

# SUPER



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## **Acknowledgments:**

*Thanks to all the people who helped me edit and complete this book. I won't mention you by name, as I feel like there are still grammatical and potentially even spelling errors inside. You shouldn't be associated with this.*

*To the reader: Please ignore any of those errors, along with all the formatting mistakes I probably missed.*

*Thank you too.*

## **Introduction**

I really enjoy drugs. They have always held a special place in my heart. I have always appreciated smoking a joint or trying out a new high from time to time. However, it had never occurred to me that I could make some money selling the stuff. Then I became one of the most famous drug dealers in the biggest city in America. It felt like it happened by accident. I mean, I never intended it to happen that way. It is a long and sordid story. Knowing that I had the best marijuana ever concocted on this planet can explain it quickly enough. That does not do the story justice though. To get an idea of how things can escalate into scary territory, I have to share the details.

I am sure you may have heard this story before. It has been told dozens of times in different ways. It gets changed, modified and mystified as it loses what truly happened. I want to set the story straight. You can only hear the true account of this story through me.

# Chapter 1

I loved my life. I also started hating every minute of it. I kept myself busy, I had a job, I had lots of friends and I got laid on a pretty consistent basis by a string of random women. People were jealous of me.

So why did I feel so goddamned depressed?

One of the possible reasons was my brother. I don't remember the last time anybody called him by his actual name, everyone knew him as 'G'. G was a great guy and I loved him, but supporting him and his exploits was starting to get old. He had been living with me for the past six months.

He said the postman was, “Obviously stealing and destroying my rent cheques.” This resulted in his eviction. I had to help him.

I didn't exactly have a lot of room. Not a lot of people in this city do. Especially people with shitty jobs like mine.

I lived in the lower east side, always had. When I was younger it was an extremely rough neighbourhood. It was all my mom could afford. Over the past decade we have seen it change. It was actually turning trendy and was almost a respectable place to live. At least at that price bracket. It was an old neighbourhood and the buildings had been around a long time. Old brick, which was always some derivative of red but never the same colour, changed from building to building. These bricks were criss-crossed with constant stairs and ladders making up the different fire escapes. People made shoddy patios on the landings. They tried to use the four square feet of outdoors that were available to them, even if it was illegal and defeated their purpose. They wanted to grow a few plants and potentially sit on their so called balcony. These balconies covered the entire community, casting shadows that made the place even older and scarier. Air conditioning units were the only new addition to many places. They darted out from windows to deal with the inevitable heat that summer would bring. A small window unit was usually capable of cooling the tiny apartments averaging five hundred square feet.

My apartment was smaller than the average. I did have a bedroom which I was grateful for. My kitchen, living room, den, dining room and library unfortunately shared a single space. Thank God for the bathroom door.

I was twenty-eight years old and I was sharing a queen sized bed with my little brother. This was enough to make anyone feel a little down. When G first got there, he was crashing on my couch. When I realized how messy this would make my tiny living room, my small sanctuary from the world, a disaster area, I let him live in the bedroom.

My mom was a fantastic woman, but there was only so much she could do. She did a fine job raising us after my father passed away. When it was only the three of us for so long, she got lonely. It must have been a tough struggle for her. It made sense for her to leave G to fend for himself.

My dad passed away when I was ten. It was a tough time to lose a father but I had been old enough to learn a few things from him. He was a good man and taught valuable lessons about hard work, being a man and blazing your own path. Unfortunately, G doesn't remember him at all.

We didn't have any other family in the city. My dad was an only child and his parents passed away before I had any chance to get to know them. Mom had two sisters somewhere on the west coast. They haven't talked since the passing of their mother. I didn't get to know any of my aunts, uncles or four cousins I had somewhere out there. My mom tried her best, but it was a struggle with little money and two young boys who didn't make life any easier. As I grew up I had to look after G most of the time. I understood, but I thought it would stop at some point.

There wasn't much for us to do as children, so we sometimes got in trouble. Our mom tried to keep us busy and we tried a few sports. I was never any good at any of them and it wasn't the most affordable thing to do. I wasn't too bad at tennis, but I was awful at golf. The one thing my mom spoiled us with was racing. She said my dad used to do it as a young man in his twenties. We got into the odd race track tournament on go karts. I used to love it. However, there weren't a lot of places to do that in the city anymore.

As my mom spent most of her life struggling to make ends meet, she finally met a nice man. When the relationship got serious she had to take a serious step. He was some oilfield guy from Canada who used to do a lot of finance business here when they met. When he took a new job in their head office in Calgary, my mom took the second leap of her life. It came by fast, but when you hit a certain age you apparently don't waste any time. I was twenty four at the time and after four years of their dating, I was capable of coming to terms with this, but my brother never actually did. He was still too young at the time and had not gotten his feet underneath himself yet. When my mom was forced to move, G was stuck in limbo. He was old enough to move out on his own, but he was young enough to still consider going with my mom. He had no desire to move to Canada. He was on his own in the big city at eighteen.

At least the guy she married had some serious money. Not that he shared any with my brother and me. We hardly knew the man. He was cordial with us, but that was for mom's sake. He did fly us to Calgary once a year for Canadian Thanksgiving. Their Thanksgiving is in October for some odd reason. It was the one time of year we could all get together.

That was the extent of my world travels. To a place known as Cow Town to celebrate a holiday that Canadians celebrated during the wrong month. We had got back three weeks prior to everything changing, and the visit went all right. We saw some funny shit in Canada. For a country that is so similar to ours, they are so different.

So with my mother out of town it was up to me to make sure G did not end up dead in an alley somewhere. That was my main goal. Then I wanted him in his own place. Since he would need money for that, he was going to need a job. I always woke him up in the morning when I headed to work in the hopes he might get up and do something. This morning was no different.

"G, I gotta get moving. Get your ass out of bed."

"Mghhhh," was all I got in reply.



I went into the bathroom to freshen up before leaving. I looked in the mirror. Sometimes I forgot what a disgusting sight I was. I was currently growing a mustache for this charity called Movember. It was to raise money for prostate cancer research. Men would grow mustaches for November to boost awareness. It was not hard to notice the guys with mustaches who shouldn't have mustaches. That would open discussions about prostate cancer and raise funds. It was not exactly big here though, so it was pretty embarrassing. G had learned about it on our trip to Canada where they raise a lot of money doing it. He thought it was hilarious and had convinced several people to do it that month, including most of the guys at my work. I would have never heard the end of it if I hadn't joined. So there I was with a thick dark mustache and curly black hair. I wasn't sure if I was fortunate or not that my mustache came in so thick and quick. As I observed myself in the mirror I gave the obligatory check out. I was still quite fit, and even with the mustache, I thought handsome. My mom always told me I would be. I quickly brushed my teeth, threw on my uniform for work and was ready to head out.

I kicked the bed hard as I walked by. I wanted to make sure G wasn't trying to fall back asleep.

"I'm up, I'm up," grumbled the pile of meat under the blankets.

"Well use this morning to get up and look for a job. I want to see some progress when I get home from work tonight. And clean up your fucking mess in the kitchen while you are at it."

"Ya ya ya ya."

If I didn't have to work I could have stayed on top of him. Maybe he would have got his shit done. Unfortunately, without a supervisor I didn't expect much from him. What were the chances he could have landed a job with that greasy mustache anyway? He should not have been allowed near playgrounds or schools at that moment, let alone land a job

Somebody had to pay the bills though. It was time for me to head to work.

## Chapter 2

My job was shitty, and I mean that in a literal sense. When I was younger my mom convinced me that working with my hands was one of my best options. It has never sat well with me that she thought I was a retard. To be fair, I didn't exactly bring home the most impressive report cards during school. I am sure she was tired of hearing, "He means well, but," at all the parent/teacher conferences. Looking back, I deserved the shit I took from the teachers as I was not making their jobs easy. They took it the wrong way though. They thought I acted out because I was slow and didn't get the material. Actually, I felt bored. I understood it and found the work simple enough to not give it much thought. I held back this fact as I didn't want to come off as a nerd. Cool kids don't try.

So my mom convinced herself that I should get into a trade. It wasn't the best reasoning for me to get into it, but in the end it wasn't a terrible decision. People in this city don't exactly know how to work with their hands. Even during the terrible economy, people's plumbing had problems, and we were there to fix it. I made decent money and could always keep myself busy. My boss was a big fan of mine. He always made sure I had work.

I got to work this particular Monday morning and I knew my day was off to a terrible start. Dubs ended up arriving at the same time and walked in with me. He had a big shit eating grin behind his disgusting thin and crooked mustache as he stared at me. I think he knew I didn't like him and he relished in it. Either that or he was clueless and he actually liked me. I don't even know what it was about him that I disliked so much, I just hated his face. I can't explain it any better than that. This was kind of weird because people always told us we looked alike. Sometimes they even thought we were brothers. He was at least forty pounds heavier and almost a foot shorter though, so that comment always felt like an insult.

Our names were even similar sounding. When he started working at our shop people kept getting us confused on work orders. For ease sake, he opted to take a nick name. His name started with a W, so he took the liberty

of nick naming himself Dubs. No wonder I fucking hated this guy. Who gives themselves a nick name?

“Morning,” he offered in my direction with that fucking smile of his.

Forced into a response I mumbled, “Morning,” back. Just because I didn't like him didn't mean I could be an asshole. My mother would have scolded me for that kind of behavior. She would tell me there is nothing to gain in being cruel. Therefore, I continued to be as kind as I could muster to Dubs.

