

Deadbeat

(based on a true story)

Rick Marcou

1.

"Tommy, get your fuckin' hands off me....I swear to God, I'm gonna kill you....Ow, shit, that hurts, get off me!"

"What, I was only kidding," Tommy said, releasing Ginnie, her head now freed from its temporary prison in his crotch area, where Tommy was playfully forcing it down to. Playfully in Tommy's world. Ginnie was strong, don't let the sub-5 foot height and 90 or so pounds fool you. She grew up with boys around, whether they were half-brothers, cousins, wasn't ever clear. But with minimal parental involvement it was a free-for-all, and her ability to survive, get food, avoid being assaulted, all was due to her ability to defend herself. Or go on the offensive. But that didn't stop Tommy from manhandling her at times, and though he was a bit skinny, he was wiry strong. Spend enough time in juvy and you end up strong, or a victim. His 6-foot frame was lean and pasty, but there was enough muscle to allow him to hop up and over fences quickly, bust through doors if needed, and other such tricks of the trade. That trade of course being robbery.

"I swear, you keep pullin' that shit, I'm gonna stick a knife in your ear. You know I will."

"Yeah, I know. I'm sorry, G, I was just playin'. I didn't mean to hurt you. Come back here, let me make it up to you."

"Fuck off."

"C'mon, don't be like that. Here, you can punch me in the gut, free shot." He got up off the couch and walked toward her, his surfer t-shirt lifted up to reveal a pale expanse of belly where abs would exist on better men. Ginnie had her head down, focused on her black fingernails which she was picking at. She was leaning against the kitchen table.

"C'mon free sh...". Before Tommy could get that word out Ginnie lunged forward and drove her right fist into his belly, causing Tommy to collapse in half and a guttural sound to come out of his mouth. He stumbled to the side, using the arm of the couch to keep him from hitting the floor.

"Now we're even."

2.

"I think I know how we can get a place. I'm on CraigsList, there's this 1 bedroom apartment in South Seattle, looks real nice." Tommy showed Ginnie his phone, she started scrolling through the pictures.

"Whoa, that is nice. Looks brand new. How much is it?"

"Says \$1300. Plus I think you gotta pay utilities. Electric and water and stuff. So I don't know, maybe like \$1400 or \$1450."

"How the hell can we pay that much? We don't have jobs Tommy." She looked at him incredulously.

"What am I saying," she added, "with your record they won't even look at us. Forget about whether we have jobs."

"That doesn't matter anymore. Seattle changed the rules, they passed a law or something that you can't use criminal records against people for an apartment. They may not even be able to see my record, not sure though. But it gives us a chance."

"Seriously? That would be cool. But we still have no income. I mean, income they'd accept."

"I could get a construction job, maybe Jojo can hook me up with his crew. I could work there a couple months, then apply. Jojo could verify it if they check up on it."

"So you've thought about this, obviously."

"Always thinkin', babe, you know that."

"You think it could actually work?"

"Sure, why not?"

“Would be nice to get off this couch. I know Ashley wants us gone, even if she doesn’t say that.” They’d been couch-surfing for about 3 months now. This was the 4th place they’d bunked up at, the 4th ‘friendship’ they were exploiting. They were running out of acquaintances who would take them.

Six weeks later later Tommy called on that apartment, and luckily it was still available. They set up an appointment to see it the next day.

“We’re gonna head to my dad’s apartment first,” Tommy said, pulling away from the curb. The engine in the old Tercel coughed once, then got going, though not convincing anyone in earshot it would make it very far. Tommy had put this car together, or at least as much as he was capable of with his limited knowledge of cars and engines. What it lacked when he bought the chassis from the wrecker he filled in over time, through sources unverified. Meaning he mostly stole them.

Tommy and Ginnie were driving north to South Seattle from Kent. They were wearing their Sunday best, which for Tommy meant a pair of loose dark green cargo shorts hanging from a couple inches below the beltline but covered up by a light blue button-down short sleeve shirt. For Ginnie it was tight denim shorts with a white cotton cardigan top, sexy but not over the top. Ginnie was small but had a tight body, and never failed to show it off no matter how conservative Tommy told her to dress. Which today was very; the outfit was maybe semi.

“Why?” Ginnie asked, eyebrows scrunched in, confused.

“I have an idea. We’re gonna take BeBe with us.”

“What? Why would we do that?”

“We’ll say she’s our daughter, it’ll make us look like a family. They won’t know she’s not ours. But we’ll look so much more presentable, don’t ya think? I drove by yesterday, I forgot to tell you, there were kids playing in the courtyard, so it’s kind of a family place.”

“This is so whack. You’re probably right, it’ll probably fool them. But what about when we move in and there’s no kid?”

“We can make up something about shared custody or something. Or that she stays with her grandparents. Which she does, so that’s true.”

BeBe, not short for anything, was Tommy’s niece, daughter of his older brother who was a guest of the state for at least another 5 years. She was being raised by Tommy’s dad and his girlfriend. Tommy’s dad had also been a guest of the state on several occasions. Kind of a family tradition. The apartment they lived in looked more like the office in a body shop, with random auto or construction supplies hanging on the walls, from hooks in the ceiling, in piles on the floor. It smelled the same too, that combination of tire rubber, motor oil and maybe a dab of sweat. Little BeBe was in a chair, watching TV, in just a pair of Dora underwear. ‘Gramma’, aka the girlfriend, was in the back bedroom, talking on the phone, while Grampa was nowhere to be seen. Tommy and Ginnie went in, found BeBe’s nice dress (thankfully it was mostly clean), got her into it over her objections of not being able to see the TV screen, told ‘Gramma’ they were taking her, and walked out the door. They grabbed the stroller which they found outside propped up behind the stack of tires to the left of the door.

So the tour happened, with Tommy pushing the stroller and 2½ year old BeBe playing along so well, partially due to the bag of animal crackers Ginnie luckily grabbed before walking out of the apartment. They were the young family looking for their first place, getting out of the parents’ homes. Tommy’s

application was accepted within a day, they signed a 1-year lease and a day later they started moving in. Tommy paid the first and last month's rent, plus a security deposit. He would only pay rent one more time during the following 12 months.

3.

