Dee. I told him she's getting ready to be married to a real fine businessman.

He seemed almost human for a few moments. He told me several of those boys are dead or in prison. Some doing long terms, others on death row. He lost track of the rest.”

“So? I'm not hearing something I should be. What are you not telling me?”

“My brother came over to throw the punk out. While Howard was escorting the thug out, he started yelling how he was the first to have Dee. He made her a woman.”

Edward exhales a deep breath and says nothing. Herb sees the artery in Ed's neck expanding while his face is turning red.

“On his way out the door, he said he's going to find Dee and see if she's still as good as he remembers. Maybe make a baby with her.”

Edward rubs his hand down his face to compose himself; “I'll give you any amount of money you want to find out where this punk

lives and his name.”

“Would twenty thousand be too much to ask for?”

“I'll be back in a few hours with the money.”

The old man smiles and puts his hands on Ed's shoulders; “No son. This is on me. His name is Darnell Washburn, he's Dee's age. I'll get you the address.”

Herb picks up the phone and calls someone; “Hey Art, this is Herb the undertaker. ... No I'm not calling to see if your dead. I'm calling because I'm looking for someone alive. ... You know everything that goes on everywhere around here. ... Yep, that's why I called you. I need to know where Darnell Washburn is staying. ... Yep, that's him. ... Okay, thank you. ... Art, It will be best if we never had this conversation. ... Nope. It will be healthier if you never repeat to anyone you told me where Darnell lives. ... I can't say but something really bad is going to happen to him and I don't want you connected in any way. ... Thanks Art, I knew I could count on you. ... Bye.

Herb wrote the address on a slip brown grocery bag paper and hands it to Edward.

“You're not going to so something stupid are you?”

“No; it won't be stupid. It will be incredibly painful for a while. Then Darnell will die begging for his miserable life while I make sure he knows how he almost destroyed a woman's life. The last thing he will ever see will be my smiling face. The last thing he ever smells will be my bad breath as I cut his throat and watch his life run down his chest.”

Herb is gently shaking his head; “Please be careful. Dee deserves a good man in her life. I know she found that man in you.”

Edward drives to the address he was given. It's a nondescript, run down four flat building. The street is mostly empty lots and burnt out shells.

He reaches into his pocket and looks at the detectives badge, a plan is hatched. While sitting in his car, he sees a young woman walking with 3 young children. He exits and approaches her.

He flashes the badge; "Excuse me young lady. Do you live around here?"

"Yeah. I didn't do anything wrong. What do you want?"

"Do you know who lives in this building?"

"There used to be a few people living in there. It used to be a place for the dope fiends to crash before he moved in and chased everyone out."

"Who's this 'he' person. Does he have a name?"

"Darnell Washburn. He was a bad ass around here for a while. He was mean before, now rumor has it, prison made him worse."

"Do you know where in the building he lives?"

"The top floor. I see the lights on all hours of the night. You'll never see him before noon."

Edward slips the woman \$20; "Let's keep this conversation between us. Buy yourself and your babies something nice. If anyone asks, I was asking for directions because I was lost."

The young woman is all smiles; "You were asking how to get downtown."

"One last question, is it ever quiet around here?"

“It seems there's always someone screaming. At night, stay away from windows because of the bullets flying around. I would guess it's quiet just before sunrise till maybe a little before noon time.”

“Why's that?”

“Shit. All the gangbangers, dope fiends, robbers, and drunks find a place to crash or are in jail by the time the sun comes up.”

“I want to make sure you're safe. Start pointing like you're giving me directions.”

The young woman does, Edward thanks her and leaves.

He returns to the apartment where Dee tells him; “We need to set up a real business to cover ourselves for taxes.”

“Why's that so important?”

“That's how the federal government got Al Capone, his taxes.”

“Oh. How did you figure this tax stuff out?”

“I went to college to become an accountant. It didn't work out the way I hoped. After four years of college, the only real job I could find was babysitting women porn stars.”

“Yeah, I guess being a matron for porn stars isn't the worst, but it sure doesn't fit your education.”

“Not by a long shot. So anyway, we need to get to the supply store and pick up cleaning supplies. Mops, buckets, towels, cleaners and everything to make downstairs look like a cleaning service.”

“Okay. Any ideas where to buy this stuff?”

“There's restaurant supply stores on seventh street. Let's go.”

Edward asked Dee to drive because he's formulating plans to eliminate Darnell Washburn.

A couple of hours, and several hundred dollars later, they're back at what was the studio, unloading all the supplies they bought. The crew previously removed all the beds, mattresses and other cheesy bedroom furniture. They brought everything to a resale shop and left with some extra money in their pockets.

With the once studio now looking like a huge storeroom. The office now has cleaning product advertising posters hanging on the walls. Dee decides everything is done and she's had enough work for one day.

She's worn out from setting up the new business; "Instead of lasagna tonight, let's go out for an early dinner."

"I love your cooking. If you want to eat out; where do you want to go?"

"There's a place on Blue Parkway. Let's check it out."

In a reserved tone of voice; "Okay. If that's what you want."

She picks up on the hesitation in his voice; "What's the matter?"

"I'd rather we go to your Uncle Harold's place. I seen dinners on the menu."

She looks at him with compassion on her face; "You're not comfortable being the only white guy in a new place are you."

"No I'm not. We've been to Harold's place a few times now. For the most part, I'm ignored. I only get the occasional stare. I don't think I'm ready for a new place yet."

She exhales and in a mildly depressed voice; "Okay. We'll go to

Uncle Harold's place.”

“Thank you.”

Little did either of them know this is going to be an evening that will be remembered forever.

Chapter 10

That evening at the H&H restaurant, the dinner went surprisingly well. Several of the patrons, both female and male recognized the couple. A few even stopped by briefly to chat.

One middle age couple stopped by their booth. The husband starts the conversation by looking at Dee; “My wife and I have been coming here for years. We remember way back when you had pink ribbons in your hair.”

The wife takes over; “He sometimes forgets his manors. I'm Beth and he's Melvin.”

Edward starts to get up when Beth puts her hand on his shoulder; “Oh don't get up on our account young man. We just stopped by to say hello. When we seen you two sitting next to each other, I knew you two are together. This lug I'm married to wasn't sure until he seen you two looking into each others eyes.”

“Looking into each others eyes? Hell no. They were looking into each others soul!”

“Quiet Mel. Let's leave these two alone. Just one question young man. Are you serious with this young lady?”

“The rest of our lives serious.”

Beth bends over to be closer to Dee so not overheard; “You two have a big hill to climb and conquer. You're gonna have a lot of enemies; some black, but mostly white looking down at you.”

Edward smiles; “This lovely woman captured my soul. Before she would let me capture hers, she made that real clear about us.”

Mel adds; “Come on dear. They're young and I'm sure they're going to figure this out and handle any problems that come up.”

Goodbye's are exchanged and the mood in the restaurant seems warmer and more friendly. Cousin James comes in from the rear, says hello and sits at a more front table.

A few minutes later, a man with a rough looking face comes in and is looking around. He sees Dee with Edward and walks over to their booth.

Loudly; "Hello Dee, remember me? I was your first. Who's this? Because you've had black men, you want to see if what they say is true? Marry light and pray your babies come out light?"

Dee is somewhere between shock and crying.

"Let me tell you, I was the first and oh my, she was tight! She was so good, I can't describe how good. She did all eleven of us. Now ain't that right."

Edward grabs Darnell by the belt. The look on his face suddenly changes; "Hey man! Let go of me! Are you queer?"

His face drops to one of shock; "You feel a sharp point in your belly? I'll gut you like a fish."

Darnell now looks frightened. From behind, James forcefully grabs the offender by the back of his neck.

"Don't push me man! This honky has a knife in my gut!"

James sticks the gun under Darnell's chin; "I'd blow the top of your head off it wouldn't splatter all over ceiling and the customers."

"What are you gonna do?"

"You're going to apologize to Dee and her man. Then you're going to leave and never come back. Now apologize!"

“I'm sorry. Your front was so good, I should have tried your backdoor. Hahaha.”

James hit Darnell so hard with the gun, he hit the floor like a sack of potatoes.

While asshole is on the floor looking up; “The next time you see me, I won't be so hospitable.”

James bends over and drags Darnell out backdoor. A few moments later, James reenters the restaurant shaking his right hand as if he injured it. He sees Dee and Edward going through the front door. he catches up with them outside.

“Don't worry Dee. You won't ever be bothered by him again. I'll make sure of that. Trust me.”

When they reach their car, Dee is too upset to drive. Edward gets behind the wheel and the drive to their apartment is dead silent. Once inside, Dee silently makes them cups of tea. They sit at the kitchen table in silence.

She breaks the mood with; “Let's have sex.”

“No. Not right now.”

She almost explodes; “Oh, that's because you met the guy who turned me into a filthy rotten whore. You can't be bothered touching me now that you've seen the truth. You don't want me because Darnell and his friends had me first. Okay, now I know where we stand.”

She's fidgeting and is about to cry. Edward gets up, walks over and tries to put his arms around her. She screams; “Don't you touch me! I'm nothing more than a filthy whore to you.”

He lowers himself to his knees. He forcefully pulls her right hand

from the table. She resists at first, then gives in. He places her hand on the side of his face.

“If you won't look at me, at least feel my face. I love you more than life itself. I would love to have sex with you anytime you're willing. But now is not that time. Not while you're like this.”

“I need to know. I need proof you're still willing to have me.”

“Well then look at me. I'm on my knees trying to give you comfort. I only want what's best for you. Having sex to prove something to yourself would make you feel worse.”

“No it wouldn't. If we had sex, it would show me I'm not tarnished filth to you.”

“It would prove I'm an asshole who only thinks of what's between your legs than you as the woman I love and want to marry.”

She finally turns to face him; “After all this, you still want to marry me?”

“Now more than ever. I'd get a minister to marry us right now. This evening if I could.”

A huge smile comes over her face; “Are you really serious?”

“Find me a minister and I'll give him a thousand dollars to marry us tonight. That should take care of any no license issue.”

Dee leaves the table, picks up the phone and makes a call; “Hello Uncle Herbert? ... No customers for you tonight. Or at least so far. Is there anything going on at the parlor? No? Great! I need a favor. ... What's the phone number for Minister Davis? ... Edward wants to get married as soon as possible. ... To me! ... Hahaha thank you. Do you think Minister Davis would marry us tonight? ... Do you think he would marry us for a thousand dollars? ... Okay. Give

me his number. ... If he says yes, I'll call you right back.”

She looks at Edward who has a blank stare; “Are you sure you want me to make this call?”

“I'll dial the number and talk to him if you're scared.”

Dee looks like she's glowing while picking up the phone receiver and dials the number. A moment later; “Hello Mister Davis, this is Dee Mullins. ... Yes I'm Herbert and Harold's niece. ... I'm fine thank you. I'm calling to ask you to perform a marriage ceremony. ... This evening if at all possible. ... We're in a hurry. ... I understand you're a busy man. ... No we don't have a marriage license. Would a five dollars in cash change your mind? ... I knew you would understand. ... Where? How about an hour from now at your home? ... Okay, I understand you want to keep your wife from knowing. How about an hour from now at my Uncle Herbert's funeral parlor? ... Thank you. We will see you in an hour. ... Yes with the cash.”

She looks to Edward; “It's still not to late.”

“Not to late for what? A glass of warm milk? I'd pass out during our wedding.”

She calls her uncle back and tells him her plans. He calls Howard who calls James. An hour later, everyone is gathered in the funeral homes viewing room. Cousin James even has on a clean shirt. Herbert and Harold are smiling like proud parents.

Two minutes later the minister says; “You may now place the ring on her finger.”