We walked into the office and got our morning's assignments. I grabbed one of the company vans and headed out. My first job was nearby.

I did three jobs that morning. One was doing some installs at a restaurant that was expanding. The next was repairing some lines at another restaurant. I don't know if it's the number of restaurants in this city, or the type of people that run them that causes them to have so many plumbing issues. Either way, I spent most of my time in them. The majority of the time, after being in their kitchen, I knew I would never return as a paying customer. I also lost all trust in the food safety board for all the A banners I saw in the windows. The things I saw in supposedly clean restaurants would make a rat gag. Which, they probably did. They were in the restaurants to see what I saw too.

My third job before lunch was to a private residence in a nice part of town. When I knocked it took quite a while before a little old lady answered the door.

This lady was old. I mean, I feared for her safety that she was alone in the house, old. Sometimes the job could be depressing with the type of places you went and the people you met. The majority of work was usually conducted at businesses. Employees and owners don't have time to tinker away and fix things themselves. They have a business to run. Every once in a while you got calls like these. This old lady made me feel so damn depressed. Don't get me wrong, she was the sweetest, nicest little old lady I have ever met. When I arrived she greeted me at the door with such

hospitality. There were literally milk and cookies out. I never knew either of my grandmas, but I could see myself adopting this one as my own.

Her house was quite beautiful and she evidently had plenty of money. The issue I was struggling with was the job was too simple. A tiny clogged drain that was a five minute fix for me. I almost puked while doing it though. Pulling old grey long hairs in a ball out of a sink was like discovering a lab rat in there. For being a plumber, my gag reflex was pretty high in these situations. I had to turn my head and hold back vomit as I regained my composure more than once.

There was another reason a simple job like this depressed me. Someone she knew should have been able to handle it. A friend, a neighbor, a child, a grandchild. This lady obviously didn't have one of those to help her with these simple things. There were pictures of her husband around the house, but none of children. If I were to guess they were quite the power couple in their hay day and decided that they were better off without children. Now that the husband seemed to have passed away, she was lonely. I wondered if she regretted her 'no children' decision. Now that she had aged, she probably had few people in her life. She has likely watched her friends pass away and has nobody younger than her in her life. I struggled to imagine what kind of life that would be.

She was anxious to have company in the house. She asked me questions the entire time, mostly wondering if I had a wife and children at home. I informed her that I was living the bachelor life.

"A young, handsome man such as yourself? You seem like a nice boy, I am sure you will meet a lovely woman soon," was her reply. Old ladies always loved me for some reason. I took solace in the fact that if I didn't find someone in thirty years, I could finally settle down with one.

As the job was short, there was not much more time for talking and I could see her disappointment that I had to leave. I wouldn't put it past this lady to sabotage some of her house to have a recurring visit from repairmen like me to talk to. She would surely suffer disappointment, as a lot of them are not quite as polite as I attempt to be.

As I left, it made my depression run even deeper. The last thing I wanted to do is end up like that old lady. Not that it was that bad or anything, I only wanted something different. A wife. Some children. A family. When I was in situations like this it was tough not to reminisce. I would think about past relationships and why they didn't work.

As I was driving to my next job, I thought of the twenty-six year old virgin that I couldn't commit to. I was afraid to take that next step with her as she may become too attached. I was confident that it wasn't going to go anywhere. If you meet a twenty-six year old virgin, assume that they might be a little boring. Who wants to spend their Saturday nights going for cheesecake and coffee and settling on the couch for cuddles for the evening? She couldn't even spend the night because she had to go to church in the morning. At first, this was what I thought I needed, someone to settle me down and take me in a new direction. In the end, it wasn't the lack of sex that ended it. The root cause of the breakup was cake, coffee, cuddles and Christ. It got boring too fast.

There were many other women that didn't work for all sorts of reasons. It may sound bad, but as you get older, bitches get crazier. There are reasons why they are still single. I tried to date, but I almost never passed the third outing. There would always be some quality that I wouldn't want in a wife or a mother, and I would cut it short right there. I didn't want to be wasting my time or theirs. Also, I was always fearful that I would be dating some girl I didn't like when an amazing girl would come along. I wouldn't want to be that sleaze ball that was cheating on his girlfriends all the time.

My last true girlfriend I dated for almost three years. This was over five years ago now. Her name was Pauline and I should have known better. She was the life of the party, people liked hanging out with her. I think I may have been in love, so much so I didn't notice how little she was in love with me. Don't get me wrong, we were awesome together, but I knew she was never into it that much. I was afraid to get too close or be too 'boyfriend' for her liking. I worried I might scare her off. Older me wants to go back and kick younger me's ass for not figuring that shit out sooner.

The problem was Pauline was too much fun. We had a blast together, and when I was with her I thought that was it. When we weren't together, I thought she was the worst person in the world. She would neglect that I even existed and never considered my feelings if we were not located in the same room. I would spend a week not seeing her and would want to break up with her the entire time. When she came back and we hung out, I forgot all about it. I called her my weekday girlfriend. During the week she was all about hanging out and going on dates and doing fun activities together. Come the weekend she was all about big plans and adventures, but she neglected to include me in most of them. It's amazing how looking back, it is easy to see how bad the situation was. Your friends will tell you they were thinking it the entire time.

I broke it off when Pauline was getting too close to one of her guy 'friends'. I accused her of cheating and that is when the relationship blew up. She still denies it, yet she ended up marrying this so called 'friend' a few years later. If she wasn't banging him, she sure was thinking about it. That constitutes cheating for me. The consolation of being right never made me feel better about the situation.

When I eventually told her that we couldn't see each other anymore, the conversation got a little ugly. I was doing the breaking, but it was because she wasn't into it and I needed to move on. I wanted an explanation for why she wasn't that into me after two years of dating. The things that bothered her would have probably been better left unsaid. She hated that I was a plumber and she was afraid we would have a boring life. I was not all that pleased by the conversation. I may have mentioned some words along the lines of, "You will regret this."

I wasn't threatening her with violence or anything. I just thought that one day she would regret not locking me down. I was destined for something better than what I was currently doing. Unfortunately, you judge yourself by the potential you believe you are capable of. Everyone else judges you by the actions you actually accomplish. I hadn't accomplished shit.

Not that my threats of regret were motivating or depressing me those days. I did feel shitty about what I could have been doing though. I wanted to start my own business. I wanted to travel the world. I wanted to do something great.

## Chapter 3

The weekend was upon us after a long week of work. It was late Friday afternoon when everyone was back at the office, returning equipment and cleaning up from the week's activities. A colleague of mine, Steve, was having a particularly rough week. His wife had left him the week before and he was struggling to keep it together all week. I had picked up two jobs for him already and was helping him clean his van out after his last job.

"How about I take you out for a beer Steve? Let's grab some eats and some drinks. It's on me." I was trying anything to alleviate the poor guy's pain. He was a sad little man. He was an excellent father, but his wife never respected him. I remember the first time I met her and I felt bad for him. I knew he would be a doormat. His wife had apparently been sleeping around with multiple men. One day, she decided to run off with one of them. Steve didn't deserve this. Neither did his kids.

"Thanks a lot man, but Rebecca is actually dropping the kids off for the weekend so she can head out of town on some holiday with Paul." He changed his inflection and voice on the word Paul and filled it with hate and disgust. "I do appreciate the offer, and maybe next week, as it will be a tough weekend. This isn't the easiest thing to explain to the girls," he finished. He grabbed his bag and made his way out the door.

Dubs made his way over to me in the meantime.

"I'll go for a drink with ya," he offered.

"Sorry Dubs, I got plans."

I turned and walked away from work for the week.

It was a good weekend to let off some steam. I got home and G had a case of cold beer waiting for me. He cracked two when I walked in the door. Sometimes G knew how to treat a brother. It may have been purchased with spare change found around the apartment, but it was thoughtful nonetheless. We drank a few beers while talking about what we



could get up to that evening, running through our list of friends that might be up to something. G asked me to give Dubs a call. They got along for some reason. There was no way I was about to invite him out though, and G knew that. We were trying to call up some girls to go out with, but none were around or wanted to hang out. It was going to be just the bros that night. As if sharing a bed with him wasn't enough.

We went to one of our usual places. Started out at a pub where G and I played our usual games with women at the bar. G was quite taller than me, but not close to my weight. He was all boney jagged corners. All joints. That didn't mean he couldn't do well with the ladies. What he lacked in physical prowess he made up for in wit and attitude. Something about an unemployed free spirit that many women found attractive. I could never figure it out. He even asked girls what they thought of his current mustache. He didn't lack any confidence that was for sure. Unfortunately for him, he was great at opening doors but had trouble closing the deal. That's where I came in. He could establish relationships with women, the art of the cold call, and I got to walk up and start chatting after. Sometimes smoothing over some idiot remark by the pointy bastard. I am sure it didn't hurt that I was much older than him. Women love the older and mature option.

We had a lot of fun doing this. We enjoyed meeting people and trying to see what kind of stupid things we could get away with saying or doing. Sometimes this led us into awkward or strange situations that made for great stories. There were crazy parties, crazy women, and crazy mind bending hallucinogens. We had fun. It was a change having my brother around. I used to get into a lot of trouble. It wasn't uncommon for my night to end with me rehashing fight stories for G when I got home. He looked up to me, and when he was of age, I was finally well past this stage. I didn't want him to fall in the same trap I did. I stuck to trying to teach him everything I knew about picking up women.