Kirk walked over towards the garbage dumpsters, and felt a modicum of satisfaction seeing they were just half-filled. Two days ago it was a much different story. The garbage truck had just emptied them the prior day, but they were already overflowing, with huge dark green extra strength bags piled high, each probably filled with 30-40 pounds of miscellaneous construction garbage. Each bag dusty on the outside, kind of a giveaway of where it came from. Which was obviously not from his tenants. This was one of the many ongoing problems of having an apartment building in a crappy neighborhood, with an alley along the back. Trucks stopped off at the end of their workday, dumped their garbage in his dumpster, and went on their way. Occasionally his on-again, off-again security cameras picked up the activity, but they were old low-res cameras useless for trying to zoom in on a license plate or a face. He figured he'd just have to get lucky and be there when it happened. But he went and checked the footage anyway. And got lucky. The truck had been there about an hour before he found the mess. The white full-size truck had the construction company name on the side – All-Quality Construction – dumb name, and dumbasses for not seeing the cams before illegally dumping. And more importantly, Kirk knew where they came from – the townhomes being built down the street, with the obnoxious sign out front, proclaiming “this extraordinary development brought to you by All-Quality Construction”. Well, his truck wouldn't hold all of the bags, unfortunately it was a small Toyota pickup, but he managed to get all but two of them up into the bed. Drove right over to the site, which given it was after 5pm meant it was empty, probably for over an hour. He started unloading, one bag at a time, carrying them over to the newly poured concrete foundation. Dropped them in a nice pile right in the middle. And because he's a spiteful bastard, he cut open the last bag and dumped it over the top of the pile, spreading an assortment of dirt, wood scraps, bent nails, cardboard, and tons of other debris all over the remaining bags and the fresh concrete. Fuck them, he thought. That should send them somewhere else, maybe even to a garbage dump to pay for their trash themselves. Standing there admiring the half-filled dumpster today, and thinking of the look on the foreman's face when he saw the pile of garbage yesterday morning, Kirk smiled. The little victories do add up.

He headed back to the front of the property, he had a tour set up for a vacant unit. It'd been vacant for way too long, like 7 weeks, he'd already dropped the rent on the ad site by \$100, he'd have to do it again soon if he didn't get this thing rented. He hated having vacant units in this neighborhood, nobody wanted to live here unless they had to. Maybe it wasn't as bad as it once was, with gangs and drugs, but it still had its fair share of crime. Car prowls, break-ins, maybe some assaults too but mostly property stuff. Vacant units meant no income, and that was money out of his pocket.

He saw a couple coming down the sidewalk pushing a stroller. The guy nodded his head and smiled, *I guess this is Tommy*, Kirk thought. Looked like a typical teenager these days, with long baggy shorts riding low, but at least he had a button-down shirt. Maybe the teenager 5 or 10 years later, after knocking up his girlfriend.

“Hi, are you Kirk?”

“Yes, Tommy?”

"Yeah, Tommy, and Ginnie," he glanced to the side at the short but very cute girl whose hand he was holding. "And this sweetheart is BeBe." They both looked down at the stroller, where a little blonde-haired girl was busy with a bag of animal crackers.

"Hi BeBe. Animal crackers, those were my kids' favorite too," Kirk said, crouching down to look at Bebe at her level. He glanced up to Tommy and Ginnie, "we used them whenever we needed to keep them occupied, like this."

"Yup, exactly what we were thinking." Tommy looked at Ginnie and winked.

Kirk looked at Tommy's application. Donaldson Construction, 2 months. Makes \$35 an hour. Jeez, not bad. But 2 months? Last job, just says day laborer, no contact info, made \$25 an hour. Called the current job, it checked out, solid employee, no trouble, helps out above and beyond, etc., etc. These calls were usually useless other than confirming the basic facts. Can't say anything negative or you could get sued. He ran the background check, came back clean. Credit history was minimal, not that unusual for a kid. He was only 25, maybe he didn't have a credit card.

With this property, Kirk was often in the position of beggars can't be choosers. If he wanted to fill apartments sometimes he had to take a flier on applicants. Which meant sometimes it went well, rent paid on time and apartment kept clean and undamaged. But sometimes it blew up in his face. He hoped for the best and told Tommy his application was accepted.

4.

"Bring it in here for now. We'll figure out what to do with it later." The sound of Tommy's voice and then something heavy being dropped onto the living room floor easily woke up Ginnie in the next room.

They'd soon find out it woke up the downstairs neighbors too.

"What the hell?" Ginnie said through half-closed eyes, like the sun was beaming directly in. "Tommy, what time is it?" She looked over at the stove, it showed 3:18am, though whether that clock was right wasn't known. "It's 3 in the morning, what the hell are you doing?"

"G, I got this amazing tool chest, it's loaded. Thing is heavy as a motherfucker, cause it's got tons of brand new tools in it."

"Where'd you get it?" she was still wiping her eyes from the light.

"Jojo and I got it from the construction site he's on. Called me and said they brought this in today."

"Hey Jojo."

"Hey Ginnie, sorry to wake you up."

"It's ok." She went and sat down on the couch, moving another smaller tool box that was taking residence there temporarily. "How much you think you can get for it?"

"I don't know," Tommy wondered, looking at the still shiny yellow chest. "Gotta be careful though. Jojo thinks the construction foreman will put word out to other crews to look out for it. May need to bring it down to Tacoma or something, away from here. Or maybe just sell the tools out of it, toss the chest."

Tommy flipped the chest open while he continued to think. "Nice chest though, maybe I'll paint it and sell it."

Just as he said this a woman appeared at the door, older Hispanic or native American heritage, hard to tell, seriously overweight, wearing a housedress and an angry scowl. "What are you guys doing so late? It's after 3 in the morning. This building has rules about noise you know."

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Tommy started, “that’s my fault. We had to drive 10 hours from a job site down in California, we needed to get here tonight, and I didn’t want to leave my toolbox in my truck. Someone could steal it, especially in this neighborhood.”

The woman looked down at the shiny toolbox as he talked. Jojo moved to try to block her view but she had already seen it.

“I’m sorry though, it won’t happen again.”

“OK, hope so. My husband is sick, he needs his sleep. That banging woke him right up.”

“Sorry.”

As soon as she left Jojo closed the door, and all three of them started cracking up. “Tommy, man, you are an unbelievable liar,” he said in between laughs, “I swear, I believed that story.”

5.

A knock at the door. Tommy and Ginnie didn’t stir. Too early.

Another knock, this time accompanied by a man’s voice. “Management. You guys home?”