Panic sets in. Edward looks like he's about to die; “I forgot I needed a ring. I'm so sorry.”

James hands Edward a wedding ring; “You can borrow this.”

Edward takes the ring and places it on the third finger of Dee's left hand.

“You may now seal your marriage with a kiss.”

After they finish their embrace, Minister Davis approaches; “I hope you're satisfied with my service. Here's your certificate of marriage. I've never married anyone in a funeral home before.

Now may we settle the other matter we talked about on the phone.”

With Dee watching, Edward gives the man \$500 cash. Then he reaches into his other pocket and hands the minister another \$500. He looks surprised; “What's this for?”

“I promised the love of my life I would pay someone a thousand dollars to marry us tonight. I'm a man of my word.”

The minister is all smiles; “Now that your married young man, let me give you some advice. Whenever extra money comes your way, never tell your wife. She'll find creative ways to spend it. She'll want to pay bills, buy new curtains or something else foolish.”

“Thank you. Unfortunately, that won't work with us. This beautiful woman manages all our finances. She's better watching over the money than I will ever be.”

“Well good luck and thank the both of you.”

With the minister now gone, Edward asks; “Thank you for letting us use the wedding band. Who's was it?”

“My father was killed before I was born. My mother died giving birth to me. This was her wedding ring. When Harold told me of your sudden wedding, I had a hunch you may need a wedding ring in a hurry.”

Thank you. We're going out tomorrow so I can by Dee a wedding ring.”

Dee looks to James; “Once again, you come to my rescue. Thank you.”

She steps on her toes to give him a kiss on the cheek.

He looks embarrassed; “Thank you.”

James and the uncles went to a kitchenette in the rear. There was a couple of minutes of talk between them with Howard standing in the doorway watching the newly weds. (So they don't overhear the conversation.)

When the three man conversation ended, they return with several urns that are normally filled with the ashes of the deceased, now filled with bottles of beer and ice.

“We needed something to help celebrate. Let's drink Herb's beer!”

While Dee's uncles are talking with her, James pulls Edward off to the side of the parlor.

“I don't want you gettin involved with that rapist. I'm gonna take care of the soon to be departed Darnell.”

“I can handle him. I'll make him regret he ever existed.”

“No you won't. You're a white guy. You'll stick out so bad, you won't get away with it. Trust me, I'll take care of him. Look at tomorrow's newspapers. Dee told me all about you. I think you'll be satisfied.”

“I don't want you to get in trouble over my wanting revenge.”

“No man. She needs and deserves a man like you to be with her,

not in prison because you made a mistake.”

“I don't make mistakes.”

“You will fail if you try your shit in the ghetto. I'm invisible, you're not.”

Dee walks over; “You and James are talking away like two long lost friends. I'm glad to see you're both getting along so well.”

“Cousin James and I see pretty much eye to eye on most things. He gave me an education on some of the ways in the ghetto.”

“He's a good man Dee. I told him to be careful and not do anything stupid and wind up in jail.”

“You better not do anything foolish. I don't want you leaving me alone because you got whacked with the stupid stick.”

Everyone gathers and the idle chitchat started.

Edward finally asked the question he's been wondering; “Everyone calls you Cousin James or James. I know Harold and Herbert are half brothers, I got that. Dee's mother was their half sister.”

Now Edward's uneasy because everyone is smiling at him.

“So how are you related to in the family?”

“I'm not related anyone in the Mullins family.”

Dee supplies part of the answer; “My mother and her brothers all have their mother's name.”

“Okay. So who is James related to?”

“When I graduated high school, I went looking for a job. Couldn't

find anything. Desperate to get out of my grandma's apartment, I stopped in Harold's Pulled Pork Palace. That's what H&H used to be called, to see if they needed a dishwasher or anything.

Harold used to drink many years ago. When he asked my name, I told him James Cousins. He was distracted by someone asking him a question, so he called me Cousin James. It stuck from that moment on.”

“Hahahaha. That's a great story. Did you get out of your grandma's apartment?”

“Because I needed a place to stay, Harold let me stay in the basement for a few months. I was security for the restaurant and the laundromat next door. Howard owns both of them. I made the locals feel safe while they did their laundry.

The Herb sent me to school to learn how to be a funeral parlor director and a mortician. When the parlor business is slow, I work here.”

“When did you start working here for Harold?”

“I was eighteen and Dee was about nine or ten. She would come down stairs every few days to remove my bed linens and laundry, take them next door to the laundromat and wash everything.

She'd wait for them, then come back and make my bed. Then put my laundry away. I owe her a lot. She was like the best little sister I never had.”

A look of sadness comes over his face; “Dee, Herbert, Howard; I need to talk to Edward in private.”

The trio walked to the kitchenette.

When the door closed; “When she was violated, and the police did

nothing, I dished out some ghetto justice. I found three of them trying to violate another girl in an abandoned building.”

“What happened?”

“The first one who was standing there watching, I came from behind and bashed his head in with a brick. While his buddy was waiting for his turn, cheering the asshole raping the little girl, I used the same brick on him. The third one, I pulled him off and broke his fu**ing neck. None of them were breathing when I left. I made real sure of that.”

“What happened to the girl?”

“I walked to the next building over and told the woman who answered the door, I heard a young girl being raped and calling for help from the building next door. I also told her she never seen me.

She asked if the rapists are still there. I told her yes they are, but they will never rape anyone again. I seen to that.

The woman looked at me for a moment and told me to wash my face, hands and burn my shirt. When I asked why, she told me there's blood on my face, hands and all over my shirt.”

“Does Dee know?”

“She knows two were beaten to death with a brick and one from a broken neck. I think she knows it was me. The police called it gang related and that was that. Nobody cares about black people killing each other.”

“I understand. ... Can I still call you Cousin James?”

“You can call me anything except late for dinner.”

The men shook hands. James calls everyone from the kitchenette.

After everyone drank their fill beer, it's time for the newly weds to return to their apartment.

On the way home, Dee and Edward decided for her to keep her Mullins name to avoid legal problems. (interracial marriage being illegal)

Oh what a night they had enjoying their first night as a married couple.

Chapter 11

The following morning, Edward was first to relieve himself. He's standing at the sink getting a drink of water as a totally nude Dee passes by him on her way to do the same.

As she exits the bathroom; "I'll have some of that. My throat is dry."

He turns to face her. With surprise in his face; "Oh my god! I can't believe my eyes!"

She takes offense; "What's your problem this morning? I haven't brushed my hair or put on makeup yet, so don't start."

"You're prettier than you were yesterday. Everyday you are more beautiful than the day before. I'm truly in love with a goddess."

Now smiling; "I'm sure you say that all the women you've known."

"Never to anyone. Only the woman I'm madly in love with."

Later, after morning romance, it's shower time. While Dee and Edward are considering more romance or have breakfast, the doorbell sounds.

Edward grabs a towel, wraps himself and goes downstairs to answer the door.

It's Big Mike; "Did I catch you at a bad time? It sure looks that way. I have an offer for you two."

Edward turns to look upstairs. Dee is now wearing her robe and looking over the railing.

"It's Big Mike. He wants to talk with us."

She calls down; “Hi Mike. Come on up and wait in the kitchen. Give me a few minutes to get dressed.”

Mike has a sly smile on his face; “You're both adults. I have nothing more to say.”

“Thanks. Come on up. It'll take me a few minutes to get dressed.”

“Yeah, that would be a good idea because I'm taking both of you out to brunch.”

“Now? Dee and I were trying to decide on a late breakfast or something more personal. ... You know.”

“There will be plenty of time for that later. This is going to be a business meeting. You two are going to meet a couple of important people. A man and a woman.”

“Any clue to who they are?”

“People who want a extremely important job done without any problems.”

“Any idea what it's about?”

“Lots of money and what you two do well, make people disappear.”

“Thanks, your a wealth of information.”

“The less you know, the healthier it will be for both of you. Now get dressed. We have reservations in forty five minutes.”

“Where are we going?”

“Carmine's Restaurant on twelfth street. It's owned by people who are friendly to to us. We can meet there without being disturbed.

Now get dressed. Everyday casual will be fine.”

40 minutes later, the trio arrives at what could best be described as a hole in the wall Italian restaurant. The only way anyone would know this place is here is if they happen to see the door.

The small sign on the door reads: Carmine's Little Italy Hideaway.

Dee comments: “What happens when we go in? A bigger question is will be able to leave breathing?”

Mike is reassuring; “There are no weapons allowed in here. Give anything you have to the matradee. After all, it's a family restaurant. After you two finish your meeting, there's a cab stand at the end of the street to the right.”

“You're not staying?”

Mike opens the door; “No. Alex told me to bring you two here, and that's what I'm doing.”

Dee looks in and sees a sign; “Watch your step.”

Edward moves to the front; “I'll go first. If it's safe for you, I'll tell you it's okay.”

She looks at him with a slightly sarcastic grin; “Oh please. I'm sure we'll be fine as long as you don't fall down the stairs.”

The went down only a few steps that are well lighted to see an elderly man waiting for them holding a tray.

He smiles; “Welcome. Empty your pockets of all items and place them on this tray. Miss, place your handbag on the table next to you. This is required of all our safety.”

After Edward empties his pockets, the elderly man frisks him; “No

weapons. Take your items.”

While this was going on, an elderly woman dumped the contents of Dee's small handbag onto the table. Not finding anything that can be used as a weapon, Dee was frisked.

The old woman looks to the old man; “She's clean.”

A debonair gent in his late 40's or early 50's approaches; “Welcome. We have security precautions for a reason. I'm sure you both understand. Come this way please. Your guests have already arrived.”

They enter a private dining area to see a nicely dressed woman and a man dressed in business a suit. The authoritative looking man tells them; “Introductions are unnecessary. We know who both of you are. You're connected to the six organized crime organizations in the city. We know what business you're in.”

The woman tells them; “We're from the other side of the coin.”

The woman flashed a Kansas City Detective badge before she continues; “On rare occasions, we will require your services, sometimes with extra needs to be taken care of.”

Edward calmly; “We're not killers for hire.”

“Nobody said you are. How you two handled the deviate Charles Pearson was creative. Getting rid of that scumbag Taro was outstanding work.”

“One was to prove what I'm capable of and Taro was a necessity.”

The gent; “We are going to require your services with a few extra requirements, to be named later. It will be similar to what you do already. Are you interested?”

Dee asks; “Our fee is a thousand dollars a body.”

The gent responds; “Young lady, because of what we're going to demand, the price per person is double. And before you ask, the persons will already be deceased. Are both of you interested?”

Edward answers; “If what we hear is good, we're in.”

“Very well. I need to get back to the office. I have several meetings this afternoon and a budget committee. Good meeting with you both.”

The man gets up and leaves.

The woman reaches into her purse and removes several business cards. She hands them to Edward. On the card is the Kansas City Police emblem. Top right reads: Present this to the arresting officer.

In the middle in bold letters: **GET OUT OF JAIL FREE**

Under that reads: Not valid outside of Kansas City Missouri

“Are these real?”

“Yes. Keep one of these with you at all times. Do not give them to your employees. They'll do something stupid like get drunk and use one. You keep these handy in case you or your crew have a problem while on a job.”

“Okay, thank you.”

“Now stop shaving.”

Dee asks; “Why?”

“It's going to be part of his disguise for an upcoming job.”

“I bought him the new double edge safety razor after his surgery.

I've been shaving him every morning. Well not today, we were busy. I like a clean shaven man.”

“He needs to grow a beard. I can see his beard will be perfect.”

“But his beard will tickle.” She giggles as Edward blushes.

The woman smiles while leaning over; “Trust me, you won't care. It might even enhance the experience.”

Edward is so red, he looks like he's about to burst into flames; “Ladies, I'm sitting right here.”