On this particular weekend we headed to the bar both Friday and Saturday, meeting up with random groups of friends out at the bars. We met a lot of girls. It was a fun time and I got three different phone numbers. The one I got on Friday night, I texted her when I was drunk on Saturday night. I guess I was kind of hoping to get a random hookup out of it. It didn't take.

She was a little classier than I had taken her for. She wasn't interested in a drunken hookup and now she wasn't interested in me in general. She stopped answering my texts and I knew that it could never progress anywhere after that. I was a little dejected and not too interested in the other two. I didn't even bother messaging them.

Saturday night I ditched the bar early to get home before G. My recent depression and the rejection from that girl had me feeling not too shit hot. I felt like burning one. I decided to walk home as I had the forethought of bringing a joint with me that night. I stopped at the park a few blocks from my house and smoked. I must have laid in the park for twenty-minutes staring into the sky. Not the safest thing to do at that hour, so I got myself up and walked home. I got back shortly after one and fell asleep on the couch watching late night cartoons. I didn't even hear G come home.

Sunday I had my regular hangover routine. I made some breakfast for G while we tried to recover from the two consecutive night bender. I spent a bit of time on the phone with my mother, catching her up on the week of activities. We always chatted on Sundays, but our phone calls were superficial. I didn't quite fill her in on the gritty details of what we did, or how low G was sinking. She always wanted to know how he was doing or if he was working yet. She put a lot of pressure on me to be responsible for him. She had to question some of my past bad habits, as if they could still be poisoning him. Aside from that, she always had her regular questions and statements. She wanted to know if I was seeing anyone, always afraid I would never settle down. This always led to her questioning my drinking habits and then scolding me that my liver would never last. Every once in a while she would compliment me, but it always felt backhanded. She would tell me how smart I was and how clever I could be, but that would make her question why I wasn't accomplishing more. Thanks mom.

That afternoon I had my visit with my little brother. Not G. I was a volunteer at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. It was something I started a couple years ago. I would like to say it was all for the children, but when I joined I thought it would be a great way to meet women. Don't get me wrong, I'm always glad to be helping out kids, but there also happened to be

a lot of social events where I met all sorts of nice women. It's where I had met the virgin.

As I got more into it though, my priorities did change. Lots of these kids needed a positive male role model. As I grew up without my dad through my formative years, I could see a lot of myself in many of the kids I worked with. Some of them were cool little bastards too. I was sticking this program out way longer than I thought I would. I actually enjoyed it. Lots of these little kids looked up to me, and it made me want to be a better person. It taught me a lot about kids. I think it not only prepared me for having my own kids, but made me anxious to find the lady I could finally do that with.

This was a pretty typical weekend though, and going back to work on Monday was a drag. My slow decline into depression was ever worse by my nocturnal exploits. I never verbalized it, but my lifestyle was eating away at me. I wasn't feeling great about what I was becoming. It's not like my work was causing any of it. With so much time driving and the mindless activities I sometimes had to perform, I had too much time to think about my personal life. I sometimes wondered what it would be like to be too busy at work to think about that stuff. Maybe time would fly by. I often wondered if I should have gone to college, or maybe I should have settled for the mind numbing repetitiveness of a fast food restaurant. It always felt too late to switch careers by then either way.

When I got in Monday morning it didn't help that I learned that Steve had quit, effective immediately. Apparently his wife had no intention of coming back from her holiday with her new man, 'Paul'. Steve was going to take his girls and move back out to the Midwest. I knew it was a good decision for the kids. However, my heart still broke for the guy. It was tough to see a family you know disintegrate in front of you. Steve was a good dad though and I was confident he could get his kids through the tough times.

I did a few jobs that day that were standard. In the afternoon I had a call to a residence. As these calls could go really well, or really bad, I was looking forward to the randomness of it. Today I would be installing a

garburator. This was usually easy work if someone had not mangled the plumbing or cupboards under the sink.

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I walked up to an apartment building and rang the buzzer.

"Who is it?" asked the voice from a tiny black speaker in the wall

It was a woman. Sounded like a good looking young one too. That was a shame. In my experience, that meant there was a high probability she was unattractive and possibly overweight. The type that was perfect for radio. I introduced myself and the door buzzed open. I made my way up the few flights of stairs to the apartment.

I knocked on the door. I stood there, curious. I wanted to prove my inappropriate thoughts correct, thus making them justified. It opened, revealing the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Apparently super models require plumbing too. I always thought they found random dudes to do things like this, but for free. This was a first. I opened my mouth to speak but my brain was not keeping up with the situation. It was stuck focusing on the anomaly before me. I stammered when I went to speak.

"Ga ga good afternoon ma'am." Ma'am. When the fuck had I ever said ma'am? I was going to have to pull my shit together.

"Hi there. Please, come in. And please, no ma'am stuff, call me Aida. Can I get you anything to drink while you work?"

"No thanks, I should be fine."

She led me into the apartment and showed me the small kitchen. The place had a similar layout and size to mine but something was different. There was art and pictures on the walls, the colors of the furniture matched and the air smelled of wildflowers. I lived in an apartment, this girl lived in her home.

She went over to the cupboards and I found it odd she kept some cups in the bottom drawer near her sink. However weird I found it, it was now my new favourite drawer as she bent down to grab one. She was a tall girl,

with a beautiful body and a tiny waist. At that moment I thanked God for Lululemon (later I found out the man I should have thanked was Chip Wilson). She grabbed two glasses and filled them with water. I guess I was drinking water.

My next thought was pure panic. I remembered that I had a stupid fucking moustache on my face. I immediately became self-conscious about my appearance. She turned around to face me with a glass of water in hand, placed it on the counter and told me it was there if I needed it. I was too busy holding my hand over my mouth and mustache to respond. I was desperately trying to disguise the fact that I currently had a sexual predator appearance.

"So, before you get started, I have a weird question," she began.

I was deathly afraid of what was about to happen next. My heart raced as this girl could have went anywhere with that opening statement and I wasn't sure if I was capable of hearing it.

"Is that moustache for real? Or please tell me you know what Movember is."

I bursted out laughing. Wow, was I relieved. She was actually a big fan of Movember. She had an old family friend get prostate cancer a few years ago so she had some involvement in some fundraising before. She also got a kick out of the mustaches she would see throughout November. We chatted about it as I prepped to get started.

I got down and took a look under the sink. She sat at the table a few feet away with a clear view of me working. She sat there, legs crossed and her body poised. Sitting politely one could say. She kept chatting while I worked. She surprised me when she told me she wasn't a super model, she was a librarian. It was hard to picture her as a book worm, but she was. She was equally impressed when we started to discuss books and how much I actually knew. I had taken up reading about a year ago and had read a bunch of classics. My timing couldn't have been better.

We got to talk about books from Hemmingway, Steinbeck and Orwell. I got excited at the prospect that some of our favorite books lined up. We

talked about 1984 in great detail (the book and not the year). I was glad I got to show off my more intellectual side. Even if I had my head under her sink and my hands covered in grimy grease.

We talked more about her job, how much she liked it even though it paid absolute shit. I didn't know much about working at a library these days, as I thought books were no longer used by our current generation. I got all my books through Amazon. If I had known that librarians looked like this, I would have owned a library card.

I was curious about her job so I asked a lot of questions. She talked while I shouted out a question from time to time. Turns out she spent her time building literacy programs for families and kids, trying to get them interested in reading. It seemed like quite a noble thing to do. It impressed me. She was one of those lucky people who got a lot of satisfaction from their work.

"How do you like your job?" she asked me, as if reading my mind.

"It pays the bills," I replied, looking at her while taking a drink of water. I could tell by her look that this answer did not impress her. I would have to give her more.

"I mean, it's all right. I like working with my hands and it's nice to finish projects and be useful to people. I just wish I owned my own business or at least did something more meaningful than fixing people's clogged drains. Like, maybe I should have gone to school. Wear a suit like all those people walking outside," I told her in earnest.

"What's wrong with being a plumber? My dad was an electrician, and I have respect for all tradesmen. Plus, you have a real sweet uniform. Somebody was clever that day." She smiled slyly. I couldn't tell if she was being playful or mocking me. I chose to believe she was being playful.

"Ya. My boss likes to think so. Anyway, I am all finished up here. Thanks for being so friendly through this process. Made it real easy. I don't deal with a lot of young people. They tend to let plumbing problems get worse or they can't afford us." I explained to her. The interaction did make my day.

"Well it was a fun visit. I was expecting an old fat man. I picked your company because of your slogan; I didn't want to see that fat old man's ass crack. Although it was weird letting in a rapist," she referred to my mustache. "If you would have had aviator sunglasses on I don't think I would have opened the door."

"Well I'm glad I was able to help, and that you could see past my mustache. I swear there is a handsome man behind this somewhere." I said as I waved my hand over my face.

"I believe it," she said, looking right at me.

I hesitated, but I was pretty sure that was the invitation I needed. She was definitely into me. Then again, maybe was she was just being nice. She was a smoke show and I had my head underneath her sink for forty five minutes. This was the moment that was always a struggle. Convincing myself to take a shot at it. Luckily I have built up a strong defense to rejection, so I thought I could handle it. I began to stammer through an awkward moment.

"Well thanks again, I really enjoyed your company. Maybe, sometime later this week I could perhaps take you out for a drink, wearing some regular clothes and not having my hands dirty. You know, if you are interested."