A few minutes later, another couple knocks. “Tommy, Ginnie, you guys awake? It’s Kirk.” It was 1pm on a Friday, they were up past 3am after being out drinking and getting back to the apartment complex around 2:30. Loudly up the stairs, along the corridor, and slamming the door. Kirk received two separate texts about it. He was there to discuss it with them. And maybe to collect rent, which was 3 weeks past due.

Ginnie moved first, she was a lighter sleeper than Tommy. She woke him up. “Tommy, landlord’s at the door. What should we do?”

“Nothing. Pretend we’re not home. Now let me go back to sleep.”

And that’s how that visit went.

Two weeks later, the world changed. Covid was official, the rumors of the virus had become the reality of the virus. People were getting sick, people were dying. Locally, in Seattle, the combination of the homelessness crisis, liberal politics and huge wealth gaps had prompted the city council to propose, and successfully pass, an eviction moratorium. The governor soon followed suit at the state level. But the local city council was always at the leading edge of anti-landlord/tenant-friendly philosophies. Tommy wasn’t exactly one to follow local politics, or any kind of news, but he heard about this one through some grapevine he was attached to, and he quickly glommed on.

“Guess what G.”

“What?”

“We don’t have to pay rent anymore.”

“Whaddaya mean?”

“They passed an eviction moratorium, so we can’t get evicted even if we don’t pay.”

“What does that word mean?”

“What, moratorium?”

“Yeah, that.”

“I don’t know, just some political word I guess. But what I’ve heard, if you don’t pay rent during this Covid time they can’t evict you.”

“What about after it ends?”

“Probably, but who knows when that’ll be.”

“We gonna owe them all that money then? Or do they wipe it away?”

"I don't know. Probably. But if this happens everywhere, there's gonna be huge amounts of rent not being paid. Landlords are gonna go batshit, might end up going bankrupt if nobody pays."

"So you can just not pay? Do you have to prove you lost a job or something?"

"I don't know, I haven't read up on it. I'm sure there's some kind of process, there always is. But I do know one thing. Seattle likes renters way more than landlords, way more than most places. They passed all those other laws in the past couple years, like the one where they couldn't see my record. So it's probably not much that needs to be done. They probably make the landlords do something to try to collect."

"Well, that's cool. We haven't paid rent in like 2 months."

"I know. I was thinking the exact same thing. Good timing."

"Hey Tommy."

Tommy kept walking, head down like he was in a rush.

"Tommy," Kirk called out again, picking up his pace to catch up to Tommy. They were in the back of the property, in the parking lot, but Tommy was heading into the alley that heads towards the retail avenue.

"Slow down, I want to talk."

Tommy stopped and turned around.

"Oh, hey, sorry Kirk, I gotta be somewhere. What's up?"

"What's up? You haven't paid rent in over 2 months. Next week will be 3. What's going on?"

"Oh, yeah, I meant to call you. I lost my job with the construction company. They let go a bunch of people with the Covid thing."

"Oh really, sorry to hear that. But you didn't pay 2 months before the Covid shutdowns. Why was that?"

"Yeah, well they actually let me go before, when a job ended, they do that sometimes, hire people for big jobs and then let them go after. But with Covid they aren't hiring back anyone. I was hoping to hook back up on another job site but I guess things are on hold."

"That's too bad. You collecting unemployment?"

Tommy stared blankly, and then looked down at his feet, which were kicking at small pebbles in the alley.

"I applied, but I haven't gotten anything yet. I don't know why, I filled out the forms and everything."

Kirk could tell Tommy was bullshitting him. Tommy mostly kept looking down at the ground as he relayed this story.

"You want me to call them, I've done that before, sometimes it helps to show the urgency if the landlord calls." That was also bullshit, but he knew Tommy wouldn't know. He just wanted to press him.

"No, that's ok. I'm on it. I was gonna call them again this afternoon, see if there's been any progress."

"Ok, sounds good. Text me after to tell me how it went. When you're gonna get paid."

"Ok, I will." He said that straight to Kirk's face, convincingly, showing Tommy could actually tell a lie without looking away. Special skills.

"I saw the landlord walking after you out back. Did you have to talk to him?" Ginnie looked worried.

"Yeah, he caught up to me. I tried walking faster and acting like I was in a hurry but he stopped me."

"What did he want?"

"Whaddaya think he wanted. His rent money. I told him I got let go and was trying to get unemployment but haven't gotten anything yet."

Ginnie laughed. "Nice. Did he believe you?"

"I don't know, seemed like it. But he pressed me, wanted to try to help with the unemployment office. Wants me to text him with updates."

“Like where we’ve spent the money so far,” she laughed. “Invite him up for a beer, he’s buying!” She grabbed Tommy and laughed into his belly. He couldn’t help but join her.
“That’s good, maybe I’ll do that.”

6.

Kirk opened up the sec cam app on his phone. The good thing about these crappy old cameras placed around the upper edges of the building was he could at least see footage from the past couple weeks. The third-party vendor stored the recordings and then auto-deleted them after a while. The only problem was about a third of the cameras were out of service permanently, and the rest seemed to go on or off randomly. Typically when he needed to see something, Murphy’s Law in full bloom.

But fortunately he could see recent footage from the camera which has a view of Tommy and Ginnie’s front door. Ever since they stopped paying rent, which was now 4 months ago, he’d taken to reviewing footage. Not just when he got the late night calls or texts complaining about noise up in their apartment, which was often, but even on random other days when he had nothing better to do. An obsession? Maybe. But when Kirk felt someone was trying to screw him over, he didn’t take kindly to it. And he knew Tommy was screwing him over. The bleeding heart liberals in Seattle, of which there were thousands, or maybe tens of thousands, would accuse him of being insensitive, or worse, a capitalist heartless monster, the face of all that’s wrong with today’s world. Why there’s a huge income and wealth gap in the city, why there’s no affordable housing, why there’s a massive homeless crisis, etc., etc. Kirk just knew he was doing his job, managing the building in a responsible way, trying to make it profitable for him and his partner while providing a safe and welcome place to live for his residents. That sounded like a bullshit poster ad, but it was true. His building was way nicer than other apartment buildings in the neighborhood, so people who wanted to live around here would come to his building first. So of course he charged a little more. Only fair, you have a nicer apartment, with newer appliances and other features, you pay extra. Kirk knew this to be true, regardless of what some on the city council or in agencies would accuse him of doing.