Dee gives him a hug with a kiss on the cheek, then turns back to the unidentified woman.

The woman leans back; “Now with that covered, lady, your facial bone structure is perfect.”

“Say what?”

“With some lite makeup, no lipstick, a long sleeve blouse, gloves, dark glasses and a hat, you could easily pass for a white woman with an incredible tan.”

“Why in the hell would I ever want to do that?”

“Both of you are going to take the place of two people. They are both white, he has a trimmed beard and she loves big floppy hats.”

Edward puts his left hand on Dee's thigh while whispering; “Let's see what this is all about. If it's not to your liking, we walk.”

She faces him; “Only for you my love. Only for you.”

The still unidentified woman; “Here's the plan. We know you two are living together. That's of no concern. We will contact you some

early morning and tell you where to go with your crew.

Both of you and your crew will remove two bodies. They will be in a grassy area adjacent to a parking lot. There will be the victims two vehicles.

Inside of one of them, you will find a woman's hat and sunglasses. In the other car you will find a newspaper boys cap and a pair of sunglasses.

You will drive the vehicles to the airport. Both of you wear those items before you get to the terminal. There you will buy two one way tickets to San Diego using the names John and Jane Smith.”

“Why?”

“I'll get to that later. Both of you will fly to San Diego. While in the airport, both of you will go to the restrooms. You will shave off your beard, dump the newspaper boy hat and glasses.”

Turning to face Dee; “You will dump the hat, sunglasses and gloves. Then remove all your makeup. Both of you do this without being seen. Then go to the bus station, buy tickets and come back home.”

Edward asks; “Can we stay for a couple of days and enjoy the sites?”

“No. You can buy tickets to Vegas and stay there for a couple of days. Just don't get stupid drawing attention to yourselves by dropping lots of money everywhere. Act like real middle class tourists.”

“What else will be part of this job?”

“After we leave, stop at a travel agent and get a brochure about Guyana. Leave that and the vehicles registrations in the cars.

Empty the cars of any personal items and destroy them. Leave the cars in tact at the airport.”

Dee is curious; “Why all the cloak and dagger with these two?”

“I never told you this and you never want to repeat any of this. These two are married to others. They're also ripping off small time, low level criminals. This needs to stop.”

“I don't get it. Why don't one of the crime organizations take them out and be done with them?”

“Because they're police officers. When the time is right, they will be off duty and taken care of. It's the disposals we're concerned with. There will be no limit to an investigation of two murdered cops. But if it's believed those two ran off together, there's no death investigations. If you two do what your paid to do, everyone will think they ran off to Guyana.”

Edward has a concern; “We and our crew do not want to be witnesses to any murder. That could lead to all kinds of problems.”

“When the time comes, you will be given instructions where to wait. When you enter the site, you two and your crew will be the only living beings. It should not take you more than a few minutes to do what needs to be done and leave.”

Dee asks; “And payment for our services?”

“There will be a brown paper bag in one of the front seats with four thousand dollars in cash waiting for you. The bodies will be in outside of the cars in a grassy area. That way there won't be any traces of blood in the cars to deal with.”

Edward asks; “Is there anything else we need to know?”

“There may be future jobs like this in the future.”

Dee has a look of concern; “How do we know you're not setting us up for charges of double police murders?”

The still unidentified woman smiles; “Ask Big Mike about me.”

“I will. What's he going to say? You're okay? Trust her?”

“He's going to tell you the truth. I'm his sister. Now I have to get to work. I'll be in touch when your beard grows out.”

Dee and Edward are in shock by this situation. They left the meeting, found a restaurant where they had an early lunch.

Edward called Alex for some advice about Big Mike's sister; “She's one hundred percent legit. Whatever she told you is the truth. I recommended you and Dee to her.”

“Thank you. That set's our minds at ease. On more question. Do you know where I can buy a wedding ring set?”

Almost aggressively; “For who?”

“For Dee of course. We were married by a minister last evening.”

“Well congratulations to both of you. I'll make a phone call to my friend Jacob Rubin. He owns a jewelry store on the North side. Do you have something to write on?”

“All set.”

“Here's his address.”

An hour and a half later, Dee has a beautiful, although conservative wedding ring and band set. Edward now has wedding band also. The couple returned to the apartment and continued with this mornings interrupted activities.

Later that afternoon, the couple are sitting in the kitchen. Edward looks to Dee with a smile; “If you stare at those rings anymore, I think you're going to forget I'm here.”

She looks up; “There is no way that's ever going to happen.”

Suddenly, sadness comes across her face. She lifts her left hand; “I wish my mom could see me now. I'm married to the most wonderful man in the world. She would be so surprised by you.”

“Why's that? Because I'm not black?”

“That would be part of it. When I was gang raped, mom was real sick. She told me no honest real man would ever want me.”

“I'm sure she was talking like that because of all the pain medications they were giving her. I can't imagine those words came from her heart.”

Dee starts to compose herself; “Yeah, mom said a lot of crazy things before she passed. ... You're right. She even told me to watch out for white men because that want to abuse us women of color.”

Aggressively; “Stop this right now. You're going to talk yourself into a real ugly mood. I'm your husband. If there's any using to be done around here, it's going to be us using each other.”

With a huge smile; “Like last night and this morning?”

“Oh my love, you can use me anytime you want. Just let me recharge. I'm worn out from too much of wonderful togetherness. Besides, we need to give Cousin James his ring back.”

“He's in no hurry for it.”

“What if he meets Miss Right and needs the ring in a hurry?”

“That will never happen for James. He's not that way.”

“What do you mean?”

She places her hands on his; “He doesn't romantically or sexually care for women.”

“Oh. I would have never guessed.”

“He keeps his private life quiet. When asked why he's not married, James says he's a widower. That usually ends the conversation.”

“I'm so glad you told me so I don't make a stupid mistake.”

“So with that taken care of; your bedroom or mine?”

“Let's go to mine. There's no wet spots on the sheets.”

“Good idea. I'll change the sheets later. For now my husband of less than twenty four hours, I have some ideas.”

Chapter 12

Late that afternoon after another round of personal hygiene and getting dressed again, Dee asks; “What would you like for dinner?”

“I have no idea. Whatever you would like is fine with me.”

She smiles; “Do you have the energy for a good dinner?”

“Honey, I think you wore me out. How about something lite. Maybe Caesar salads with grilled chicken?”

“Sounds good. I don't want you eating too heavy. It might slow you down. Hahaha.”

“A night with you and a shot of booze would kill me.”

“Oh you see the sweetest things you silly man. You mentioned you wanted to get the news papers. The Golden Olympic Restaurant down the block has carryout. Why don't you get us a couple of Caesar salads with grilled chicken. Then you can stop at the newspaper stand on the way home. Pick up the morning and evening editions. I haven't read a paper since the day before we met.”

“And what a lucky day that was. I never would have guessed we would be husband and wife.”

“I didn't think I would continue breathing the first time I seen you.”

“When I first laid eyes on you that first time. I froze. I knew inside you are someone special. I'm sure it was love at first sight.”

“It took me a little longer. Maybe a couple of hours being with you. Perhaps it was you trusting me than changed my mind.”

“Will you be alright while I go, get our dinners and the newspapers?”

“Well I don't know. The door downstairs has three dead bolt locks and two on our apartment door. I also have both of Ed's automatic pistols and I'm a woman with an attitude who's madly in love with her husband.”

Smiling at her statement; “Yeah. You'll be fine.”

“I'm better than fine. I'm wonderful because you've told me that several times you hunk of man.”

“I love you and I'm having a hard time tearing myself away to get our food.”

“And husband, don't forget my newspapers. Oh do I love the sound of that. Husband.”

Edward embraces Dee and finally ends the kiss when he needs to take a breath; “That should hold me until I get back.”

“It better!” as he smiles and turns as he goes out the door.

45 minutes later, dinner is finished. They're reading the papers when Dee lets out; “There really is a god!” and starts shaking with tears forming.

“What's the matter?”

“Someone I wished was dead everyday for the last eleven years was found murdered. A police car on patrol seen smoke coming from one of those abandoned buildings in the ghetto Midway street. He thought it was some homeless guy cooking.

The fire department came and found a smoldering body. According to the story, it's the body of Darnell Washburn. He was tied to a

chair, castrated, and someone set him on fire.”

Her whole body is shaking while reading.

“Are you okay?”

She wipes her eyes; “That mother fu**er raped me! He cheered on the others screaming 'harder, faster' as they raped me. I only wish I was the one that killed him.”

Dee looks at Edward; “Did you have anything to do with this?”

“Look at the time this happened. We were sleeping when justice was carried out.”

“Yeah, I should have looked before asking you that question.”

“You can ask me any question you want, whenever you want. I will never lie to you. We have only been totally honest with each other. I know in my heart we always will be.”

She looks to him with a suspicious eye; “Why do I have this feeling you know something about this?”

“Please don't ask. I don't want to violate a trust.”

“Okay, I won't ask you. It's done and over. Darnell Washburn can burn in hell for all eternity.”

Edward gives a warm smile; “He's gone my love. It's only us now without him looking over our shoulders.”

“Let's go to bed and celebrate asshole being killed.”

With softness; “No, let's celebrate by sitting on the sofa and holding hands. Maybe even a hug or two.”

“Why? Now you don't want me now because you're reminded how I had sex with eleven people? You think I'm damaged goods and not clean enough for you? Maybe the thought some of Darnell is still with me?”

Dee's eyes are filling with tears and face is filled with hurt.

“Whoa! Stop it! That was eleven years ago. Any trace of him vanished years ago. Now he's gone forever.”

“But I'm damaged.”

“No your not. You're a beautiful, college graduate with a degree woman who's married to a husband who would worship the ground she walks on.”

“You would?”

“Anything you ask would be my command except having sex to prove I still love and desire you. If we were to have sex, you would think lesser of me and I can't have that from the woman I love.”

“You're the best thing that ever happened to me.”

They both get up and Edward holds her close while she has a good cry.

The following day, they go to see Cousin James at the funeral parlor. While Dee is in the office with Herbert, Edward is with James.

“Thank you for helping me out. I almost passed out when the minister asked for the ring. I was only thinking of getting married. I never even thought about it.”

“I'm glad I could help. Did you read the newspapers yesterday?”

“We both did.”

“Don't tell Dee, but consider that a wedding gift. How did she react when she seen it in the newspaper?”

“Emotional, upset, and a damn good cry. It seems like a great burden has been lifted from her shoulders.”

“She's been carrying that burden for years.”

“One man to man question if it's okay with you.”

“Man to man? Ask me anything you want.”

“The newspapers said Darnell was castrated before he was set on fire. What happened?”

“He was in his crib with music coming from a windup record player. He never heard me as I came up from behind. I choked him out. While he was unconscious, I tied him to his chair with some clothes line from behind the building.

When he woke up, I told him why it's going to die. He started screaming. I hit him with the record player and he stopped. I cut off his package and stuffed it in his ... let's say he was having trouble breathing.

I took a couple cans of Sterno from the restaurant, you know, canned heat. I smeared it all over his face and head.

Just before I lit the match, I though his eyes were gonna bug out of his head. The last thing he heard was: Remember three of your rapist friends who were found with their skulls smashed? That was me. You were in jail at the time. This if for what you did eleven years ago to Dee Mullins.”

“Thank you for making her demon go away.”

“You would have done him too fast. Like I said before; she's the little sister I never had. What are big brothers for other than to kill off their little sister's demons.”

Dee exits the kitchenette with Herbert to hear Edward say; “Your a hell of a good man James. It's an honor to know you.”

“Damn! I've been called a lot of things before. But nobody ever told me it's an honor to know me.”

Dee is all smiles; “If it came from my Edward, it's the truth.”