"Are you asking me on a date?" she asked coyly.

"I guess so. Sorry if this is inappropriate. I shouldn't be bothering you. This is not what you paid for in our service. I'm so sorry." I turned to leave with my tail between my legs. I wondered if this would get back to my office. I was so embarrassed and felt completely dejected and worthless. Trying something like this while on the job left me feeling sheepish.

"I am just messing with you," she said with a big smile, "I would like that. Are you still going to have that mustache?" she asked. My emotions did a full one hundred eighty degree swing as I turned around with a giant smile on my face.

"Sadly yes. I have to keep it for another two weeks until December first, and I would prefer to not have to wait until then to take you out. Hopefully that's not an issue?"

"No, that's good. It looks great on you," she said with a hint of sarcasm. "You got my info on your little invoice there. It will make you even creepier when you have to steal my number from there. I'll hear from you?"

"For sure. I'll call you later in the week to do something this weekend."

"Are you actually going to call like a man, or are you going to text me like a teenager?" she asked.

"Well I guess you answered that question for me. Expect to hear my voice later this week."

"Super."

I turned and gave a soft bye with a wave as the door was closing behind me. She had already put that phone number on the invoice before I had asked her for it, so I was confident I didn't even get a fake number. It had been a great day.



## Chapter 4

I had not been that nervous in a long time. I couldn't remember the last time I called a girl for a date. Not since texting became a thing. If she hadn't asked for the phone call, I would have texted for sure.

I didn't even remember how to do it. My heart was racing when I went to dial the number. Before I pressed the green dial button I put the phone down. What happened if she did not answer? Do I leave a message? If so, what does it say? If I didn't leave a message I would have to call back. How many times can I do that with those missed calls from a strange number?

Even worse yet, what happens if she does answer? Do I make small talk or jump straight into asking about a date? I wasn't ready. I couldn't believe it was happening to me. I thought I was a lot more confident than that.

I actually sat down and made notes. A script for a message if she didn't answer. Discussion points I could bring up to make small talk if necessary. Three different plans for dates in case she didn't like the first two. It was a loose map of fluid possibilities. The plan was nothing, planning was everything.

With that little panic attack out of the way, I felt a little prepared. I was able to pick up my phone again.

As the phone rang I felt my stomach fill with uncertainty. My heart rate picked up and I became nervous again. I understood why people used to hang up mid ring. With call display, that was no longer an option. I was doing this.

Thank God she answered. I didn't want to have to use my voicemail script. It wasn't that good. It would have sounded forced. Probably because it would have been.

The phone call went better than expected. Not as difficult as I had psyched myself up for. Once I introduced myself and had a few pleasantries

out of the way, I asked her to go for some drinks on Friday night. She was so easy going. She obliged and I picked a location that she agreed with. It was quick and simple, which was good. I was able to keep some material for our date.

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I met her at a pub. If she looked good in her comfort clothes at her house, she was gorgeous when she went out. She had long blonde hair. It wasn't straight, but it wasn't curly. It just kind of bounced down off her shoulders. It framed her face in the most magnificent way where I immediately got drawn in to her big blue eyes. She was beautiful, and didn't need to show off to prove it. She dressed in a conservative manner compared to girls these days, but it still emphasized her athletic figure. She was a peach.

I stood up to greet her. Luckily I was also dressed semi-casually. I had struggled for an hour whether to wear a jacket and slacks or jeans and a polo. Considering the venue I hoped it would be casual. Thankfully our styles matched. Crisis one was averted. Now it was up to my brain and mouth to avoid the embarrassing stuff.

We ordered a couple drinks to start. One time I had ordered a cocktail on a first date and my date ordered a beer. I felt emasculated and decided never to let that happen again. Now I went with my standard beer. She got a beer also and we started chatting. We talked for hours. About anything and everything. We talked so much and got through all that boring first date stuff so fast we were talking about serious topics. We talked of our bad habits, like how much we liked to drink and smoke. Turns out she liked to blaze too. One of those types who swears if people smoked grass, it would solve all the world's problems. We hit all the topics, even the ones they tell you never to mention with new people. Politics, race, abortions and religion. We tackled them all. She told me about the dating world as a girl, and all the douchebags she had to deal with. She even got me talking of my

childhood. A few beers, a location change and a bottle of wine had my tongue loose. Maybe more than it should have been.

"Well, I was kind of an angry child. My dad passed away when I was ten. Without him around I kind of started getting into shit. I had what some may call a short fuse. I started getting in fights. I have beaten some guys up which I don't feel great about. I have taken beatings a few times which I feel even worse about." I could tell she was interested in this topic. Maybe because she was into the dirty side of things, or maybe because she interested to hear how I grew up. I had trouble telling the difference because I had never talked to anyone about this stuff before. Wading into unfamiliar territory, I continued.

"It's weird how it can snowball from there. It starts to become a part of who you are. My brother and I used to egg people on, trying to start fights. We even gave ourselves a nickname, but I am too embarrassed to even repeat it. It was stupid. My brother idolized me and I was leading us down a stupid path. Next thing you know you are twenty-one years old and getting in fights at bars. At that age and surrounded by those types of people, they are no longer impressed. When I was twenty-four some guy was pissing me off and he was quite a bit bigger than me and thought he was tough. I guess he thought I would back down or turn and run when he started to threaten me. When I didn't, he got mad and threw a punch. It happened fast, but he was on the ground bleeding and I was standing over him. Two of his buddies came at me and I took a few hits but managed to land more damaging blows back. I had got on top of one guy and was about to pummel him when someone grabbed me from behind. I turned around, fist cocked, and the poor guy's girlfriend was screaming and crying. I stood up and she knelt down to hold him and stared up at me. Her tears were running down her face. The mortified look on her face said it all. I scanned the room and I had not impressed anyone. They were scared of me. It actually made me sick. Usually after a fight the adrenaline was pumping and it would be the most incredible high. This was the first time I felt ashamed. I could have walked away before it came to that, but I didn't. Instead, the usual response came over me and it sort of happened. I didn't have control over the situation, and maybe the crowd saw that. I certainly felt it. I haven't thrown

a punch since." I sat there in silence for a minute. I immediately got nervous that I blew it.

"I shouldn't have said anything. You think I am a psycho don't you?"

"Not at all. You learned from it didn't you? It's good you no longer do that, but weren't a ton of girls impressed by that kind of stuff?"

"Not the type I was looking for I guess," I responded.

"Good answer," she said back.

It was slow going getting the conversation back up and running again after that serious topic. Soon enough we were laughing and had moved on to better things. She was amazing.

By the end of the date, we had spent approximately eight hours together. Quite a few beers, appetizers, a bottle of wine and a dinner were all shared together. I was feeling quite drunk, which I believe would make her flat out drunk. I was confident my weight and slight history of alcoholism would mean that she would not handle her booze quite as well as me. It was time to call it a night. I didn't want her to take a cab home by herself so I asked if I could escort her there. My place was past it anyway. I also had a giant crush on her and did not want to leave her.

We arrived in front of her place and I asked the cabbie to wait a minute. He looked unsure, but decided he would trust me that I would come back. I suppose the mustache doesn't remove all credibility like I thought.

I walked Aida up to her front door. We stood there as I told her how much fun I had and that I hoped we got to do it again real soon. She agreed. I finally leaned in to do what I was waiting to do all night at the bar and the restaurant. I gave her a kiss goodnight.

Over the next couple weeks we spent almost every day together. We went for drinks, dinners, and movies. I even introduced her to my brother. It was the happiest two weeks of my life to that point. We got to learn so much about each other, it brought us even closer together. Aida was amazing. To give an idea of her personality, I would say she was almost hippy, without the real annoying hippy qualities like not shaving or bathing.

She had an appreciation for people, the earth and healthy foods. We shared in the fact that we both liked to smoke grass, and we indulged a couple times together. While high, we had the most amazing conversations, I was so enamoured with how proud she was of her work. She loved to hear of my good deeds with the Big Brother program. I withheld my reasons for joining, but she didn't need to know that.

We were keeping ourselves busy almost every night on dates. The problem was what that meant for my bank account. I think Aida started to recognize this. It was growing more customary for Aida to attempt to split bills with me when we went out. I argued with her every time. She countered, saying I couldn't afford to spoil her all the time. She happened to be right, but when I first actually let it happen it felt like I was inefficient as a man.

It was now the end of November and my brother and I had raised eight hundred dollars for prostate research with our mustaches. I had told Aida that I was thinking of keeping my mustache and so she donated one hundred on the last day if I shaved it off. Once I finally did she said she could no longer see me anymore. It turns out the mustache was what made me attractive. She thought she was so fucking funny.

I was glad the experiment was over. I was tired of that fucking stache. G was already recruiting for next year. I vowed that I would not be involved. I hoped I would have more important things on the go.

## Chapter 5

I knew right from the beginning. I was so nervous to even acknowledge it. It was after that first few weeks of dating before I was confident in dropping the L-bomb, but I held out for months. I could tell it was on the tip of her tongue as well and I was confident I could wait her out. I didn't want to be the first to say it.

It was the day before Valentine's Day, when I was at a friend's house visiting with him and his wife. They loved Aida, but she wasn't with me at the time. One of the few times they saw me without her since she was around. His wife asked if I had used the L word yet. When I said I hadn't, his wife stared me right in the eye and said, "Don't be a pussy."