But enough soapboxing. Right now Kirk was looking at the previous night’s footage. It started with Tommy and some other guy bringing a ton of stuff into the apartment. First time was around 12:30am. They made about 7 trips back and forth from a truck in the alley, which he could also see from a different camera. *Thank you cameras for not being out last night.* He couldn’t make out exactly what the equipment was, again, the cameras were low-res. Some heavy items they both had to carry, some boxes which looked like electronics, and numerous others. Ginnie helped out and grabbed some of the smaller boxes. All in all they were unloading for about 20 minutes. At this late hour, which told Kirk it was all stolen merchandise. That’s when some of the texts from neighbors started. “They’re at it again.” “Tenants in M making noise again.”

But an hour later it got weird. He couldn’t see much from the cameras, except a couple residents on the first floor below them and another from the apartment next door, coming out and looking/pointing at Unit M. Then more texts – “I think they’re fighting now.” “There’s a ton of yelling, throwing things.” “Should I call the police?”

That got answered a few minutes later when the police did show up. They knocked at the door to Unit M, nobody answered. Kept knocking. Kirk could see the neighbors talking to the cops, pointing, probably

telling them people are definitely inside and something bad was happening. Eventually Tommy's face could be partially seen through the blinds, and one of the cops appeared to be talking to him. But the door never opened, apparently whatever Tommy said, plus Ginnie showing her face at one point, gave the cops enough comfort to walk away. Given all that stolen merchandise inside, Tommy clearly didn't want to open the door.

7.

"Tommy, what the hell?" Ginnie exclaimed, nearly in shock. The door was finally closed, Jojo heading home. Tommy looked at her, expecting to see a smile, amazed by his huge score. But this was more a "what the fuck did you just do to us" look.

"G, look at all this stuff. We're gonna make a killing."

"Are you serious? We're gonna be dead. Did you really hit a chop shop?"

"Yeah." Tommy was still reveling, trying to get Ginnie to go along with his joy. She wasn't budging.

"You don't think they got cameras there? Or that Jojo will run his mouth?"

"Jojo's not gonna say a word, trust me. He knows the deal. As for cameras, we didn't see any, but we had full masks on the whole time. No way they know it's us. You don't gotta worry, we're good." He went over and brought her in, hugged her to his chest, which was about as high up as her head came. He then pushed down on her head slightly.

"Stop it," Ginnie immediately responded, and tried to break free from his embrace but Tommy held her tight, and then pushed downward again.

"I said stop it, I'm not doin' that right now," and she was able to break out of his grip, her compact strength and maneuverability always there when she needed it.

"C'mon, G, help me out. I just made a huge score, we're gonna make thousands off this. Gimme somethin', I've earned it, haven't I?"

"Seriously? You've earned it!?" she was livid now. One thing to put them in danger, another to ask her to blow him in celebration. She grabbed the nearest heavy thing she could, which happened to be a socket wrench sitting on the table, and flung it at him. It hit him in the left forearm, which he raised just in time to deflect it. Got him square, but then also hit the wall pretty hard and then onto the tile floor.

"What the fuck! Are you kiddin' me?" And he flung himself at her, tackling her onto the couch but with his knees pounding the floor at the point of landing. Wrestling ensued, *fucking asshole* and *fucking bitch* mentioned, Ginnie biting his other arm, Tommy shoving her head deep into the cushion, etc., etc.

Nothing that hasn't happened tens of times before.

Ginnie managed to get her left arm free and promptly found his nutsack with a backhand. It sent him onto the floor, writhing. "You bitch!" he managed to enunciate between the many pained utterances.

"Asshole," she responded, kicking his butt lightly as she passed him and then slamming the bedroom door behind her.

About five minutes later a knock at the door, with a "Police, open up" coming from the other side.

Tommy couldn't believe his luck, still lying in massive pain on the floor and now the cops. He felt like his balls exploded, he'd been hit there before but never this hard. Ginnie could hit when she wanted to.

He lied there quietly, hoping they'd walk away. And assuming this was a noise complaint, not because of the huge pile of goods now inhabiting his living room.

Another knock. "We know you're in there, please open the door, we've received complaints and want to make sure everyone's ok."

Good, it is about the noise, he thought. He struggled to his feet, and went to the window right next to the door. He opened the blinds with his fingers, peeking through. The cop who was knocking, a thickly muscular Hispanic uniformed guy with dark buzz-cut hair, took a step over to the window and leaned to it.

"We're all good in here," Tommy offered, through the window.

"We got complaints about fighting. We need to make sure *everyone* is good."

"I just tripped before and dropped some things on the floor. My girlfriend yelled at me for doing it. Then she jumped on me as a joke and we were playing around. Nothing serious."

"Can we see her, we need to make sure."

"OK. G, come here, police want to see you," Tommy said to a closed bedroom door.

A few seconds later the bedroom door opened, Ginnie made her way slowly to the window. Tommy used both hands to wedge the blinds open, and Ginnie put her face up to the window.

"Ma'am, are you ok. We got complaints about fighting."

"Yeah, I'm fine. We were just messing around. No biggie."

"Are you sure? If you want to come outside we're here to help."

"No need, I'm fine."

The police knew they couldn't push it any further. Ginnie had no marks on her, looked and sounded totally fine and frankly in control, based on her tone. If they sensed she wasn't or there was a risk, they could've required the door be opened, or even gotten a warrant to open it. But they just told Tommy and Ginnie to keep the noise down and have a safe night, and they left.

And Tommy breathed a deep sigh of relief. Ginnie went back into the bedroom, closing the door quietly this time.

8.

Kirk was frustrated. His partner was understanding of the situation – it was a pandemic, tenants might be struggling to pay rent – but he was still a little pissed Kirk got him into this deal. Sold him on the potential of this neighborhood, a pioneering location, all the money that was going to be invested there building townhomes or upgrading the retail a couple blocks away. But most of that had yet to occur, some townhomes were built down the block but didn't sell well. And the new ones going up now, with the nice garbage pile on the foundation, were probably going to sit unsold unless the developers gave them away. So Kirk's partner said the right things now regarding the pandemic issue and the lost rent, but Kirk knew what he really felt. Get me the fuck out of this deal as soon as we can get a decent price. That wasn't happening anytime soon with deadbeat tenants in place. Nobody would want to buy into that, and lenders wouldn't give you any credit for that income if it wasn't being paid. Kirk was kinda fucked. And the local government wasn't helping, instituting the eviction moratorium and then extending it whenever it approached the end of the term. Kirk would love nothing better than to throw Tommy and Ginnie out on their butts, not because he was some heartless slumlord, but because he knew they were scamming the system. Why pay rent when you couldn't be thrown out? And if you're collecting unemployment and even maybe the federal stimulus payment, it becomes a profit deal. Kirk saw it as a direct attack, and that wouldn't fly in his world.