The couple returned to their office where Dee is creating the books for a real business with faux cash paying customers. Complete with faux receipts.

Edward is setting up the office to resemble a real cleaning service. In what used to be the studio, he bought shelving units. The place is beginning to look like a real business complete with a warehouse and supplies.

The front picture windows are still painted opaque to keep prying eyes out. The lettering on the front door and mailbox now reads: Specialize Waste Disposal

Over the next three months, there's the usual 'cleaning' of the suddenly departed from high velocity lead, the occasional stabbing, asphyxia (choked), or the head being struck with a blunt object.

There was only a few deep lacerations of the throat, because the aggressor is usually sprayed with the victims blood. Not smart.

Business has been averaging a little over two victims a week.

In four days, there were three cleanings involving a bakers dozen. Herbert and Cousin James were so busy, they gave two members of the community free funerals.

That way they could dig excessively deep grave sites for the rush of unexpected sudden bodies from Dee and Edward.

One of the ways Dee and Edward found to make extra profits was through the disposal of any gold in the form of jewelry the victims had in their possession.

Down the block from their storefront is a pawnshop. The owner agreed to melt down the gold jewelry while they watch to make sure everything is destroyed. They agreed on a price of \$10 an ounce.

One day in the morning mail, Dee receives a package containing a pair of up to the elbow beige woman's gloves, and all the makeup she would need to pass as a Caucasian with a really deep tan.

A week or so later, the call came they knew would arrive one day.

Chapter 13

It's 4:00 AM on a crisp Tuesday morning when the phone rings. Dee answers; "Hello?"

She hears a male voice; "I have two spills that must to be removed this morning. The details were put through your mail slot." Click

Edward is standing next to her; "The job we were told about a few months ago is happening this morning. The man on the phone said our instructions were put through the mail slot. Go get them while I call everyone and get them here. I'll also call Uncle Herbert so he can call James."

Without a word, Edward goes downstairs and finds a folded sheet of paper. Printed are the instructions: Burr Ridge Forest Preserve. Be parked, on the street, next to the entrance no later than 5:15 AM. You will receive further instructions there.

When you see an unmarked police car leave, enter and drive to the far end of the parking lot. There will only be two cars parked. The stains to be removed will be a few feet in front of them.

Remove any items from the vehicles that would make an investigator think the owners are returning. Leave the registrations. There are multiple garbage cans nearby. There will be a large female hat and sunglasses in one vehicle. There will be a pair of male sunglasses and a newspaper boy hat in the other vehicle. Both of you will need those for your disguises.

In one of the cars, you will find payment in full and two tickets for a flight to San Diego in the name of John and Jane Smith.

Drive both cars to the airport and park them next to each other. Put on your disguises. Wear the sunglasses and hats you found in the cars. Enjoy your flight. Once you arrive, go to a restroom toilet, remove your makeup and disguises, then throw them in the trash.

Shave off your beard. Throw the hat and glasses away. Take a taxi to the bus station and purchase two tickets to Las Vegas and enjoy yourselves for a couple for a couple of days. Do not act like big spenders! You will draw too much attention.

Take a bus back here. Do not fly! Plane tickets require passenger names. Bus tickets do not.

The crew arrives at the office. With Dee driving, everyone arrives at the destination at 5:08AM. A couple of minutes later, a unmarked police car pulls next to the truck. The driver looks at the name on the truck: Specialize Waste Disposal.

He drives forward to block the parking lot entry. Dee and Edward see the man pick up the police radio microphone. He couldn't have said more than a word or two.

At 5:15 exactly, a city garbage truck pulls up. The unmarked police car turns and enters the forest preserve and disappears down the winding parking lot road.

The garbage truck pulls next to Dee. The man in the garbage truck passenger seat looks over; "Don't look at me. Stay looking forward. When that unmarked car leaves, go inside and do your job. I'm going to block the driveway so you won't be interrupted."

Moments later, the unmarked car returns and stops. The driver signals Dee to go inside.

She drives the twisting road to the farthest rear parking lot where she sees the two cars. She turns the truck to be blocking anyone's view.

While the crew is wrapping the two bodies, Edward and Dee find everything as they were told. Payment is found in a brown bag on the front seat of what presumably was the man's car. In the trunk is a doctors bag. Edward does not look inside. In the glove

compartment are two airline tickets to San Diego. (Not first class) The names are Mister and Mrs. John Smith. Same as the car registration. Edward finds the newspaper boy hat and sunglasses.

The big hat and sunglasses are in what must be the newly deceased woman's car.

The crew has wrapped the bodies in army surplus blankets and loaded them in record time because there's no crime scene to clean up. Both victims were shot in the back of the head while on the grass in the woods.

Edward hands Larry the brown paper bag; "There's four grand here. Take the money from here and pay everyone double when you unload at the funeral parlor. Pay Dee's uncle Herbert double also.

When you get back to the office, and park the truck, wait until Bruno and Albert leave. Then put the money bag and the doctors case in the floor hiding place."

Edward takes out a pack of bills; "We're going to need this."

"You're trusting a black man with a brown paper bag stuffed with money?"

"I'm trusting a friend. Should I be worried?"

"No, I'm just shocked you would trust me with this."

"You're my friend. If I can't trust you, I'm screwed. When you get to the office, move out the big counsel floor radio/record player. There's a trap door underneath. Put the money and the doctor's bag in there."

"I'm sorry Ed, I've had you wrong. You really do trust me. You're an alright guy."

Because Larry is a huge man, he almost takes Edward's breath away with a hug.

Turning to Dee; "I see why you love this man. He's alright."

"I know that. I'm glad to see you do too."

Dee and Edward enter the cars and follow the crew to the parking entrance. The garbage truck exited the driveway and everyone went on their way.

At the airport parking lot, Dee first puts on her makeup. Then she put on the gloves, hat and lastly the sunglasses. While she's busy, Edward writes the names of John and Jane Smith on their carry on overnight bag tags.

Edward has mug shaving soap and a new double edge safety razor in his overnight bag. He puts on the paperboy cap and sunglasses that were in the car.

While walking to the airport terminal; "I wish I had my lipstick. I feel naked without it."

"Honey, if you had your lipstick on, you would attract every man in the airport by how beautiful you are."

"I don't know about that. If one person says *look at the negro trying to look white*, there will be blood."

"Nobody is going to say anything. I'll check us in at the gate. There's nothing to worry about."

"Are you going to want me to keep looking like this?"

They stop before the terminal entrance; "I would still love you with or without makeup. Today we're actors. Actors wear makeup."

“In your case it's only a beard.”

“I can't wait to shave it off. Now are you okay with this? Should I hold your hand? Maybe get you a glass of warm milk and a blanket?”

She starts chuckling; “You can always hold my hand. Now would be a good time because I've never flown before. As for the warm milk, I'd go to sleep.”

The check in at the gate was uneventful. Their seats were in the middle of the plane. While waiting for takeoff, Dee whispers in Edward's ear; “This is the first time I'm sitting in the middle of anything. It's always been sit in the back of the bus. Being white has it's privileges.”

He whispers back; “Just stop it. This is act one of a play we've been cast in. We need to act like two ordinary travelers and not draw attention.”

She smiles and still in a whisper; “When we take off, I'll ask for a blanket. You can unbuckle your pants, I'll go under the blanket and take care of you. Just like I do at home.”

He gently lifts the front brim of her hat and plants a kiss on her lips. Afterwards; “As much as I would enjoy that, I don't want us getting arrested when we land.”

“We could get a hotel room in San Diego for a few hours. After all, I am a woman with many wants and needs.”

“When they come around with the drink cart, I'll ask for a big glass of warm milk. Maybe you'll sleep through the flight.”

“And then I'd have dreams about what I want to do to you and with you.”

Over the intercom; “There is no smoking during take off and landing. Put out all smoking materials. Make sure your meal trays are in the upward position and your seat belts are fastened.” Dee has her face down as the stewardess walks down the aisle making sure everything is okay. She also lowers her head whenever someone walks down the aisle going to the bathroom.

Because this is her first flight, Dee was surprised when drinks are served. She had an orange juice and vodka. When the in flight meal came, she was thrilled. The rest of the flight was uneventful.

Upon reaching San Diego and leaving the plane; “I need to find the restrooms and get this shit off my face. And before you say it, I'll go in a stall and do every thing there. I'll wait until I can throw the hat and glasses in the trash without people watching.”

Edward is standing there smiling. This is slightly annoying her; “What's your problem?”

“I get to see my wife, business partner and best friend in the world be two people in one day.”

“Oh stop it already. Which do you like better?”

“The woman I married is the only woman for me.”

“I barely had enough time to comb my hair and put on some lipstick that night.”

“Oh it didn't matter. The bride was the most beautiful woman in the world, the same as she is today.”

“I love you too, but we need to change back to who we really are. Then my husband; oh I like the sound of that. Then we need to find the bus station and buy tickets to Vegas.”

“And if the bus isn't leaving for several hours?”

“We find a hotel and make passionate love until we pass out from exhaustion. Then catch the bus when we recover.”

Dee sees the huge grin on his face; “We need to go before you hyperventilate.”

They found out of the way restrooms. 20 minutes later, they met and took a taxi to the bus station. The trip from San Diego to Las Vegas takes over 8 hours. The next bus leaves in 45 minutes. There's still 2 open seats available.

Dee tells the clerk; “We have a few things we need to do before we leave. When is the next bus leaving after this one?”

“Noon tomorrow. Would you want to buy your tickets now? That guarantees both of you seats.”

“Yes. I'll buy them now. And where's the nearest hotel.”

“The Misty Star is down the street. As you leave, turn left. You can't miss it.”

After Dee pays for the tickets, they walk to the Misty Star. Edward pays for the room using the name Mister and Mrs. Lester Rollins. The sleazy clerk never looked up. He was looking at some girly magazine as he passed them the room key.

Outside the office, Dee asks; “Where did you come up with the name Lester Rollins?”

“He was my best friend in boot camp.”

“Do you know what happened to him?”

“He kept complaining his right arm hurt. Finally they took an x-ray and found he has a bullet lodged in his forearm.”

“Didn't they remove it?”

“No. They discharged him as unfit for service.”

When they reach their room, Edward opens the door; “Well it looks clean. It even has air conditioning.”

Dee almost pushes him through the door; “Who cares. I want a shower and then I want some attention. I want to work off this stress I have built up.”

She looks to her; “We never had a honeymoon. I was hoping for so much better than this for you.”

“Sweetheart, you're here, I'm here, there's a bed and a shower. What more do we need?”

Edward undresses in record time. Dee looks and asks; “Let's skip the shower. I can see your a man with needs and I'm a woman with needs right now!”

The following day around 11:30, the satisfied couple is boarding the bus to Las Vegas. Edward has changed the names on the overnight bag tags to Mister and Mrs. Lester Rollins. Their sitting towards the middle rear and it's almost empty.

Thinking they're beyond ear shot of anyone, Edward asks; “Maybe we can get married while we're in Las Vegas.”

Before Dee could respond, a gentleman of color who they did not know is sitting in front of them arises and speaks to them over his seat.

“No you cannot. Marriage between a negro and a white is illegal in twenty eight states, including Nevada. They're called anti-miscegenation laws. Asking to be married could result in bad consequences. They may say no or have both of you arrested.”

A woman of perhaps Asian decent is now looking over the top of her seat next to the man; “We were married in Minnesota; that's where we're from. Our marriage there is legal.”

“By the way; I'm Melvin and she's my wife Junna. We've both been to jail for being together a few times.”

“And Melvin is a lawyer. So take my advise, keep your affair to yourselves. You never know who's going to be on the bus with you.”

“There's always some fool who want's to cause trouble.”

With a smile on Jenna's face; “So what do you two do for a living?”