It struck me quite hard as she wasn't one to use that kind of language. She knew me well, and knew that I couldn't ignore that. She really liked Aida, more than any other girl I had brought around. She was still just happy to see me with someone other than Pauline. She wanted to see me with Aida and she was pressuring me as though I needed to hear it.

The next day on Valentine's Day, Aida and I both agreed to have somewhat of an anti-Valentine's Day. We picked up a case of beer, a bottle of wine and a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. We camped out in her living room, got drunk and watched TV together. She was my kind of girl. Even full of KFC, we had sex that night. It was Valentine's Day after all. We were lying in bed next to each other and I wanted to say the word. It was right there, I couldn't hold it any longer though. My friend had pushed me over the edge.

"You know I love you right?" What a fucking way to say it. I was a Casanova.

She laughed at me.

"Oh ya?" was her response.

“Come on now, don’t make me feel more uncomfortable than I already am. This isn’t something I’m used to.”

She teased me for several agonizing minutes. I knew she had the same feelings for me, but she was going to make me squirm first. I should have possibly played it more smoothly.

Finally she stopped, got serious and asked, “Do you want to try that again stud?”

I gave her a full passionate kiss, pulled away, stared straight into her eyes and said “I love you. I am so happy we met and I am lucky to have you.”

“I love you too,” she replied softly. A great weight lifted off my shoulders when she said it back. This was followed by the feeling of pure happiness that I was lying next to this amazing woman who uttered those words. I knew I would never want to let her go.

I struggled to understand how I had gotten so lucky. Honestly, she was out of my league. I am a pretty confident individual and I think highly of myself, still, I believed this girl could get anyone she wanted and she was with me. It made me uncomfortable.

One night she brought up that game where you list three celebrities you are allowed to sleep with if given the opportunity. Doing so would not constitute as cheating. I refused to play. I told her it wasn't a fair game because I believed she could pull it off. I didn't think I stood a chance with Jessica Alba, Natalie Portman, or Helen Mirren. Therefore, I didn't want to play. She called me a poor sport. I think I dodged a bullet. I would not have been comfortable with her sleeping with Justin Timberlake.

Over the next four months things got even better. I was so happy to have found someone who I connected with so well. Everything worked for us and we were both all in, right from the start.

There was only one other issue in our relationship aside from my own insecurities. I was forced into a situation that I didn't like and I knew there was nothing I could do about it. It all started during a pretty standard week.

The good thing of note was Dubs was on holidays so I didn't have to deal with him at work. Aida was all worked up because her best friend Daisy had called and said she met someone and she was in love. She asked Aida if she and I would come out for a double date to meet her new beau.

"Daisy is so excited to introduce me to this new guy of hers. She hasn't told me anything about him yet, but she is really excited about this. She met him a week ago and they have spent every night together since, which is why I haven't talked to her at all. She insisted that I bring you along so we can all go out for drinks." Aida explained while we made our way to the restaurant that Daisy had told us to meet at.

Aida and I arrived at the restaurant early. Daisy and her mystery man were nowhere to be seen. We grabbed a table and a couple of drinks to start. When they arrived, my heart sank. There was Daisy and her new man. Daisy introduced him to Aida, then turned to me and said, "I believe you two know each other?"

Aida reached under the table and put a hand on my thigh. She knew how I felt about this guy, she heard about him several times when I came home from work. She was talking to me through this hand on thigh gesture. She was telling me 'I know, I know, but play nice'.

"Hey Dubs, how's it going? How has your week of holidays been?" I squeaked out through the shock.

Apparently they had met randomly at some coffee shop. They had started talking and got around to making the connection that they both knew me. This is what assisted the relationship along. They thought it may be uncomfortable for us, so Daisy said they would keep it a secret. She would hate that she would come between friends. What had Dubs been telling this poor woman?

So even though everything else was going well, I was now forced into hanging out with Dubs outside of work from time to time. After hanging out and getting to know him better, I actually disliked him even more. Turns out he wasn't aware of me not liking him, but was actually that naive. I usually pride myself in finding the best in people and getting along with



them on some level. I could not find it with Dubs. He was bipolar in how nice he could be, yet also the most disgusting and crass individual ever. I hated listening to his constant stories about nothing. He would continually laugh maniacally at his own jokes. It was painful. When he didn't like something, he threw out an evil and childish sound. Something along the lines of 'nghhhhaaaaa!' It was so juvenile, stupid and it should have been embarrassing for him. It sure as hell embarrassed me. He thought it was cool.

I don't know how Daisy stomached it.

Dubs was a small complaint though. Other than the odd double date and seeing him every work day, I still had some of my time free of him. If I wasn't so happy with Aida I may have snapped.

I would handle the worst kind of people out there if I had to. I was in love with the girl. In the six months following the day we met, we hung out all the time and I continued to be extremely happy. I began staying at her place most of the time. In the meantime my brother slowly took over my apartment, even though I was paying for it. It forced me to crash with her even more as my place was being transformed. Apparently my presence was what kept my brother maintaining a certain level of cleanliness. Aida didn't mind having me, and I was happy to spend my nights with her.

For our sixth month anniversary from our first date, a day she remembered and reminded me of, I wanted to do something special for her. I told her I wanted to take her on a trip. At dinner we discussed the possibilities, Mexico, Hawaii, and Thailand. She was ecstatic to talk about it. Her eyes lit up when discussing places like Maui. I wanted to give it all to her. When we made it home that evening I told her I would book something. Instead of being excited she flatly said we didn't have to do that. That we should be saving our money for a house, retirement and other boring adult stuff. She said she appreciated the thought and the effort, but right now was not a good time for us. She could say that, but I saw how she lit up when we discussed it earlier. It crushed me, but I knew she had our best interest in mind.

Everything was so different than any previous girl I had ever been with. I couldn't help but compare Aida to the string of women before her, and she stacked up in every category. Now when I thought of Pauline, it was truly in contempt. If there was this much potential for relationships to go this well, what the hell was I doing with Pauline for even a short period of time? The question baffles me now.

I finally had a girl that I talked of the future with. We were constantly talking about our plans, our hopes, and our dreams. This was great, but sometimes caused me great anxiety. Aida had large hopes for the future, a future she no doubtlessly deserved. She wanted to travel the world and she even wanted me to go with her. She wanted to raise a family and move to the suburbs. I only feared that I could never provide her with such a lifestyle. Between the both of us working full time, we would be lucky to afford a decent apartment. Life was going great, but I feared what was to come. I didn't want to lose the best thing I had going for me.

## Chapter 6

It was a beautiful spring Saturday morning and the girlfriend was out with some friends. I put on the TV and flopped onto the couch and started flipping through the channels.

Cartoons. Nope.

Documentary of some kind featuring the voice of none other than Morgan Freeman himself. Boring.

Some old movie with Jon Legouiziamo and Bob Hoskins. Looked stupid.

There is never anything good on Saturday mornings once you pass the age of twelve. Considering the girlfriend wasn't home and I was chilling in her place, I figured it would be a good time to swing by my pad. I wanted to check out the old place and grab my mail.

I hadn't been back to my place in two weeks at this point. I hadn't seen or even talked to my brother. I was afraid to return there. I contemplated phoning him to warn him that I would be popping in. Then I realized I was warning someone that I was coming home to my own place. Seemed stupid. I decided to pop by unannounced instead.

I was trying to convince myself that the place would be in great shape and my brother would be up. It was ten o'clock on a Saturday morning after all. I always had such high hopes for the scrawny shit. I put my key in the door and opened. The place was so dark I couldn't see a thing. That did not stop my nose from working though. It smelled of squalor. I turned on the light to see why. There were beer bottles and pizza boxes everywhere. It even smelled of urine. I should have considered buying the wood chips for a hamster cage and spread those before I had left. In the middle of the destruction lied two full grown males, one on the couch, the other face down on the floor, hand still grasped to a PBR. Neither of them were my brother. Classy.

Past them I could see the reason for the utter blackness that enveloped the room with the lights off. The windows were black, covered with garbage bags. My brother was a real class act. I could not believe I hadn't received a phone call from the landlord or complaints from the neighbours. Then again, the complaints could have come in the form of letters. I wouldn't be surprised to learn he had intercepted them. I wouldn't put anything past him.

I walked over to the windows, stepping over the grotesque man on the floor, and yanked the redneck curtains from their duct tape frames. Light burst in and immediately there were sounds of life from the two drunks. I kicked the body on the floor while shaking the man on the couch to wake them both.

"Rise and shine boys," I tried to say in a polite voice. I followed less politely with, "and I don't mean to be rude here, but get the fuck out of my house."

At this, I heard a commotion in the bedroom. At least G was now awake. He stumbled out of the bedroom and helped his boys regain consciousness. He tried to be as kind as possible as he rushed them out the door and told them he would talk to them later. He knew it was not the time to worry about being polite. He knew his pissed off brother when he saw him. He closed the door behind the two gentlemen and turned to look at me, still standing shirtless in a pair of briefs.

"What the fuck G?" I asked with my arms out, palms up, twisting my body side to side. It was as if I had to show him the room for the first time.

"I know man," he said with disappointment, "things have been getting out of hand recently. I'm really sorry." He started to pick shit off the ground.

"Clean it up later," I told him. "Go get some clothes on. Let's head out for some breakfast or something. I can't be in here right now. Do something about this though. Today."