He walked onto the property, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the door to Unit M open, then quickly close. *Ah, they're home*. He detoured up the stairs and knocked. No answer, of course. He knocked again, harder, and said "Tommy, Ginnie, I know you're home, I'd like to talk with you."

After another minute, and another knocking and calling out, Tommy finally opened the door. "Sorry, I was asleep, the door was closed, I didn't hear you."

Amazing how he could lie to me when he knows I had to have seen the door just open. "Is Ginnie here?" "No, she's down at her folks' place. She'll be back tomorrow." So that proves it was you who just opened the door, you lying prick.

"No worries. What's happening with rent, with work, with unemployment? You're 5 months behind right now. That's \$7,000. That's real money you owe me."

"I know. I feel horrible about it. I've never had this happen before, I always pay my rent on time." He showed a despondent face, right on cue. Not bad. "This is really depressing to me, not finding a job, not getting any unemployment. I wish I was so I could pay you something."

"You still haven't collected unemployment?"

"No, they keep saying it's caught up in the system, or something like that. They said it'll get fixed and I might collect for the past couple months, but who knows."

"What about the stimulus payment from the government?"

Tommy gave him a blank stare. Kirk caught him with a left hook with that one. Tommy stuttered a bit, "What...what's that?"

Wasn't a very convincing lie. "The federal stimulus payment, sent out to anyone who made less than, I don't know the number. But I'm sure you qualified, most people did. You didn't get it?"

"No, I never even heard of that." He was looking at his shoes, unwilling to look Kirk in the face for this lie. Guess he's not that good a liar, Kirk thought, or maybe this one is just too obvious. *But that's another \$1400 he could have paid. A month's rent, exactly. How poetic.*

"I'll reach out to the unemployment office later today, or maybe tomorrow morning, and see what I can do, maybe I can make some headway with them." Kirk was glaring straight at Tommy's face, not even blinking, daring him to look him back in the face. He didn't, just kept looking at his shoes or lifting his head up slightly and maybe catching Kirk's stomach.

"Ok, thanks." Tommy had no choice but to acknowledge, knowing it was too easy to be caught in that lie. He was just hoping Kirk was BS'g him.

9.

Tommy scampered across the church parking lot, going car by car, looking in the windows for anything worth taking. He didn't usually do car prowls, but it was a Sunday morning, all these people were in church and would be there for at least another hour, unless they were skipping communion and confession and all that nonsense. Tommy wasn't one for church, his dad never took them and basically told his kids that if they wanted to survive in this world they'd have to rely on themselves, not some god they can't see. He failed to mention they wouldn't be able to rely on him either. So this was about as close as Tommy would ever get to the inside of a church – robbing the people who were looking for salvation on a Sunday morning. He looked up from a piece of shit 1990's Honda Accord, frustrated all he was seeing was food wrappers and a frayed phone charger, and saw a crown jewel. A big, beautiful truck. He quickly ran over to get a closer look. A maxed-out Ford F-150 Raptor, black matte paint, big as hell tires with sweet rims, shiny black brand new bed liner, built-in tool chest, custom Ford insignia on the front grill, Raptor painted onto the hood, and who knows what under the hood. He tried to look into the cab, but the windows were fully tinted all around. That told Tommy there was gold in them hills. He turned and signaled over to the car parked on the road outside the church lot, gave a thumbs up. That

was the signal that he was going in, and be prepared to hit it if he came running. Jojo and Ginnie saw it, Ginnie opened the window and gave him the thumbs up back.

Tommy grabbed the slim jim out of his bag, and went to work. He knew that a lot of times higher-end or suped-up cars or trucks have specialty locks that the slim jim won't work on, so he had a glass breaker with him just in case. But he was in luck, he got into the car within about 15 seconds. It was worth it. Because he found 2 things of value in there. The first, an after-market very high-end stereo system which he had the tools to quickly remove, along with a radar detector just velcro'd to the top of the dash, and an iPad in the back seat. But second, there was also an electric bill on the seat. He checked the address, and then found the registration in the glove compartment, with the same address. It was about 10 minutes away. What are the odds there's anyone home on this beautiful Sunday morning church day?

Tommy grabbed all the electronics, memorized the address, and walked fast to the car. He got in, and told them where to drive.

"What are you talking about, Tommy, you just scored. Look at all that stuff. That's gotta be like a thousand dollars worth of stuff, right? Let's just call it good."

"Nah, G, I know, this guy's got money if he tricked out his truck like that. His house is probably the same way. Definitely the garage, I know this type, he's gonna have every specialty tool there is in there."

"He'll also probably have a serious security system."

"Maybe, let's check it out. But he could have put some stuff in the car which he didn't. Specialty locks, not even a car alarm. Kinda stupid, to trick out your truck like that and make it so easy to get into. Maybe the house is the same. If it's bad, we'll walk away. I promise."

"Ok, fine."

"I'm cool either way, you know that. I agree, man, I bet it's a goldmine." Jojo was never one to say no to one of Tommy's escapades. He's made more money working with him than anyone else he ever worked with, and it paid way better than construction.

They made it to the house in about 7 minutes, it was closer than he thought. But that meant the owner was only 7 minutes away too, so he'd have to be quick just in case. They slowed down as they approached the house, looking for cameras and checking out the layout of the place. It was a basic pacific northwest rambler, one story, but looked like it was renovated with a new paint job and roof, nice landscaping. Money was spent here. Tommy was focused on the garage, though, and the shed out back which he could see from the side. Just as important, he couldn't see any cameras, despite looking in all the usual spots where you place them. This looks too good to be true, he thought. They drove on down the winding tree-lined road, past other similar but maybe more humble houses, then around the block and circled back to the target.

10.