“We own a waste removal service. Dee is also our accountant.”

“Oh that must be so nice to have your own business. What type of waste does your business remove?”

Dee answers; “Sometimes businesses have special waste that needs to be removed that can't be done by normal means. That's when we provide a specialized service to eliminate problems.”

“That sounds interesting. Enjoy the ride.”

The couple returned to sitting in their seats. Edward has been doing his best to keep a straight face.

The long ride was interrupted only once for a 45 minute stop over where Dee purchased a couple newspapers and Edward bought himself a couple of popular magazines. (Look and Life)

Upon reaching Las Vegas, they found a small hotel. Because of the new hotels being built downtown and on Highway 91 (the strip), the owner is glad to have Dee and Edward as customers staying a

couple of nights.

They went to a couple of the casinos. Dee set them a budget of \$100 each to gamble. Edward lost \$50 one day and the other \$50 the next. Dee played blackjack at several casinos. She made a little under \$500 in two days.

They left Las Vegas Thursday on the 1:30AM bus. They finally arrived in Kansas City Friday at 7:45AM. Taxi ride home and they are thankful the bus rides are over!

They see a note on the table to call Big Mike when they return. Neither of them want to talk to anyone right now.

Edward kissed Dee then; "I'm going to my room to get some real sleep without waking you up when I snore or have to pee."

She melts his heart with that smile; "Thank you. When you wake up, it won't be a bad thing if you come join me."

With a smile on his face, he lets out with a low growl.

Chapter 14

It's almost noon and the both meet at the bathroom door; "How did you manage the bathroom time with six other women living here?"

"Other than the occasional: can I go first? It was rather orderly. Can I go first?"

"Please go. I'll just stand here gritting my teeth with my legs crossed doing the pee pee dance to hold it."

"I've never had this much drama when I was living with my uncles. They always let me go first."

"I'm kidding, take your time. Just don't die in there."

Less than a minute later; "Your turn."

"Thank you."

After Edward leaves the bathroom, there someone knocking on the apartment door.

"Ed? Didn't you lock the downstairs door before we came up this morning?"

"I know I did. That has to be ..."

Wearing only his boxer shorts, he opens the door; "Big Mike. It's always good to see you, but what brings you here?"

"All the locks in this building are being changed today."

"Okay. Not to be rude, but why are you here?"

"You weren't here for the last three days. Because you're here today, Alex wants to take both of you out to lunch. There's a couple

of things he wants to discuss with both of you.”

“Did we do something wrong?”

“Na. It's nothing like that. Alex only wants to ask both of you a couple of questions. Anyway, he found this Jewish Deli that has the best corned beef and pastrami sandwich in the world. Or at least in Kansas City. If he says it's the best, who am I to disagree.”

“Okay. Give us a few minutes to get ready.”

“Oh, by the way. I already called the locksmith for you. He's one of our business partners. He should be here before we leave. You'll have to pay him when we get back. He should be finished by then.”

Dee gives Mike the evil eye; “Don't look at me that way. You don't know how many people may have keys to the building. Alex and I want both of you to stay safe.”

“Oh alright. Will we have the only keys?”

“Yes. That way both of you will be safe here. Alex and I don't need or want keys to anything here. Just in case if you understand. We don't need or want any connections to each other.”

“We understand. Thank you. We'll meet you downstairs.”

45 minutes later, the group of 4 is seated inside of a out of the way deli. It's in the lower level of an apartment building. Alex has ordered 4 lean corned beef and pastrami sandwiches along with 4 cups of coffee.

While they're waiting for the food, Alex starts; “Questions have arisen concerning your latest job and I presume honeymoon. Because of who the people asking questions are, I agreed to talk to both of you about their concerns.”

“Ask away. The cleanup went exactly according to plan. So what's the concerns?”

“How much cash did you recover from those two?”

“I remember our crew saying something about what a tight wad the guy was. They said he only had four dollars and some change on him.”

Dee answers; “The woman had three dollars and some change. That was it.”

“Did you or your people find anything else in the way of cash?”

“Nothing other than our cash payment of four thousand dollars in a brown paper bag on the front seat of the man's car. That was it.”

Dee is getting a little frustrated; “What's this all about? Are we being accused of ripping someone off? Are we going to be targets of revenge?”

At that moment, their food and coffees are being delivered. After the server leaves; “No, nothing of the sort. Let's have these while they're warm. I hope nobody minds because I ordered everything on fresh onion rolls. There's yellow and Dijon mustard on the table.”

After the food has been consumed, most of the close by patrons have left. Alex continues the conversation; “How did the job go?”

“Perfect down to the last detail.”

“Did you find any large sums of money in either of the cars?”

“Only the money we were paid. We wore gloves and left the cars at the airport. So what's going on?”

“Those two were cops. Like almost every other cop, they were taking five and ten dollar bribes to look the other way. It's the cost of our doing business.”

“That's normal everywhere.”

Over the last six months, they became greedy. They started ripping off drug dealers and selling the products to out of town organizations. Myself and others in our business were becoming more unhappy with those two by the week. But being police, what could we do? Nothing.”

Dee asks; “So who put the hit on them?”

“There's a select few in the department who learned of an internal affairs investigation that would have brought those two down and put a spotlight on the whole department. They orchestrated the hits.”

Dee sets her coffee cup down; “Oh shit. No wonder the unmarked car.”

Edward asks; “So what's word on the street concerning those two?”

“The other organizations know you two eliminated the bodies. Now they are looking for the money those two ripped off.

Everyone figures it's hidden somewhere local because it's obvious they didn't spend it. They lived in small average houses and you know what kind of cars they drove. Smith's wife is a grocery store clerk. The woman's husband unloads trucks at a meat packer. Their bank accounts are nothing special.”

“Any word on what the police think?”

Alex smiles; Because of a brochure found in one of the cars at the airport, they think the couple eloped and are living in Guyana, South America. Also because English is widely spoken there. I heard most everyone in the department knew they were an item.”

“Do the other organizations know how much money is missing?”

“They're guessing between ten and twenty thousand.”

Dee lets out; “Holey shit!”

“Now with those two gone, it's business as usual. They must have hid the money somewhere.”

“Thank you.”

“You're welcome. My associates can sometimes be a greedy bunch. If the missing money were to be found, there would be a fight. Who gets how much and why? I sure as hell don't want to get involved in that shit storm.”

“I can understand why. Six organizations arguing over the money might cause a major increase in our business.”

“I can see why you married Dee. She's a beautiful woman and really smart. She knows that is exactly what would happen.”

“Thank you. I'm trying my best.”

“I know that. One last thing. I understand the late Detective Smith didn't trust banks. He remembered his mother telling him about the bank failures as a child during the great depression. Because of this, he kept the ill-gotten money in a satchel.

If that bag of money were to show up, it could start a gang war none of us need.”

He stares at Dee and Edward with all the seriousness in the world in his eyes for several moments before leaning back in his chair. The server arrives with the meal check.

Alex tells her; “I would like to order two more of these great sandwiches to go please.”

He reaches into his pocket and gives the woman two twenty dollar bills; “This should take care of the check and you keep the change for your great service.”

The woman has a smile from ear to ear; “Oh my god! Thank you Mister Morris.”

After she steps away; “Mike. These are for dinner tonight. One for you and one for Alice. Am I understood?”

“Clearly boss.”

“Thank you. When I see her, I'm going to ask how she enjoyed tonight's dinner. Am I clear?”

“Crystal clear boss.”

Turning to Edward; “A month or so ago, I bought Alice and Mike rib dinners. Mike almost ate both of them. I think Alice told me she had a couple of ribs and maybe half a potato.”

“They were really good ribs boss. I couldn't help myself.”

“Anyway, onto another unpleasant matter concerning you two. I have a considerable sum invested in your business. The building, the truck and the car. My lawyers and accounts tell me I need to account for the sale of those assets. This is to make sure of a one hundred percent legal separation between us”

Edward asks; “What are you telling us?”

Dee answers; “We need to pay for the building, truck and car to remove any connections between the two of us and him.”

“Like I said before. She's a damn smart woman. I feel five thousand dollars would be a fair price.”

Dee smiles; “We can arrange that. Business has been good and we have the cash. If you would have asked for more, I would have asked for terms. Business has been good, but not that good. We still have overhead.”

“Okay, you twisted my arm. Forty five hundred and it's a deal.”

“Thank you. When Mike drops us off, it'll take me a couple of minutes to get him the money. It's in our apartment.”

“Do you want a receipt?”

Edward answers; “No. We have the titles for the truck and car. We also have the title and deed for the building. Everything is in our business name. No receipt is needed.”

“Mister Morris, we've known each other for years. You gave me my first job out of college. Even though it was working for scumbag Chuck.”

“It paid very well.”

“Twelve dollars a day, seven days a week, no taxes, free room and board, and a fantastic job. I could never have hoped to make even half that anywhere else. That's why I trust you Mister Morris. You've never done me wrong.”

“Give me your hands.”

She reaches over the table where Alex gently grasps them; “If I was only twenty years younger when I met you, and society was

less judgmental ... Ah, we'll never know. That's also the reason I didn't hire you as an accountant.”

“Because I'm a colored woman?”

“Because you were so young and innocent, I didn't want you tarnished with my business. Doing my book keeping would have put you in a dangerous harms way. And call me Alex.”

He releases her hands; “So everything is good. The satchel and it's contents will never be seen anywhere again. Are we clear on this?”

Dee and Edward answer; “We're clear.”

“We don't need any gang wars. Mike; here comes your dinners. Don't eat Alice's.

“I won't boss.”

“Now bring my guests home and pick up the money. I'll see you back at the office when you're done.”

Everyone left the restaurant and briefly chatted outside. Alex entered his car and drove off while everyone walked to Mike's car. The conversation while returning to the apartment is rather bland.

“What's wrong with you two? I thought you'd be talking up a storm right about now.”

“After the bus rides from hell that took so many hours, we talked and solved all the worlds problems. In short, we're talked out.”

“Ah you'll be home in a couple minutes. You can start doing what married people do when they come back from a long trip.”

“We were about to start doing that this morning before you knocked on our door.”

“I mean you're going to pay the locksmith, turn on the radio and relax.”

Dee turns to Edward with panic; “How much money do you have?”

“Why?”

“We only have about forty six hundred and we need to still pay the locksmith.”

Edward smiles; “Remember that money Mike gave us? I put it away in case he wants it back or some other emergency.”

From the front seat; “I will never ask for that money back.”

Dee smiles; “Mike, you saved us once again. You're the best.”

When everyone arrives in the apartment, Dee starts walking around, removing every heater vent cover and taking out packets of money. Edward has removed money from the freezer and is now removing the back of the radio, where he pulls out more bills.

With Mike looking on; “You two was something else.”

Edward smiles; “You can't be too careful.”

“Did you check the bread box and cookie jar?”

“Thanks! I forgot the bread box. We only keep cookies in the cookie jar.”

Mike asks; “Hey Dee. Do you still make those peanut butter cookies?”

“Yes I do. I still make the chocolate chip you used to clean me out of every time you came by.”

He starts chuckling; “Yeah, the ladies used to get pissed off because I ate all of them.”

“When I made them, I had to make several batches. As soon as a batch would cool, they would split the cookies between them and wrap them in waxed paper.”

“Why would they do that? The cookie jar was always right there on the counter. They could help themselves.”

“They would hoard them from each other and you. They also used them to trade for things. Two peanut Butter cookies for a Chocolate Chip cookie. Only one of them liked oatmeal cookies. They also used the cookies as poker chips. I'll be glad when the government stops rationing chocolate.”

Edward announces; “Let's sit at the table so Dee can count the money.”

A couple minutes later, she's handing Mike the cash; “Forty five hundred cash. Please recount it.”