"I will, I promise." At this he headed back into the bedroom. He was in there longer than it takes for a man to put on some jeans and a T-shirt. After a few minutes of sitting on the couch, surveying the damage in disgust, a

cute girl came out of the bedroom. Disheveled, but cute nonetheless. She didn't even raise her eyes or say hello, she put on her high heels and walked out the door. It was going to be an embarrassing walk of shame for that poor girl. My brother came out of the room after she left. He now had a smile on his face, right from ear to ear.

"Burn my fucking mattress while you are at it too," I told him as we stood up and took off for breakfast.

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We grabbed a seat at a little diner around the corner. It was famous in the neighbourhood for its cheap breakfasts. It was cheap. That is because it wasn't all that good. A small Korean family ran the restaurant. I am sure there was not a single wage paid out to any of the six family members that worked in it. It was the family's money. I could almost guarantee they lived in the back as well. A common occurrence around here. How bad could anyone screw up breakfast though? So this is where G and I usually grabbed it.

G had bags under his eyes and so little strength he struggled to keep his head up to be engaged with me. He was suffering through a hang-over and downed the first glass of water he had in front of him. I asked him to recap the night as I thought it could have been interesting. After he finished telling the story, I realized it wasn't.

He started to ask me how Aida was and how things were going between us. I had been feeling a little uneasy lately and I guess this opened the flood gates. I always felt comfortable talking to G for some reason. It doesn't make sense because I don't think he ever had any advice to help me with anyway.

That didn't stop me from telling him everything. I was happy. I was in love with a beautiful, intelligent, funny and sexy girl. She was even in love with me. However, I was always uncomfortable that I believed Aida could

do better than me. I was always a little nervous. I had trouble understanding why she liked me so much.

I felt that I was a pretty good guy. I could treat Aida the way she deserved to be treated. I was only concerned I couldn't deliver on all she wanted to accomplish in life. Some of them took money. Money I didn't have. I was constantly trying to come up with new ways to earn a few extra dollars. I figured that's where I was lacking. If I made sure to support my girlfriend and get her everything she deserved, I would be fine. I just needed to make a few extra dollars, or cut back on expenses a little bit.

"Why do you think Aida is with you anyway? How did she not have some sugar daddy taking care of her before you came along?" he asked honestly and inquisitively.

"She's not like that. And trust me, I have wondered, and asked, the same thing. She said she didn't want some asshole with money. She said she was waiting for a nice guy like me."

"Dude. There is your answer. Stop worrying. Shit will work itself out. Aida is not like that anyway. She knows you're a fucking poor ass plumber."

My brother was trying to be supportive. He sure had a way with words to make me feel better. However, I wasn't sure if he was reading between the lines. I had been supporting him financially for some time. I was going to need to cut him loose if I had any chance of keeping myself together. I knew Aida was not going to break up with me because of money. That didn't mean I still didn't feel obligated to provide for her. If only I had enough money to support myself, my girlfriend and my dumbass brother, I could have been set.

## Chapter 7

My brother was trying to be nice and he may have even been right. Yet, I had this unrelenting feeling of uneasiness. I wanted to bring it up with Aida. We generally talked about all our issues, but this one felt different. I felt like a failure of a man to tell her that I couldn't give her what she wanted, what she deserved. Instead, I was on my own. I was spending a lot of time thinking about ways to raise some extra money and dreaming of all the things I would like to do for Aida. Thinking of all the ways I would like to spend money on her, they all scared me. I wasn't sure how I would pull this off.

One night we were lying in bed after sex. It was the time I got most confident bringing up uncomfortable subjects. Maybe my defenses are down when I am naked. Or maybe I finally had some blood flowing back into my brain. It was when I first told her I loved her. It was when I first asked her where she thought this relationship was going. I remember how pleased I was with the answer when she said she saw a long future. As long as I didn't 'fuck it up', was her caveat. I was afraid that I was already nearing that line. There had to be thoughts going through her head of what she was capable of, professionally, in her relationships, and her life in general.

I still sort of danced around the subject. I told her I was considering getting a side gig, maybe bartending or waiting tables. She asked why I would do that. I told her I could use the extra bit of cash. She fired back that she was afraid I would work too much, that we wouldn't have nights to hang out or do activities. I would end up having to work weekends and she wanted those available in case we wanted to take a trip or do something. She missed the fact that without the work I couldn't afford these things. I decided not to push it any further at that time.

I was afraid of the impending conversation that she would break up with me. I had worked it into my head that a break up was inevitable. The thought of losing her made me physically ill. My life had improved so much since meeting her. I couldn't remember what it was like without her.

It scared the fucking shit out of me. I began thinking I was developing an ulcer. I was throwing Tums in my mouth like one would eat popcorn.

After my breakfast with my brother, I was at work Monday morning when he called and asked to meet me somewhere to talk. This was a rare occasion for him to be so cryptic and wanting to meet up. Concern rushed over me thinking something was terribly wrong. He was in some kind of trouble and I didn't know if I would have the cash to bail him out. I told him I would meet him straight after work. The rest of the work day had me in a fog, my mind racing with possibilities. I got more and more upset thinking of everything I have had to do for him. It was piling on. I wondered what G could have gotten himself into. I hated him at that moment for piling on to my existing stress.

We met at a small pub we used to hang out at together. We liked it because it was quiet and we could keep to ourselves, drinking for cheap and sometimes shooting pool. It was quiet because it was a dank old place with a long skinny bar. The bar was carpeted as many were back in the 70s, and years of booze and self-loathing had soaked in to give the bar a unique smell. In the back there were a couple of booths surrounding the pool table. The few people that came in generally sat at the bar, alone. As I walked in a few heads rose to see the newcomer. When they saw I was going to add no further excitement to them, they went back to their business of doing nothing. I could see G was already at the back by himself. He was sitting in a booth with a beer in front of him, waiting for me to get there. This also made me nervous, as he was never early. Not even for something he arranged. I grabbed a beer from the bartender and made my way to the back.

I sat down and he started making small talk. I cut him off immediately.

"What did you call for G? You got me kind of nervous here. Let's cut to the chase."

"Well, the other day you were telling me that you were a little uncomfortable with your financial situation. Lord knows that I need to start bringing in some money myself." He maneuvered his position in his seat



and leaned towards me. "We both know a lot of people right? And people trust us right?"

"You mean they trust me," I broke into his spiel.

"I can be trusted you fucking dick," he snapped back loudly enough for the five or six people at the bar to hear and briefly look in our direction.

He calmed back down immediately and continued as everyone's head slunk back down into their drinks at the bar. Their excitement for the afternoon was over.

"So I was talking to a bunch of buddies and they were saying how much of a pain in the ass it was to get weed these days. You always have to buy it from some fucking douchebag. Guys whose house you go into and they have a katana hanging over their couch. You remember that guy Alan who used to require us to go through the front door and his mom would let us in?"

"So you want us to be those douchebags?" I kind of laughed when I realized where he was going with this.

"I think we can do it without being douchebags."

G drew out his plan to start selling weed. He began to list all the people we know that smoke weed and how much they smoke. Sadly, this number was depressingly high (no pun intended). With them alone we could provide enough weed to pad our pockets.

"And where, do you suppose, are you going to get that much of a continuous supply of weed?" I asked.

He knew a guy that could provide the weed. This is where I started to get nervous. I didn't know this guy and I didn't know if he deserved our trust. Was I going to be able to put my trust in my brother? I started to give everything serious consideration.

Pot was illegal and the selling of pot could put me in jail. The prospect of jail had never sat well with me. I assume it does not sit well for anyone. However, how does one end up in jail? Every pot dealer I knew was

retarded and they made money and stayed out of jail. How could I not pull it off? I was complaining to my brother about how I needed some extra income. This is one way that I could get it. I wasn't sure how Aida would feel about it, but maybe she didn't even have to know. If for some reason I did get into some trouble, it would be best for her not to know. Plausible deniability. I had heard that on a lot of political shows. It's just weed. Weed never hurt anybody.

I started to think it could work. If I was going to do it, I had some concerns and some stipulations that we had to cover. My brother needed me, my contacts, and if I could guess, my money to get started. I felt like I was in control.

One of the stipulations I had was that G would have to get an actual job. Selling this shit wasn't a career. It was a way to add a little extra coin into the pocket. The minute he treated it as his way of making money is when he would get in trouble. It is damn suspicious for an unemployed stoner to be flush with cash. If we were going to do this, I was going to take the opportunity to actually get G in a real job. Not the best motivation to do so, but whatever works.

I had one hundred percent control of the operation. However, I would be a silent partner from the purchase of our weed. The guy doesn't know about me and G handles him completely.

We only sell to people we know and trust.

We don't skimp, skim, or try to rip anyone off.

We pay for any weed we smoke ourselves as if we were normal paying customers. I didn't want G getting him and his friends high all the time off our stash.

I saw, and was responsible for, all the cash.

G had no problems with any of these. I told him I was going to have to sleep on it. We would talk about it again the next day.

## Chapter 8

I dreamt of selling weed all night. It was one of those dreams where I was still wide awake. More like day dreaming yet I didn't have control of how things were playing out. The story was taking care of itself. It wasn't a nightmare, so it couldn't have been the worst idea. I was dreaming of how it would work providing weed to a group of friends. I was going over the math in my head that my brother had proposed. He had listed all the people we knew that we could sell to. He was right, I was sure every one of those people would start buying off of us if that was an option. The connection for supply was the biggest issue and if G trusted the man and was going to take the burden of risk, I couldn't see any big issues. I was sure there was no chance we would ever run into the law. By the time morning rolled around, I hadn't slept, but I had made up my mind. I was going to provide a plant to my friends for a fee. I was going to be an intermediary between two parties. I wasn't going to be a drug dealer.