Rodney Lee Jernigan was a proud veteran. He served 2 tours in Iraq, and you couldn't tell him we didn't win. As for the permanent limp he walked with, due to shrapnel from a roadside explosive, well that just served as a constant reminder not to take shit from anybody. And drove him to build a successful private security firm after his service ended. He was able to buy a house in his hometown of Renton, fix it up to his wife's content, and fill it with a couple rugrats. And this morning, they all sat in the 4th row of their church, listening to the choir sing beautifully, when Rod's phone buzzed. He grabbed it out of his front

pocket, lifted it to his face to get the facial recognition, and saw that his car security was activated. His wife softly elbowed him, he waved his left hand to acknowledge her, but he knew he had to check this out. It was his other baby, that truck.

He excused himself and headed outside. He made his way to the truck, which looked ok from a distance. As he walked up to it, he could see scratches on the driver's side window. He knew what that meant, someone jimmied the lock. Fuck, he thought. He opened it up, not needing his key of course. What he saw – no stereo, no radar detector, then a couple minutes later noticing that his daughter's iPad was also gone from the back seat. *Fuck!* He looked around, hoping against all logic that he might see someone, something. He didn't. He called the cops, had to report it, and sat down in his truck. He texted his wife telling her what happened, told her to stay in there through the service, he was going to wait for the cops.

Amazingly, the cops were there in less than 5 minutes. Amazing, or maybe shocking, because it was a car prowler, which happens probably every 5 minutes in the Seattle metro area, and isn't exactly a high priority. Also shocking because this was Kent, and the cops here aren't known for their speed. But they came, and started writing it up. Rod being in security helped, because someone else with this truck losing those items might not get the attention of cops. They were just finishing up the report when Rod's phone buzzed again. This time it was his home security system. Someone had just opened his garage door. He looked at the cameras, and saw instant footage. He showed the cops and said he was going, and he didn't care about speeding. They said they'd lead, with sirens. Rod quickly texted his wife and told her he had to head home, but didn't say anything else. *Fuckers! You break into my truck, now my house? You're dead.*

11.

Tommy and Ginnie got out of the car, both with bandannas over half of their faces. Beauty of the pandemic was that people wore masks, so this wouldn't even raise an eyebrow with the neighbors. Hopefully. Jojo then drove off, intending to go around the block and wait on the corner, about 50 yards from the house. No need to sit out front and draw more attention. Tommy headed to the garage, he told Ginnie to hit the shed. Tommy sensed this guy had tools and gadgets galore, and that's what he wanted. Kind of his specialty. No need to break into the house, where a security system was more likely. He still didn't see any cameras, which shocked him. How dumb, having this kind of stuff and no protection. Tommy went around the side of the garage and found the door. He could pick that kind of lock, and if he tried to open the big double-bay garage door facing the street it would be obvious to anyone watching. He was in the garage within a minute. Ginnie struggled with the shed, it was a combination lock but a good quality one. She finally just got the crowbar from Tommy and broke it off. Strong girl when she was determined.

She opened the door and found basics – lawnmower, hedge trimmer, bag of mulch, other lawn supplies – in other words, useless. She joined Tommy in the garage, where he was in heaven.

The garage had that professional epoxy finish to the floor, and was so clean you could eat off it. No cars parked in here. The guy had a massive 10 foot wide tool chest, or dresser, or whatever the hell you'd call this thing. He had a double cabinet with every power tool you could dream of, all top-of-the-line brands. Tommy sensed the guy tricked out that truck himself. Certainly had all the equipment here to do it. This was the first time Tommy ever faced this situation – too much of a good thing. He didn't have the ability

to take more than a few handfuls, he only had Jojo's little Toyota sedan. He told Ginnie to call Jojo and get him here so they could start loading. He did a quick assessment to see what they should take, picturing the trunk and what would fit. Circular saw, belt sander, orbital sander, toolbox, socket set, router, cordless drills, nail gun. That should do it. He started lining up the stuff at the door, so they could both grab and go once the car was there. He figured 3 trips each should do it. Just in case there was some security system he didn't see, he didn't want to push the time.

Jojo pulled up, and as he did Tommy and Ginnie were both carrying tools and hotfooting it across the lawn. It took 3 and a half trips, since Ginnie couldn't carry the last item Tommy had to go back and grab it. Ginnie closed the garage side door behind him and they rushed to the car. Just as they were slamming the trunk they heard the siren.

"Shit, get in! Fucking cops." Tommy's eyes pierced and his brow furled. "Jojo, floor it!"

They took off just as the cop car was coming around the bend of the road about seven houses back. But the cops didn't stop at the house, they caught a glimpse of the car speeding down the street and assumed it was the culprits. Rod was about 5 car lengths behind the cops. He wanted to stop and see what was missing, but he also wanted to see these fuckers get caught, and if necessary be a backup if the cops somehow couldn't close the deal. He picked up his phone as he continued down the street, and with his right hand clicked on the camera footage. He had taken a quick look as he left the church and just saw a guy with a bandanna on his face entering the garage, but didn't look again to see what he took or if he also went into the house. Now he could see there were two people, one looked much smaller, maybe even a girl, and they were taking tools out of the garage. He saw them throwing everything into the trunk of the car they were now chasing.

Jojo was a pretty good wheelman, who'd a thought, he never did this kind of thing before. And he didn't even take a moment to think about whether to take off when he heard the sirens and then Tommy instructing him to go. He just gunned it, turned left onto Keeling Road and then a quick right onto High Valley Avenue. The Avenue, two lanes in either direction, was a main artery in Renton, with a succession of strip malls and lights about every quarter mile. The cop car was still about 300 feet behind, in the same left lane, but it was gaining on them, traffic in this direction was light. Jojo's old piece of shit Toyota wasn't going to beat a cop car engine, he knew he had to do something. He looked at the oncoming side of the street, and he saw a small opening. He took it, going across the painted median and turning a sharp 180, skidding a bit but accelerating just before the oncoming traffic caught up to him. One of those cars screeched their brakes, mostly out of shock, they had enough room, but the others kept coming. It was a solid row of cars. The cop saw what the Toyota did, but didn't have an opening to do the same. The black Toyota drove past them, the driver even taking a look at the cop as he went by.

Rod was about 100 feet behind the cops, but could also see the black Toyota up ahead. He then saw what the Toyota did, popping a 180 in the middle of traffic. *Not bad, asshole.* He also saw the cop didn't follow, too much oncoming traffic. The Toyota was now approaching him, in the left lane. Rod was not letting these guys get away with his stuff for the second time today. He had a full-size front bumper protector, so he wasn't overly worried about damage. *Let's do this!* He waited a moment, trying to time it right, then turned the wheel to the left and aimed at the Toyota's left front corner. He didn't want a head-on collision, that would be murder with the size of his truck. But this would end their day. And it did. The impact stopped the Toyota like it hit a wall, then sending it a few feet to its right before it stopped dead. The car behind the Toyota screeched its brakes but couldn't avoid bumping into it,

sending it forward another 5 or 6 feet. Luckily that was it for the collisions, all the other cars managed to stop.