“I was counting it as you were. It's all there.”

Edward passes a paper bag to Mike. After he puts the money in the bag; “I see you still have some cash, good.”

There's a knock on the door, it's the locksmith; “I'm here to replace every lock in the building. I'll start here if you don't mind. Then I'll go downstairs.”

“That's fine.

“Do you want to pay me when I'm finished or should I leave you the bill?”

“We'll pay you when your done. By the way, what happens to

people who don't pay?"

"I take all my locks back. Then every few days, I remove all the new locks they had installed by someone else."

"Wow. We'll pay you in cash when you've finished."

"I looked around the building before I came up here. It will be a hundred and twenty five dollars."

"Thank you."

The man and his toolbox started on the apartment's front door. Mike said his goodbyes and left. Dee and Edward went downstairs to the office where he moved over the counsel radio to access the floor trap door.

When he opens it, he sees the round folded paper bag. He lifts it and give the bag to Dee. She counts the cash; "It's all here."

"I knew I could trust Larry."

Edward reaches in, removes the doctors satchel and walks to the desk. Opens it and sees a couple of bar towels; "This guy was stealing bar towels?"

With Dee looking on, he removes four towels; "Holey shit! You better count this. I've never even seen this much money in my life."

Dee is cool and calm counting the cash. A couple minutes later; "Those two were doing some serious business ripping off drug dealers."

"How serious?"

"Thirty one thousand, four hundred and fifteen dollars and ninety

two cents. I have no idea where the ninety two cents came from. I thought dealers only dealt in paper money.”

“Oh shit. What can we do with all that?”

“Oh sweetheart, it's a good thing I'm an accountant. We hide it and don't touch it. It'll be our retirement nest.”

“Don't you want to spend it? Or at least some of it?”

“No. We need to be smart. If we start spending more than we earn, the IRS will be on us like white on rice. We'll keep it somewhere safe, like a deposit box in the bank.”

“Why not just keep it here? You know, close by for comfort.”

“No. what if the building catches fire? What if it floods because of a water pipe break? What if some asshole breaks in trying to find cash?”

“So that's why Chuck had that open safe in the corner.”

With a smile; “You really are smarter than the average husband. That's exactly why I wouldn't let Larry and the others take it for scrap. The combination lock part is broken. You can shut the door, but one twist of the handle opens it.”

“What did Chuck store in there? His movies?”

“He use to put his potato chips in there. He would eat them though out the day.”

“No wonder he was so fat. He never stopped eating.”

“It wasn't often he stopped eating. Now on to this. Put the money and bar rags back in the satchel. Then put that bag back in the floor and move the radio back. After the locksmith is done, we can go to

the bank, get a safe deposit box and put the money in there.”

“Oh I'm so lucky to be married to a smart college graduate who happens to be the prettiest woman anywhere.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere you want to go with me husband.”

“Oh I like that. While we're waiting for the locksmith, why don't you do your uncles books?”

“My uncles are self made men. Or at least they think they are. When Harold got out of high school, his first job was dish washer in the restaurant he now owns. He has his long time girlfriend doing his books. I don't get in his way of doing things. ”

“Then what about Herbert?”

“Herbert went to work for some white man right out of high school. The guy bought and sold real estate at auction. The funeral parlor and related graveyard came up for bankruptcy auction.

Now what white man is going to bid on a bankrupt, black funeral parlor and graveyard? Not gonna happen. Herbert asked the man he was working for if he could borrow a hundred dollars to bid it. The man bid ten dollars, everyone there laughed. He won the bid and had Uncle Herbert sign the papers.”

“Wow! Did the man say why?”

“The said his grandfather was part of the underground railroad smuggling slaves to the north. He wanted to do something his grandfather would be proud of. He even sent Herbert to funeral director school and mortician school.”

“You're family is so damn lucky in so many ways.”

“Not as lucky as I am to find the man I would have never guessed in a million years would be the man I would marry.”

Edward is smiling; “It’s a shame they took out all the beds from the back.”

She smiles; “I’d get on my knees for you, but the locksmith might come in. That would be rather embarrassing. A kiss will have to do until he leaves.”

After the kiss, Edward is smiling as he tells Dee; “Your kisses remind me every time how much I’m in love with you. And everyone said we wouldn’t last.”

“Who said that? I’m gonna straighten them out right now!”

“I’m kidding my love. Nobody said anything except wishing us well.”

The love of his life smiles; “I wish that damn locksmith would get finished already. I’m a woman who needs to do things.”

“What things do you need to do my love?”

With a sly grin; “Oh you’ll find out two minutes after the locksmith leaves. I’ll give you a hint. I replaced the bed sheets earlier.”

“Oh my!”

Chapter 15

Several weeks have gone by. They're averaging 2 to 3 'cleanings' a week. Business isn't great, but okay. There's no rumors from the police about the two missing so called 'love bird' cops at all.

There has been a constant rumbling about the missing money from some of the street level thugs. Dee and Edward have been approached concerning this at least twice a week.

Dee and Edward always reply with the same answer; “We don't have any missing money.”

Dee reads every newspaper edition everyday. Edward always goes out and gets them from the local stand a half block away while she prepares dinner. This Wednesday evening is going to be terribly different.

Edward leaves the apartment with his usual \$2. He always gives the under five foot Tony, the newsstand owner a dollar tip. He's suffering from kyphosis (hunchback).

This evening after giving Tony his dollar tip, the two men chat for a few moments about the upcoming baseball playoffs. When they finish, Edward starts walking back to the apartment reading the headlines on one of the papers.

Not 30 feet from the newsstand, a car pulls up, two men jump out, grab Edward and throw him in the backseat of the car. They reenter and drive off in a hurry.

Tony seen the entire episode transpire. He lowers the overhead newsstand door and walks as fast as he can to Dee and Edward's apartment. He's ringing the doorbell like a man on a mission, because he is.

Dee finally comes downstairs. When she opens the door; “I

thought you were Edward trying some stupid prank.”

She sticks her head out the door and looks towards Tony's stand; “Where's Edward?”

Now breathing heavily; “I gave him his newspapers like always. We talked a little baseball and then he left for home. He didn't get twenty or thirty feet, then some car pulled up, Two thugs jumped out, grabbed him, threw Ed in the back seat and drove off like a bat from hell. ”

“So where is he?”

“I don't know. That's why I came her to tell you. He dropped his newspapers on the ground when they grabbed him. I left the stand and came here as fast as I could.”

Trying to control herself; “Do you know who these thugs are?”

“No. I think they're young and must be new because I never heard them before.”

“Were they white, black, Asian, Hispanic?”

“They could be white I think. I didn't really hear them very well.”

She grabs the little man by his upper arms. While shaking him, she let's loose with a tirade; “How do you not know what color they are! What the fu** is wrong with you that you don't know?”

The frightened little man is almost in tears; “Eddy is my friend. I would tell you if I could, but I'm legally blind. I'm sorry Dee. With my back like this, I couldn't do more.”

After realizing her mistake, she releases the man; “I'm sorry. I forgot about your eyes. Thank you for telling me. I need to make some phone calls fast.”

“Go make your phone calls and don't worry about me. We all make mistakes every now and then.”

“I promise I'll make this up to you.”

“I didn't come here looking for anything. Eddy is my friend and I had to find someone to help him.”

“Thank you.”

She shuts the door, then it's back upstairs and call Alex.

In a panic; “Alex it's Dee. Some thugs grabbed Edward right off the street. ... He was at Tony's newspaper stand down the street buying me some newspapers as usual. They got him while coming back home. ... Just few yards from Tony's stand. ... Tony couldn't see clear enough. ... He thinks they may be white, but he's not sure. ... He's legally blind, that's why.

“I'm sending Mike over to your place for protection, just in case.”

“I'm fine. I have Edward's forty five automatic and the thirty two you gave him. No one's getting in.”

“Okay. This sounds like some new punks went rogue. Let me make some calls. We'll have Edward home before breakfast.”

“You really think so?”

“Nothing goes on in Kansas City without at least one of the organizations knowing about it. Sit tight. We'll get him back.”

While Alex Morris is making calls to the other crime organizations, the thugs brought Edward to a warehouse in the Blue Valley Industrial section of the city. His feet, body and arms are tied to a chair.

“You got rid of those cops who were ripping off some of the dope dealers. Where's the money the cops had?”

“I don't have it.”

A punch to the head, then to his body followed.

“Is that the best you can do? My old man hit me harder than that when he was drunk and could barely stand, much less swing.”

Another punch to the head, then another to his body followed.

“When I was in Marine boot camp, my drill instructor hit me harder than that with his left fist. And he was right handed; pussy.”

His beating went on and on. When he passed out, they doused him with water and continued. He was beaten so bad, they couldn't understand what he was saying because he's deliberately mumbling.

There are four thugs taking turns beating and questioning him. Finally one of them hit's home.

“Maybe we could grab that black bitch he's shackled up with. I've never screwed a spade before. I always wanted to know what a coon is like. How about the rest of you? Want to find out what a good looking black bitch is like? I mean she is on the lighter side so there has to be some white in there somewhere.”

The others are chuckling while agreeing. Edward spits out the blood from his mouth. Barely understandable; “I'll tell you where the money is. Just give me some water.”

The thug in charge tosses water in Edward's face.

“Where's the money asshole?”

Edward spit's again; "Have one of your lackeys dig it out through your asshole." and smiles at him."

The head thug hit Edward so hard, he knocked the chair over while another thug was holding it.

"Okay already. I'll talk."

"It seems even a tough marine has a breaking point to just give up. So, where's the money?"

"Edward spits out some more blood; "Have your lackeys get closer."

"Why?"

"I want all of you to here me."

They all gather close; "Can all of you here me?"

"Yeah. We can hear you."

"Good. At the first chance I get, I'm going to cut every one of your throats and watch you die. The last thing anyone of you will see is me smiling."

The four thugs when on a beating rampage. Edward was knocked out cold. It took several douses of water to revive him.

Finally; "Okay already. Here's the truth. We had to borrow the money from Alex Morris to buy our building, truck and car. You can ask Big Mike if that's true.

We had to do enough jobs to get the money to pay Alex the five thousand dollars back. Don't you think if we had the money, it would take is several weeks to pay him off?"

One mousy looking guy; “Jimmy, he may be right. Maybe we should call Big Mike and ask.”

“Part of the money from Miss Green, we used to pay Alex off. I'm sure all of you know who she is.”

“She's the chink who oversees all the Asian gangs. We heard she likes you almost as much as Alex.”

Another of the thugs; “We know you're in good with the spics and the darkies too.”

“We don't care what color, race, religion or nationality hires us. We do our jobs because money talks.”

Chief thug Jimmy; “One last time mister tough marine, where's the money?”

“I didn't have it before and I still don't have it.”

“Then I'm going to put a bullet in your head.”

Another of the deep thinkers; “Then we're going to take your black bitch in trade. Oh don't worry. She'll be joining you soon.”

“After we've taken our turns with her. Hahahaha.”

There's a knock on the front door; “Frank, go see who it is.”

Then there's a knock on the back door; “Ray, see who's at the back door.”

Now there's banging on the overhead door; “Shit! Did someone book a convention here? Danny, open the overhead and tell whoever it is to go away.”

Turning to face Edward; “You just got a minute or two reprieve.”

Jimmy the leader turns to look in the different directions to see each of his men walking with several heavily armed others. Frank has his head cocked to one side. It's because there's another man's hand holding his head that way.

Ray looks terrified. Jimmy sees a group with guns coming towards him with one of them holding a gun in Ray's left ear.

Danny has his hands up while walking in front of another group carrying guns.

When all four thugs who kidnapped Edward are together, Jimmy sees he is extremely outnumbered and outgunned.