I went to work the next morning and the anticipation built all day. There were a few things we would have to prepare. Ziploc bags and a weigh scale. Actually, that was about it. I decided we would hold off a week or two so we could start telling all our potential clients. I didn't want to get a massive bag of weed to find out everyone I knew had already bought, meanwhile my shit was drying out.

There were a few concerns. I thought they were all insignificant. I believed there was no chance we would get in trouble with the police. Cops are dumb. Not to mention, I don't think they care about weed. People had been smoking it openly in the park those days. I would hear people get in more trouble for smoking cigarettes. My biggest concern is that it would get annoying. I didn't want potheads calling me at all hours, demanding ridiculous things, hanging around too often. I've seen it with other people. Most customers would be my friends anyway, so I was hoping that wouldn't be an issue. The other concern was Aida. I had no idea what I was going to do about Aida. How was she going to feel about all this? I was planning on figuring that out at a later date. I was doing this for us anyway.

After work I phoned G. I didn't offer any hello. Just an, "I'm in." It felt like the cool way to do it. That's how they would do it in the movies.

G was ecstatic.

I had to talk him down and explain the new details that I had come up with in my sleepless night. We wouldn't be up and running for another week or two and I would delay that even further if he didn't get that job. I was real serious about that issue. Aside from that, I was ready to start making some tax free cash.

We were going to be paying a thousand bucks every two weeks for a half a pound at a time. Cash was tight when I paid for that first stash. I was nervous getting it, but I can say I was super excited holding that giant bag. I had never held that much weed at once before. The odd guy I bought off of would have bags like this, but he would divvy it up in front of me.

Now that it was in my possession, I just wanted to hold it. G and I were like giddy school girls. Turns out I could still be immature about it all. We took turns grabbing it, hugging it, breathing it. To be fair, it was a giant bag of weed to me.

We did have a plan to follow though, so we busted that bag up into many smaller bags for distribution. It was all smiles and jokes the whole time. We were actually doing this. Once we saw how many smaller bags it made, we got a little concerned about moving all the product. I didn't want to lose any money on this deal. In the end, it did not take long to make my money back. Then the profits rolled in.

We had talked to a lot of friends, and they were all keen on getting product from us. It alleviated a lot of our apprehensions to see them all stay true to their word. We delivered some to their places, and some people swung by the apartment to pick some up. We didn't have to negotiate about money, everyone paid, and we were well on our way to make this a successful opportunity.

After we had sold it all, we were sitting on around 2,500 bucks. G was disappointed with the first round of sales as I paid myself back my initial thousand dollar investment. Another grand had to buy the new bag, and we

split five hundred bucks profit. Two hundred and fifty bucks was not exactly what G was expecting. After the second bag though, he started to get it. We split 1,500 every two weeks, seven hundred and fifty bucks each. The extra 1,500 a month tax free was going to help me out big time. The problem was G wanted more. It was tough to keep him in check. He knew that this was my operation though. I think he was well aware that if I left him to his own devices, he would end up in trouble, broke, or in jail. Possibly all three.

We sold most our stuff in quarter ounces. The odd eighth every once in a while if they weren't heavy smokers. Those were my contacts. Most of G's friends were big pot heads so he had less stops to make to get rid of his share.

At first I didn't tell Aida. I was going to keep it a secret. This lasted around five weeks. I had to lie to her a lot to keep the secret. I didn't feel good about that, even if I thought it was in her best interest. I had decided I was going to tell her but things came to a head before I even had the chance.

I had been spending a lot more time at my own place during those first couple weeks. It was easier as that is where G held everything and we measured out bags. I was at Aida's one night and we were chilling out at home watching some TV together when I got a text from a buddy looking for a hookup. I was going to have to make a delivery. My house was now where we stored it all so I would have to run home. I told Aida I was going to visit my brother. It wasn't that bad because I wasn't really lying, or at least that was how I justified it to myself when I lied right to her face. I only omitted the fact that I would be delivering someone an illegal substance afterwards.

I was getting my shoes on to leave when I noticed she was down. Tears started to build in her eyes.

"What's wrong?" I asked. My heart broke thinking she was that sad for a reason that I was not aware of.

"Are you cheating on me?" she asked. She was sitting on the couch staring at the floor. She slowly raised her head up to meet my eyes, her tears starting to flow in full force. Panic struck as I swiftly moved back to her and sat on the couch to put my arms around her.

"Where the hell did that come from?"

She went off. Quickly rattling off a laundry list of suspicious activity. It was clear that she had been building this up inside her. I had no idea. I had been so busy lately I hadn't even noticed what I was doing to my poor peach.

I had been staying at home way more often than before.

I would all of a sudden have plans out of nowhere.

I would leave her in the middle of activities or shows we were watching.

Then the big one. I had been more protective of my phone and not letting her see my texts. I had been careful not to leave my phone out. I had changed it so it would no longer show a preview of the text on the screen when I received one. When I got a message that I knew was related to weed, I would generally leave the room or angle myself away from her. No wonder she thought I was texting girls. I was an idiot.

When she told me these things, I saw it all. It crushed me to think she thought I was capable of such a thing. I would never do something to deliberately hurt her. I had to tell her. So I told her everything. How it came up, how we were doing it, who we were selling to, and finally, why I did it.

"Why would you think you have to sell drugs for me to stay with you? I have never once thought I needed more than you already give me. I love you, you asshole, don't you get that?"

"I know," I told her, almost feeling defeated. "It's just that we both want so much more and I'm afraid we can't get it at our current pace. With this, I have been putting away extra cash. Cash we can use to do so much with our future."

"It can't come at the cost of your freedom."

"It won't. I have covered all the angles. I am being safe."

"But it's illegal."

"What's the big deal? It's a plant. It's not a dangerous drug or anything. I wouldn't be hurting anyone. People are going to get their weed no matter what. What is the harm if it's me, a trusted friend that gets it for them? One could argue that it is even safer that they are getting it from me. Not only can they trust the weed (Hell, I smoke it myself to ensure its quality and its unadulterated excellence), but the money is not going to some two bit criminal who will probably invest the money in his other nefarious activities. I want to raise money so you and I can live comfortably. Happily ever after if you will. What better reasoning is there?"

I paused for a minute. She didn't seem convinced so I kept going.

"Not to mention I am finally going to help my brother. He was going to do this without me. If he did, he could have messed it up and gotten in trouble. This way I will give him some direction and some ability to make it on his own. I was the one who forced him to get a job otherwise I wouldn't help him with this. Now he is working and has to take something seriously. If G could learn a few lessons, I am sure he will be much better off in the long run."

I waited again. Finally she spoke.

"You know how I feel about marijuana, I have no problem with the drug whatsoever. I do have a problem with breaking the law though, even if I think the law is silly. There are so many cons, I don't know if they outweigh the pros."

We debated this subject for some time. It was hard for her to be upset about it as we both didn't think pot should even be illegal. It is such a harmless drug. There were still risks that could cost us, but every one she could think of, I had a rebuttal for. In the end, she began to understand. However, she sounded overwhelmed, and I could tell she was still angry.

"I trust you will not do anything to hurt us. If you think you can make some extra money without any risks, I don't approve, and I don't think it's necessary, but I won't stop you. I believe you are too smart to get yourself caught. What I can't allow to happen, is you lying to me. You have been a real asshole these last couple weeks, and you aren't going to simply get away with that. You owe me big time."

"I am so sorry for that. That was completely inconsiderate of me. I didn't even think I had changed that much. Now that you explain it to me, I see how it could have looked. That was dumb of me. I love you, and I would never do anything to hurt you," I told her.

"I know, just be careful."

This is where I needed to stop and think. I had thought of every possible angle and prevented a lot of risks of getting caught. I should have been thinking of other possibilities aside from getting caught, but now that Aida was aware of the situation, I felt great.

I still had to get going though, to drop off a quarter for my buddy Adam. This time I wouldn't be lying to Aida about where I was going and I would come back to her house instead of going home for the night. There was still plenty to hash out. She had thought I was cheating and all. But after a few hours of clearing the air, the sex was fucking fantastic.



## Chapter 9

The first few months of selling were actually getting to be kind of fun. Once we started getting into the groove of things and I was no longer lying to Aida, there were a lot of perks you would never think of when being an intermediary of weed. There was the obvious advantage of having more money. We weren't making a pile or anything. Although after a few months we were hitting our target of two ounces a week with no issues. It wasn't even difficult. By the time our two weeks were up we were generally dry, needing a new stash. I sent G to meet his guy every two weeks with explicit instructions. Nothing too serious. Don't get too involved with the guy, keep your visit short and make sure we will still be good to go in two weeks. Sometimes product got tight and if he had to cut back we wanted him to do it to his other guys. I always finished with reminding G to never speak to him about me or the business we do. All he needed to know was we could afford to keep paying him.

I hadn't spent a dime I had made on the venture so the cash was adding up. I hid it where nobody could find it. I would never tell a soul where it was. I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do with it. Watching it pile up every two weeks had me feeling butterflies in my stomach every time I counted it. I would feel this way even though the cash you get is sometimes terrible. It actually looked like a pile of old newspapers and trash. You wouldn't want to lie in it like they do in cartoons. You could catch something. It was usually low denomination, sometimes it was even petty change, and the cash was generally crumpled and dirty. I dished out most of the terrible stuff to G and held on to the better cash myself. He wasn't upset. He thought all that coin would come in handy.