Rod had braced for the impact, so was unscathed. He got out of his truck and approached the Toyota, fast at first but slowing as he got close, ready for whatever what might come from inside. He looked in and there were 3 people. The driver was leaning forward, his head against the steering wheel, some blood coming down from his forehead. The passenger was leaning to his right, head against the side window, looking like his nose exploded. In the backseat, the small girl was moving, getting her seat belt off, when she saw the man outside.

The cop car, siren still blaring, pulled up on the left, in the oncoming lane. The cops got out and were yelling immediately, telling Rod to move away from the car. They each had their right hands on their right hips, gripping their gun handles but keeping them holstered. They both approached the Toyota from behind and yelled to the occupants to get out of the car. They could see Ginnie looking back at them and moving around, but couldn't tell if either person in the front seats was moving. They didn't take any chances. They called out again. With this Ginnie opened the left door and came out, hands in front of her, exclaiming "don't shoot, I'm not armed!". Then a moment later, as she started out of the car, "we don't have any weapons." She stepped out of the car onto the pavement, and didn't look at all harmed. But she wore an expression of shock, of being a victim, not a criminal. She knew she might have to fend for herself. She always has.

The cops then approached the front doors from either side, and saw the condition of the two still inside. They managed to get reactions from both men after a couple tries, both were able to talk. Head injuries surely, maybe more, the lead officer guessed. Officer Johansson instructed his partner to call for an ambulance, then started towards Gina, who was still standing about ten feet away. But Rod walked over and intercepted Officer Johansson before he reached her.

"Hey, can I grab my stuff outta the car? There's a few items in the back seat, and I know they put a ton of my tools in the trunk."

"No sir, you can't touch any of it. This is a crime scene, it's all evidence now. Don't go near the car, please." Officer Johansson was stone-faced, which came easy for him. Square-jawed, and always hyper-focused on the rules.

"Seriously?"

"Very serious. You'll get it all back eventually, don't worry. But we'll need to catalog all of it first. Take pictures, take inventory, fingerprints, you know the drill."

"Yeah, I do. I was just hoping to get some of it back now. Especially my little girl's iPad. She's gonna be really sad."

"I'll see what I can do." The stone softened just a bit.

12.

Tommy woke up, saw the white ceiling and felt the handcuff on his right wrist. He had a bandage on his nose, which he could feel, but more so could see from both his eyes. He reached up with his free left hand and touched it. The bandage puffed out about an inch, and then seemed to wrap around his head. He vaguely recalled the accident, and his head bashing into the dashboard. *Must have broken my goddamn nose.*

"How's that nose feelin', Tommy?" Officer Johansson walked into the hospital room, smug look across his face, with his partner following closely behind.

Tommy turned his head and saw the huge cop approach him.

"Yeah, it's broken, if that's what you're wondering. Jeez, looked like someone smashed a tomato right into your face." His partner cracked up, barely attempting to hide it.

"Why am I here? What's with the handcuffs?"

"Seriously? No recollection of the two break-ins yesterday? All that expensive equipment you stole?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yeah, I figured you'd say something like that. Weird, with all your experience committing thefts, robberies, you'd think you'd know what security cameras look like."

Tommy winced, but tried to hide it. *Damn, there was a sec cam. Where the fuck was it?*

"Tommy, where do you live?"

Why's he asking me this? He probably already knows. I have my name on the electric bill. But shit, there's still some stuff in there. He ain't getting that from me. "Nowhere really. Just couch surfing with friends for a while."

"Really? Not at Landview Apartments, Unit M?"

"No, never heard of that place. Where is it?"

"You know where. You're not that good a liar Tommy."

"When do I get out of this place?"

"Today, but you're heading to the County lockup. You're still under arrest. And with your record, I don't think you'll be heading home anytime soon. But hey, I'm not a lawyer, I'm just a police officer."

With that, Officer Johansson turned, nodded to his partner to head out, and headed behind him to the door. "See ya soon, Tommy."

Tommy closed his eyes, he knew he was screwed.

13.

The following day Kirk's phone rang.

"This is Kirk."

"Is this Kirk Pallatin?"

"Yes, it is. Who's this?"

"Mr. Pallatin, this is Officer Johansson of the Kent Police Department. Do you manage the Landview Apartments in South Seattle?"

"Yes I do."

"Do you have a Thomas Apodaca and Virginia Olsinko living there?"

"Yeah, Tommy and Ginnie live in Unit M. Why, what's up?"

"Well, Mr. Pallatin, they were both arrested yesterday, and we will be entering their apartment tomorrow morning, pursuant to a search warrant we just obtained."

"Oh jeez. What were they arrested for?"

"I'm not at liberty to say. I can only say that it didn't involve anyone or anything at your property, to our knowledge. But we need to search the apartment. Are you able to meet us there at 9am to open the door? We'll provide you with a copy of the search warrant beforehand."

"Yes, absolutely, I'll be there. Anything else you need from me? Copy of their lease?"

"No, just unlocking the door will be enough, thank you."

Officer Johansson and his partner entered the property at exactly 9am. Kirk had seen them parked across the street for a few minutes waiting to be exactly on time, but busied himself with some cleanup until they decided to get out. There was always trash lying around at the property, it wasn't hard to find some to pick up.

"Mr. Pallatin?"

"Yes, but please call me Kirk."

"Officer Johansson. Thanks again for meeting us, it'll make this much easier."

"No problem. I'm here most days. Happy to help."

"Here's your copy of the search warrant. Have you seen one of these before?"

"No, honestly this is my first one. I guess that's a good thing." Kirk smiled as he looked at the officers, who remained stone-faced.

"So you can see on the form, the name and address of the building, my name as the applicant of the warrant, and the judge's signature. This is a valid search warrant."

"Ok, looks good I guess. You wanna go in now?"

"Yes sir."

"Follow me."