A Hispanic man tells his men; "Take their guns."

Then he tells Jimmy; "Cut him loose."

"And if I don't?"

The man smiled, turned to his men and spoke in Spanish. Three of his people grabbed Ray and pulled him maybe 20 feet away. One stood on each side holding Ray at arms distance. A third man stood directly behind him.

"Your man's life is now in your control. Release that man."

"I know he has the money I want. Go fu** yourself spic."

The man turns; "Carlos, cortarle la garganta." (cut his throat).

Suddenly, Ray is lying on the floor, holding his throat in a pool of blood. He stops moving moments later.

Turning to face Jimmy; "I'm giving you a choice. Are you going to release this man now?"

“Not until I get what I came for because I know he has it.”

“You sure are careless with your friends lives. Mister Chen here represents Miss Green. She has a strong interest in the man you and your crew have been torturing.”

“Who cares about some old Jap bitch? I don't”

“That is unfortunate for your man Danny.”

Turning; “Mister Chen.”

The man in a flash draws a huge knife and runs it through Danny's heart. As he fell, Mister Chen held the knife so it's removed while the man fell. Then cleaned it by wiping it on the body.

“Now I believe you know how serious we are. Release Edward or forfeit your man Frank's life.

“Jimmy! For gods sake! Cut him loose or I will!”

He moves to Edward and tries to untie him. Suddenly Frank's head jerks up and sideways while a crack could be heard. Everyone is looking on with smiles on their faces.

Looking beyond Edward; “Hello Mike. I'm glad you could finally make it. We've been dragging this out waiting for you. I have other things to do tonight. I would have killed this asshole, but I saved him for you.”

“It's good to see you Santiago and thank you. I appreciate you waiting for me. So what's it been, a couple of years since we seen each other?”

“Yeah, how time slips by us.”

He signals to his men to hold Johnny.

Edward is still bleeding and tied to a chair. Barely audible; “I can't see, but I know it's you Mike. If we could get over the welcoming each other festivities, I really need to pee.”

While one of Santiago's men is cutting Edward loose, Big Mike looks down at Edward; “Damn, you look like shit. Don't worry about having to pee, It looks like you pissed on yourself already. Let's get you out of here.”

Looking up with is one partly open eye; “Maybe you could see your way to throwing some water on me. Then finding a rag and cleaning me up a little. If I look as bad as I feel, I don't want to get Dee upset seeing me like this.”

“Your left eye is swollen shut. Your right eye don't look much better. You look like you went fifteen rounds with Joe Louis and forgot to lift your fists.”

Edward coughs up more blood. Then gasps again for a breath; “I don't mean to be a pain in the ass, but it's really hard to breathe. Help me up Mike.”

“Okay buddy. I'll take care of everything.”

Mike tries to stand him up. Mumbling; “I'm sorry, my legs hurt like hell and I can't seem to make them work.”

He looks down to see Edward has been stabbed in the thighs. He turns to Santiago; “Do you have any gloves?”

He hands Mike a pair of leather gloves; “Thank you. Now could a couple of you bring Edward to our hospital? I'll be there in a little while. I have some unfinished business here with our boy Jimmy.”

Mister Chen tells Mike; “Miss Green insists we take care of Edward. We'll take him to our hospital.”

He speaks in some Asian language while waving his hands instructing his men. They lift and carry Edward out to their car and leave.

A smiling Mike looks at the frightened Jimmy; “Someone tie this soon to be dead man to this chair. I'm going to give you, tough guy what you gave Edward. But there will be one difference.

The moment you're begging for me to make your death quick, I'll slash your wrists so you can have the last thirty minutes of your life thinking about what you did to a man with many powerful friends.”

Santiago's men gag and tie Jimmy to the chair. He wipes off the knife Jimmy used to stab Edward and tries to hand it to Mike; “You're going to need this for what he did to Edward.”

“In a few moments I will. I need two of you to hold the chair.”

After what has to be the most brutal several minute beating anyone has ever seen, Mike takes the knife, stabs Jimmy twice in each thigh. The last thing he does is fulfill his promise. He slices the man's wrists.

The man is trying to scream in pain through the gag. The only sounds are his crying.

“Jimmy, your time is literally running out. Judging by your size, maybe thirty to forty minutes before you bleed out.”

He turns, thanks Santiago; “Now comes the real hard part.”

“If that wasn't the hard part, what is?”

“I have to go get Dee and bring her to the hospital.”

Santiago smiles; “Your a better man than me Gunga Din.”

“To tell you the truth, I'm scared. She can be pretty high strung.”

“So Mike, who's going to clean this up?”

“The Gaminara organization is going to get a couple gallons of gasoline. They'll be here in an hour to pick up the bodies. These assholes were trying to impress Vincent Gaminara, he should add them to his organization. They'll be found in their burned out car.”

“Good. That bunch is not worth doing anything special for. I have their wallets and anything else that can identify them. They'll be ashes in a garbage can within the hour.”

“Santiago my friend, stay safe. Let's get together and have dinner again sometime.”

“The last time you were over for dinner, Maria worked her butt off making enough dinner for Alice and you.”

“I'll take Maria and you to any restaurant you want.”

“That sounds better. Take care of yourself my big ugly friend.”

The men shook hands and went their separate ways.

Mike drove to Dee and Edward's apartment to find her bouncing off the walls.

“Where's Edward? Alex said he would be home for breakfast.”

In a somber tone; “There's been a few issues.”

Now almost shouting; “What happened? Where is he? Is he alright?”

Trying to calm her down; “Edward is alive and in good hands. He is one tough marine.”

“Don't screw with me Mike!”

“Edward was picked up by four thugs. They tortured him, trying to make him tell them where the missing cop money is. He never told them anything.”

She falls onto the kitchen chair. “How is he? Where is he?”

“He's in our hospital. They're going to take good care of him.”

“I want to see him.”

“I don't think that's a good idea.”

“Why? I want to see him now!”

Now Mike gets a stupid streak; “Maybe leave him heal for a few days. If you go now, I don't think you're going to like what you see.”

“I'll go by myself. Lock the doors on your way out.”

“I should have kept my mouth shut. Come on, I'll take you. In your state of mind, you'll get in an accident.”

When they get to the hospital, Mike's brother Carl answers the door; “Hello brother. Did you get a look at the guy they brought in? He looks like Joe Louis tried to beat him to death.”

“Be quiet brother. That's Edward, Dee's husband.”

“Oh shit! I'm sorry Dee. He's so banged up, I didn't recognize him. Don't worry. The doc thinks he's going to be okay.”

“The Doc thinks? Where is he? I need to see him right now.”

“He's in the trauma exam room with the Doc along with Nurses

Sada and Barrett. It's been real quiet so everyone else is off.”

Dee runs to find the three medical people examining an almost completely nude Edward on an exam table.

She stops at the door; “Why is he naked?”

“His clothes are covered in sweat, urine and blood. We needed to remove everything for the x-rays and to see where the blood came from. The important stuff is undamaged and covered with a surgical towel.”

Dee sees a bag of blood and two of clear liquid flowing into her husband intravenously. There's also a suction tube in his mouth.

“Why are there bags of stuff connected to him? Why are those tubes in his mouth?”

Hiroshi quickly explains; “He's been tortured. The tubes in his mouth are helping him breathe and removing any blood so he don't choke to death. He's also lost a lot of blood and fluids.

He's really lucky. Other than all the bruising to his upper chest and face, nothing is broken. Oh, there's two deep puncture wounds to each leg and he has a concussion. Luckily the knife wounds to his legs missed any arteries.

The good news is he doesn't seem to have any internal bleeding, so far that we could find. Most of the abuse was to his head, chest and thighs. His left eye is swollen shut. His right one is only partly open.”

“Can I talk to him?”

“We have to keep him awake for now. He can hear you; but he has to be in so much pain, I'm not sure he'll understand you.”

Dee approaches, grabs his right hand and leans over. His face is so swollen and battered, she can barely recognize her husband.

She speaks in his ear; "It's me honey. I'm here. I'll stay with you until you're better and I'll bring you home."

He squeezes her hand. She sees a tear coming from his almost swollen shut right eye. He mumbles an almost inaudible; "Sorry."

Big Mike approaches; "He's upset Dee."

She turns with fury in her eyes; "Of course he's upset you asshole! He was almost beaten to death!"

"No, that's not it. When I got to where they were holding him, he asked me to clean him up before you see him. Edward didn't want you to see him the way he looks."

She starts crying; "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to take this out on you."

He escorts her out of the room and holds her while she has a good cry.

When she composes herself; "Is whoever did this going to get away with it?"

Mike looks at his watch; "No. The four assholes who did this are now in a burning their car. They'll be listed as four thugs with no ID's who were on the wrong side of a gang war."

"I would have loved to reign terror on those mother fu**ers."

Smiling; "Three of them died suddenly. The leader who's responsible for this; well let's say he got what he dished out. Then he had about a half an hour to think about what he did to Edward before he died."

“Good. Do we know what gang they were with?”

“No Gang. Just four thugs trying to make an impression.”

Hiroshi came in; “I gave him a sedative for the pain. You need to leave here and go home. The doctor is going need some time to stitch him up and make sure there's no other injuries.

Have Mike take you home. Get some rest and come back in the morning. Edward will be in a room where you can be with him. You're not doing yourself or anyone any good here.”

“What if he ... dies and I'm not here?” and her eyes go wide.

“Edward's a tough, he's not going to die. Come back tomorrow morning. Everything will be disconnected from him and the swelling will have started to go down. You'll see him on the mend.”

Mike puts his hand out; “Come on. There's nothing you're going to do here. I'll drive you home and you can come back tomorrow.”

“Thanks Mike. I've got such a pounding headache, I only want to lay down.”

As their walking to the car; “Bring Eddy some clothes tomorrow. He's gonna need them and they might make him feel better.”

A while later when Dee enters the apartment, images of Edward started flashing before here. Between her anger and helpless feeling, the little food she had in her stomach is now on the kitchen floor.

Chapter 16

The following day, because Edward has no serious internal injuries, he's being released. Big Mike's brother is helping Ed into Dee's car.

Through his swollen lips; "Carl; Where's your brother? I might need help getting up the apartment stairs."

"Mikey's busy this morning."

Dee puts his mind at ease; "Larry said he'll be waiting outside when we get home."

Edward tries to smile; "The only place I don't hurt is my feet."

"Shush; we can hardly understand you, so it's best you be quiet."

Mumbling; "Yes Dear."

After they get him in the front seat, Dee starts driving. Edward seems to be drifting in and out.

"Are you alright? When was the last time they gave you pain medication?"

Edward slowly turns his head. Dee looks over to see a battered face, one eye still closed and not much more than a open slit for the other. He looks like he's trying to smile.

Through his distorted voice; "I don't want to disappoint you, but I think passionate and wild sex is off the table for a while."

She looks over with a smile. He continues; "That means in the bedroom too."

When he tries to laugh, it sounds more like a moan and gurgle.

While keeping her eyes on the road, she reaches over and touches his hand; “I lived without sex for over a decade before I met you. I'm sure I'll survive until you heal. It will make it all the better.”

She hears what sounds like sobbing. Looking over, she sees him crying; “What's wrong?”

“I wish you would have left me in the hospital. You shouldn't have to see me like this. I'm ashamed of bringing you into my mess.”

“Oh just stop it. The minister said for better or worse. In sickness and health. We are meant to be together, so stop this feeling sorry for yourself bullshit. Marines aren't supposed to cry.”

He snuffles; “I'm overwhelmed by the physical pain and the mental grief I've caused you.”

“You have not caused me any grief. Maybe pissed me off to no end worrying about you, but other than that, we've been wonderful together and that's not going to change.”

He snuffles again and while looking at her; “Does this mean you still love me?”