The search turned up just one item of interest. A large empty tool chest, with a shiny coat of red paint, obviously painted by an amateur who bled the paint onto the hinges and locks. This item was of interest due to the initials 'DC' on the bottom of the chest, which was bare never-painted aluminum. Tommy never bothered to look at the bottom of the chest. Donaldson Construction reported the robbery months ago, and gave a description of the tool chest, including exactly where to find the company's initials. This will add another theft charge to Mr. Apodaca, Officer Johansson thought to himself, satisfied with the search.

As for Kirk, he noted to them how he had seen on the security camera footage Tommy and others bringing equipment into the apartment, usually late at night. He didn't know the stuff was stolen.

That's when Officer Johansson briefed Kirk on Tommy's record. 18 misdemeanor and 2 felony arrests, and 9 months in juvenile detention. Kirk was pissed.

"And none of this shows up on the background check. Fucking City of Seattle. Oh, excuse my French."

"That's ok."

"They passed a law a couple years ago. I don't get to see criminal histories, unless it's like murder or rape. But assholes like this can get apartments, and then never pay rent. And of course now I can't evict him either. The bastard owes me almost 6 months. Over 8 thousand bucks!"

"Wow, sorry to hear that. Maybe you can get him out now. Not that I know anything about rental laws."

"Yeah, hopefully."

"Ok, Mr. Pallatin...I mean Kirk. Thanks again. We're gonna take this tool chest, it's now evidence."

"No problem, all yours."

"Have a nice day. Stay safe."

"You too officers."

14.

Two days later Kirk saw Ginnie going into the apartment. He was across the way collecting rent from another tenant, who didn't trust the post office or the US mail for that matter, so he always handed his money orders directly to Kirk every first day of the month.

Kirk walked over to Unit M, the door was still half open. "Ginnie? Kirk here, can I come in?"

She came to the door. "Oh, hey, what's up?"

"I should ask you the same question. Anything new and interesting." He smirked and raised his eyebrows. Kirk knew the sarcasm probably wouldn't be appreciated, he didn't much care.

"I guess you heard."

"Yeah, the cops came by yesterday."

"They did?" Genuine surprise and worried look, Kirk could tell. "Did they come in here?"

"Yeah, they had a search warrant."

"Shit. Did they find anything?"

"Probably not my place to say, but I'll tell you. They took the red tool chest."

"Oh really?" At first she looked annoyed, then her expression changed to confusion. "I wonder why they took that."

"I don't know, they didn't say."

"Anything else?"

"No. But listen, what's happening? Are you guys under arrest? Or just Tommy?"

"Both, sort of. They let me go, at least for now. Tommy's probably fucked. Might not be getting out for a while."

"A while? Like days, weeks, months?"

"I don't know, but probably months, or more. It's not his first arrest."

"Yeah, I heard. Kinda bullshit he could apply for this place and I wasn't allowed to know he's a fucking criminal."

"Yeah, well, I don't make the rules."

"No, but you certainly benefited. Six months of no rent. Never intended to pay, did you?"

"That was all Tommy's idea. All of it. Getting this place, you not knowing his record, the eviction law thing."

"The moratorium?"

"Yeah, that. He knew all about it."

"I figured. Well, it's over now. I can evict you with these arrests. Moratorium doesn't cover convicted criminals. I'm going to apply for the eviction tomorrow, it'll get granted, probably quickly. You'll be out of here. Then I'll be suing you both for the full amount of rent, and the cost to get this place cleaned up and re-rented." Kirk did some calculating in his head. "My guess is that will add another four thousand. So about twelve thousand total."

"Are you serious?" She couldn't hide her true feelings this time, she looked genuinely afraid.

"You're damn right. You guys fucked me over for the past 8 months, and your neighbors who all hate you too. But you'll be the ones with evictions on your records, nobody will ever rent to you again. And you'll have to pay me the money, whenever you get a job they'll garnish your wages." He smiled at her. "Hope it was fun."

"Is there anything I can do? Can you give me time to get the money?"

"The eight thousand you owe me? Who are you gonna rob this time, Chase Bank?"

"I can pay some of it." She reached into the front pocket of her short-shorts and produced 2 official-looking checks. "Here, you can have these. They're \$1400 each."

She handed them to Kirk, and he knew exactly what they were as soon as she said the amount. The federal stimulus checks, dated about 2 months earlier. He knew Tommy was BS'g him that day.

"We were holding onto them. We were gonna cash them when we needed the money. We don't have bank accounts. Here, I'll sign them over to you."

She proceeded to sign the backs of both checks. She seemed to know how to sign Tommy's name, not that Kirk knew his signature. He only received signed payments a few times, after all.

"Did we already give you the last month's rent when we signed the lease?"

"Yeah, you did. So that's 3 months paid. There's another 3 months you owe right now, plus the time it'll take to get it re-leased. That's your responsibility."

"What about our security deposit?"

"That's a thousand, but I'll need most of it to get this place ready, Cleaning, some repainting. Not sure, I need to do an inspection."

"What if I clean it?"

"Have you ever done a professional cleaning before?"

"Yeah, I was a cleaning lady once. Didn't last long, hated that work, but I can do it."

"Ok, I'll make you a deal. You get this place spotless, ready to lease, in the next 3 days, I'll knock another month off."

Ginnie thought about it for a moment. "What if I could just get you another thousand, would you call it even then and not evict us? We'll leave, just don't file it."

"Make it two thousand, and I'll do it. But where can you get that kind of cash?"

Ginnie walked over to the kitchen, grabbed a foot stool, reached up into one of the cabinets. Beside the soup cans and boxes of pasta was a can of Folger's instant coffee. She grabbed it down to the counter, pulled the cap off, and reached her hand inside. She fished around for a few seconds, reached her hand down even lower, , and then finally came out with a wad of bills, as well as coffee grounds which fell to the counter. The bills were all 100's. She counted off 20 of them, still leaving what looked like another 10 or 15. She walked over to Kirk and handed him the \$2000.

"Here, we're even," she said with confidence, that look of fear now a thing of the past.

Kirk felt the tiniest bit of guilt that he was taking most of her bankroll, but knowing it was likely all from stolen goods, it wasn't theirs to begin with.

As for Ginnie, she pretended to be hurt by the loss, but knew where there was another can in the cabinets. And she was taking it all. *Fuck Tommy, the loser, he could rot in jail.*

"I'll check back in a few days, see how the place looks. Otherwise we're good."

He was still going to file the eviction, in Tommy's name. *That fucker's not screwing over any more landlords. The little victories do add up.*