“Do bears shit in the woods? What kinda stupid ass question was that? I've never stopped, not for a moment. I would take you in the bedroom when we get home and kiss you until you pass out. But with a hairline fractured jaw and busted lips, I guess I'm just gonna have to wait.”

“Remember when I said you will never have to prove anything to me?”

“Yes I remember that day.”

“I know you love me as much as I love you.”

As they're pulling in front of their building; "Oh you're such a romantic. There's Larry and Albert to help you get upstairs."

Dee pulls to the curb. Edward slowly opens the door to exit. Because of his injuries, he's rather slow to turn. Larry offers his hands to help. As Edward cautiously exits, Albert is shocked by what he sees.

He takes a couple of steps back; "Oh shit! They really worked you over. Is all that because of one of those jobs we did?"

Edward speaks by only moving his lips which is not clear; "There was a misunderstanding about a job. It's settled now."

Dee who has come around to the passenger side; "I told you and everyone; some rogue thugs wanted money. End of story. What part of it's over don't you understand?"

"Shit. If this is what can happen to me, I'm done. Nobody would try to beat up Larry or Bruno. Both of them are big. I'm five foot three, Edward's size."

"Nobody is going to bother you. I'm the same height as you and Edward. I'm not worried."

"No I'm done. You need to find someone else. Maybe Edward can take that kind of beating, I can't; goodbye."

Larry tells Dee; "Forget about him. Lock the car, then give me a hand. We need to get your husband upstairs. Which side has the bused ribs?"

"Three of those assholes who worked me over, must have been right handed. They beat the hell out of my ribs on my left side."

"No wonder the left side of your face looks like shit. Does than

mean you're all right now?"

"Ha ouch. Don't make me laugh, it hurts too much."

"Since I'm the biggest, you take his right side. I'll take his left."

"I'm not dead. I can walk, just a little shaky is all."

"I don't want you crashing down the stairs. Do you have any idea the terror Dee would unleash on me if I let you fall? I'd look like you in no time at all."

"Ha, ow! Please don't do that."

"Sorry buddy."

Dee and Larry stay a step behind Edward with each of them having a hand on his waist. When they reached the top of the stairs, Dee had to move around them to open the door.

Once inside; "I'd like to sit at the kitchen table."

"Why honey? The sofa would be more comfortable."

"I'm afraid if I get comfortable, I won't be able to move. At least here I'm sitting up and close to the bathroom."

Larry asks; "If you two don't need me, I'm leaving."

Dee looks to Edward; "Do you need Larry for anything?"

"He's proven his friendship to us over and over again. I can't ask for anything more than that. Thank you my friend."

The big man smiles; "Keep that up and you're gonna make me cry."

“Oh get the hell out of here before you embarrass both of us.”

“If either of you two need anything, call me.”

Larry leaves, Dee sits down and is looking at the pain medication schedule.

Her eyes become wide; “You were due for your pain medication an hour ago. What the hell is wrong with you?”

“On an empty stomach, they make me sick. At least they didn't break my arms.”

“I'm sure you don't want to chew. I have some chicken soup in the fridge. I'll warm it up for you. I need to get some food in you.”

Edward is sitting with what could be a look of contentment, watching the love of his life getting the soup, pouring it in a pot and starting it heating.

Dee notices; “Even looking the way you do; why do you have that look on your face?”

“I'm sitting here thinking: that's a restaurant range and oven.”

“You try making food for seven people on some little apartment range. It ain't gonna happen. Is that all you're smiling about? A range?”

“No. I'm seriously thinking about how lucky I am.”

“Lucky? You were almost beaten to death. I wouldn't call that being lucky.”

“I'm living with a goddess who I love and she loves me. No other man on earth can claim to be as lucky as me.”

She goes to sit on his lap. As she's lowering herself, Ed reaches to put his arms around her like they've done so many times before.

Then just before Dee sits; “Whoa! Your legs! We can't do that until you heal. I don't want to tear the stitches.”

She turns to face him. He has his hands outstretched; “We can still hold hands.”

She does and kneels on the floor; “I'd like to take care of you while I'm down here if you like.”

“Oh what an offer. But I hurt so much and have an empty stomach, something bad might happen to spoil the pleasure.”

Dee melts his heart again with that smile only she has; “I sure hope you feel better soon. You know I'm a woman with serious needs. The pleasure goes both ways.”

“Oh don't I know. But right now, I see the soup is steaming. Let's eat or at least I'll try.”

After the early lunch; “You know we need to replace Albert.”

“Call Alex. Maybe he has someone he can recommend.”

Dee calls Alex Morris. He asks if she's looking for anyone in particular.

“Not really. Someone who's not afraid of dead people at a crime scene and is strong enough to help pick up a body.”

“Would you mind someone unusual?”

“If they can do the job, I don't care who they are.”

“I'll send someone over to your office in a few hours.”

Sure enough. While sitting in the office downstairs, there's a knock on the door.

Dee walks over, opens the door and a rather tall, large woman around her age is smiling; "Hello. I'm Ruth."

"This business is not open to the public. Goodbye."

"I understand you have a job opening. Alex Morris sent me."

"Is this some kind of a joke?"

"You need someone who's not afraid of a crime scene with dead people and able to help carry bodies. I'm here."

"But you're a woman? I was expecting a man."

"I can out work most men."

"You look like you could. Do you have any experience with blood and dead people?"

"I used to work in the county morgue. I had to move bodies around. After the pathologist would weight the internal organs, I would have to dispose of the body parts, clean the exam tables and mop the blood from the floor. That stuff don't bother me in the slightest."

"Are you still working there?"

"No. I was fired."

"Why?"

"A fresh body that was involved in a murder investigation was cremated. I accidentally marked the toe tag as bio hazard."

“Yeah. I can see how that would get you fired. That must have pissed off a lot of people.

So how do you know Alex Morris?”

“While I was working, Alex came in while the coroner was called out for a meeting. He asked me if there was a way to get a particular body removed and cremated in a hurry.

I told him if a body is considered a bio hazard, one of the orderlies are called and the body is taken immediately to the crematory for disposal.”

“What did you do?”

“Alex smiled and said he would owe me a great favor if the body became a bio-hazard. He had five, twenty dollar bills in his hand. I took the hundred dollars. Marked the body tag as bio-hazard. It was removed and being cremated within fifteen minutes.”

“So you cashed in the favor Alex owed you.”

“That was a couple of months ago. I've been bouncing around from job to job since then. I finally worked up the nerve to approach Alex. Now I'm here.”

“Do you know what service we provide?”

“You and your crew remove the newly deceased and eliminate the body or bodies so they will never be found. No body, no crime.”

Dee smiles; “You're not who I expected.”

“You were expecting some twenty or thirty something white guy who's not bright enough to be of use to any of the mobs.”

“That's exactly who I was expecting. Not an educated woman in I

presume her early thirties.”

“Thirty two to be exact. Alex feels it would be less suspicious for a truck with two women in the front seat than a truck with men.”

“He's right. Welcome to Specialize Waste Disposal. Do you know what the pay is?”

“Alex didn't tell me. He only said you and Edward pay a good wage.”

“Seventy five dollars a body and whatever cash the deceased has in his pockets is split between the crew.”

“What does an average week look like?”

“On average, two bodies a week. We've had as many as six at once. It depends on how many get caught skimming off the top.”

That's great. I didn't take home seventy five dollars working two weeks.”

“Give me phone numbers where I can reach you. When I or Edward call, get here right away. If the boyfriend is on top, push him off and come here now.”

“There's no boyfriend or husband. I have no need for a man.”

Dee's eyes open wide; “Oh. I understand.”

“Is that going to be a problem for me working here? Everywhere I go, it seems people have a problem with me not needing men.”

“Besides me, is Edward; we live upstairs. I'm sure he don't care. The other crew members are Larry. He's a happily married man for many years. Bruno our other worker is single and leaves alone. Take that for what it's worth. I won't read anything into that.”

“I won't either.”

“We're lucky because he don't say much. The most we get out of him is single words or short sentences. Hello, goodbye, I'm done, let's go and we're ready. Oh, the occasional: all the bodies are in the truck.”

Smiling; “I think I'm going to like working here.”

“I know we're going to be glad to have you. With Edward recovering and Albert quitting, we were in a labor jam.”

“One last thing, my name is Anna Wysocki, it's Polish.”

“Welcome Anna to Specialize Waste Disposal.”

“Thank you. By the way, I guess you don't realize you know my dad.”

“I don't know anyone by the name of Wysocki. Who's your dad?”

“Tony Wysocki. He owns the newspaper stand down the street?”

“I had no idea he's your father.”

“Yeah, that's my dad. When he sees me, he always tells me he can count on Eddy giving him two dollars twenty five cents worth of newspapers and tell dad to keep the change.”

“That's my Eddy. Nobody could ever accuse him of being greedy.

Tony saved my Edward's life. I told him I would somehow make it up to him. So what's wrong with his eyes?”

“He has cataracts; that's clouding of the eyes. At seven dollars a day working at the coroner, I could never save enough money to get him the surgery he needs to see clearly.”

“How much does the surgery cost?”

“They said three hundred per eye, six hundred dollars.”

“If you work with us for a couple of disposals, Edward and I will pay for Tony's eye surgeries.”

“You will?”

“Your dad saved my Edward's life. I must find a way to repay him. I can't think of a better way to do that.”

“Oh thank you!”

“Will you or someone be able to take care of your dad after the surgery? One of my uncles had it done. His brother had to watch over him for a few days.”

Dee starts chuckling so Anna asks; “What's funny?”

“Uncle Harold had to get new glasses. He had to get bifocals. He thought they made him look old.”

“And men talk about women having vanity.”

Characters

Dee and Edward born 1923 Both 5' 3"

Big Mike = Thug

Alex Morris = Gangster

Edward Gibson = Killer

Bob Oakley = Restaurant owner

Oakley's diner

Sam = Cook

Chuck Pearson = porn producer

Sophie Brand - tailor

Zhou tailor's shop

Raven is the hotel name

Thomas Curto – Pickup guy

Dee Barbara Mullins

Bruno, Larry Williams and Albert (sales)

Specialize Waste Disposal

Hiroshi Sada – ex girlfriend

Harold owns restaurant

Herbert Undertaker

James – cousin

Carl – Hospital doorman – Big Mike's brother.

Jeff – Hospital Janitor

Darnell Washburn – Rapist

Barrett – nurse

Faulkner – nurse

Minister Davis

\$75 for each body – helpers

\$250 Herbert

Art Jones = information

Beth & Melvin

Alice – Big Mike's wife

Santiago – Mike's friend

Doctor Itou

Shirley – Albert's wife

Jimmy, Frank, Danny and Ray – kidnappers

Mister Chen

Santiago

Tony – Newspaper stand
Anna Wysocki – Tony's daughter
Vincent Gaminara

Proposed story lines

A priest knocks on the door.

After a delay, a woman loosely dressed as a nun slightly opens the door; "Yes?"

He asks; "This building was owned by the church. It was sold to pay down debt. According to public records, formally a convent was sold to a religious order called Holy Saviors

I can't find your order in any church records. May I come in?

No you may not.

And why may I not enter? I am a ordained priest and a ranking member of this dioceses.

This is a private order. You are not welcome here. Go away.

The priest tries to force his way into the building that was once a convent for nuns. A rather large grizzly looking man steps into the priests path. He's wearing black jeans, a priests collar and a tee shirt.

Sister Mary don't want you in here in here. You're not getting in; you capiche?

In 1967, Dee and Edward marry when interracial marriages become legal. Dee and Edward retire from the 'cleaner' business. They take over the restaurant and laundromat when they retire.

Cousin James takes over the funeral parlor.

Need to take care of Tony's eyes