Aside from the money, some of the people we sold to were good people. We generally knew them all well. Sometimes we didn't keep in touch like we should so the connection had been lost. This gave us an excuse to see them on a consistent basis. I don't know why I lost touch with some of these people. They were fun to be around. On top of that, some of them held some sweet gigs. Being their intermediary had some perks.

I don't know another business such as this one. I provided them weed at a profit. I did it because I made money, yet people treat me differently from other retailers because my product was weed. I got benefits from my customers that I don't believe their grocers, liquor store owners or other retailers got from them.

I had four bouncers at popular places that now bought from me. This almost guaranteed me immediate access to some of the hottest clubs in town. Even at other places I simply needed to drop one of their names to get in. They had a tight little bouncer's network. My guess is they all worked out at the same gym. Either that or got their steroids from the same guy. It must have been a pre-requisite to be unnaturally bulgy to work at some of these clubs. Either way, because I sold them weed, I was admitted to their secret society.

I was being given tickets to events, brought to some awesome parties, and generally treated like everyone's best friend. These were friends and all, but some I didn't see often and all of a sudden I was their bestie. They would do anything to make sure I liked them. Aida and I were treated like royalty.

Even the regular Joes that I delivered to sometimes provided a good time or a good laugh. Bringing them weed got to be funny to see the different types of people and how they handled their weed smoking. Some were so secretive. I wasn't allowed to come by when their girlfriends were home, because they didn't know they smoked. What a terrible way to live. Others would light a joint in the middle of the park and not even do an obligatory shoulder check. Some little kid would be walking by with their mother. I don't think pot is that big of a deal, but I always showed some respect in public.

There were a couple of old friends that had kids a few years ago that I got to see. Something about having kids and settling down. You don't see your party friends anymore. I went to my buddy Adam's place often and his kid was always around. He was almost four years old. When I gave his dad a baggy, he gawked at the small bag and asked his dad what it was.

"It's medicine for daddy. It helps daddy and it's not for young boys. If you want to grow up big and strong like daddy, you will stay away from daddy's medicine, okay?"

"So he is a doctor?" the kid asked while pointing up at me.

"Ya. I guess you could call him that," he replied while staring at me with a big smile on his face.

I was far from a doctor. Maybe more of a pharmacist. People struggle with the distinction and I didn't think a four year old would get the explanation, so I let it slide.

It was nice to see these guys again, even in this context. I did find it weird though. I know I was just an intermediary of drugs and all, but when I have kids I would never be seen like that. It still was interesting to see from this side of the equation.

The other big advantage was that G took my advice. He actually got that side job waiting tables at a local pub. Turns out it was great for him and great for our side business. He was doing well at the job and people liked him there. The manager was fond of him and was already training him to work behind the bar. G also loved the attention from all the women he worked with. He had an instant in with all them when they found out how easy it could be for them to score some weed. You would think his manager would not appreciate him slinging pot at his establishment, but the man was taking a quarter off us every week. He was awesome to my brother and to me. As my brother started the bar tending gig, me and my girl hit it up all the time to show support. We would sit at the bar and drink our faces off and the manager wouldn't charge us a dime. I hoped all these people didn't expect favours back. My stuff was never free. I couldn't afford it.

## Chapter 10

Drug dealing was good. That didn't mean it was perfect. The more we got into it, the more problems that arose.

Customers were continually trying to introduce us to new people. They enjoyed our service, our product and our company and eventually, they would tell their friends. No matter how many times we told them to stop, it kept happening. It was a great problem to have, people liking us. However, we weren't looking to grow our business. I didn't like the idea of new clients who were once removed from the people we knew and trusted. Without knowing them we would be opening ourselves up to risk and that was what we were trying to avoid. Still, people were introducing me to new people and it was always awkward. It was the kind of introduction where they said things like 'this is that guy I mentioned' or they say my name and raise their eyebrows a couple times. They continued to do this as if I didn't understand. They were talking about me when I wasn't around.

These new introductions seemed like great people, and it's always nice to meet awesome new faces, but I didn't want people knowing me only because I could be a hookup for marijuana. It made me feel cheap. I had so much more to offer to these people I called friends. This is what rich people must feel like. I wasn't sure if they laughed when I talked because what I said was funny or they were trying hard to impress me.

With all this happening and knowing that I was a little more financially secure, we started to party a lot harder and more often. The weekends were write-offs and the odd weekday drunk made for some difficult work days. I want to say that my work didn't suffer, but I had some days where I puked in the sinks I was working on. Luckily I didn't get any complaints back at the office. I was still doing my job but the party scene was taking its toll. I had to keep myself in check to not let bad habits get control over me. My career was being a plumber. I couldn't forget that. Both Aida and I were enjoying ourselves so much though. We partied at the hottest clubs and even had a few celebrity run-ins. I won't mention any names, but I thank

God I didn't let Aida have a list of three celebrities she could sleep with. I am sure she had a shot at one of them.

I was also delivering almost all the product I was moving. I didn't want people coming to my home. I wanted the option of leaving instead of having to kick people out of my place. Potheads have a tendency to linger. Between my regular work hours, deliveries and parties, I was starting to wear thin. On almost all deliveries, they always wanted to burn at least one with you. I was smoking way too much weed those days, and if I was having that problem, G was probably turning green.

I was starting to feel a little partied out. My body was beginning to reject me. The invites kept rolling in and I hated saying no. I got worried that if I said no, they would stop asking. Some nights I was down and out on the couch, sometimes hungover, and it took a lot of energy to pull myself off the couch when a new friend invited me out. A couple Redbull Vodkas and I was generally back in the game, but my hangover was intensified the next day. I was pushing them off until I would finally spend a day dead to the world. Aida was not impressed at what she called my Deferred Delirium Tremens or DDTs. Made sense considering it felt like someone had dropped me on my head.

We had to make a few small changes.

After some serious discussions we got G's manager of the bar to take over the selling to his staff. We made sure he promised not to sell to customers. If people started talking about how his establishment was a place to score shit, that kind of word gets out and brings heat that we didn't want. He was a good guy and even though I only knew him for a few months, I knew he was trustworthy.

I decided that I couldn't do the standard deliveries anymore. The last one that finally brought me to that decision wasn't that bad. It was that they were such time wasters.

I had walked into my buddy Mike's place and had a seat on the couch. After my last encounter selling to someone with a child, I found it increasingly weird to sell weed to someone with kids. Mike was a closer

friend and a good smart guy, so I couldn't help but ask, "What are you going to tell your kids about weed Mike? They will start to wonder."

"I dunno. I'll deal with that when the day comes I guess. That's the problem with weed, I don't have to think about it when I'm high," he chuckled.

Seems irresponsible, but I am sure he said that for my benefit as a joke and he took his parenting seriously.

At that moment Mike was already busting up his weed and was going to start rolling a joint. He was going to be disappointed when I told him I was rolling out. I had to move things along. I was about to ask him for the money he owed (they always start rolling before they hand you that) when there was a rattling in a cage next to a couch. I jumped back when I saw it. "What the fuck is that?"

Mike laughed. "That my friend, is a hedgehog. I picked it up a few days ago. My kid has been asking for a puppy, for like, forever, and there is no way I am getting him one while living in this tiny shit box. I told him it was too much work and said I would get him a goldfish to teach him responsibility. Well I'll be damned if that little nine year old isn't the best damn caretaker I've ever seen. Loves that fucking goldfish. I haven't touched it in the year he has had it now and that damn thing won't die. I thought about murdering it several times to try get myself out of the situation. The kid thinks he is ready for a dog."

"Father of the year Mike," I interrupted.

"Ha ha, don't I know it. Well last week he kept telling me how much he deserved a dog and I didn't know what to do. I went down to the pet store and thought I would get him a gerbil or something to tie him over for a while. Well, the sales guy at the pet store convinced me that these hedgehogs are way cooler and that they are more fun. So I thought I would try something different. Doesn't he look cool?"

"I guess, but for some reason I don't think your little plan is going to work. I have a feeling a hedgehog is going to get boring. Hedgehogs can't

be good business. On that note, neither can not getting paid. I need my money Mike, I gotta get running."

"You aren't sticking around for a quick puff?" he asked like a disappointed toddler. He took some cash from his pocket and handed it to me.

"Good luck with the hedgehog Mike." I slapped him on the shoulder and made my way to the door. "For future reference, anything less than an ounce I won't be making house calls anymore. I am getting pretty busy and I gotta get some more time with the GF. We will talk more about it when you need your next hookup. See ya around Mike." I said as I walked out the door.

Mike gave me a hard time. He wanted me to stick around. It wasn't often that his wife and kid were out of the house. He was pulling out every peer pressure trick in the book. I have a rubber arm, so it was hard for me to say no. I had to start standing my ground. Aida was waiting for me. I told him that I was sorry but I had to go.

I heard some muffled reply as the door closed behind me. Turns out being friendly with your client is not as good as it sounds. It would be better off if they were strangers. This had become a full time job.

If I wasn't delivering the product myself I could rely more on G and maybe one or two of my best customers. Maybe growing the business wouldn't be the worst thing. Remove myself from the risk and make a little bit more money. It sounded great. Although, I wasn't so sure it was a good idea. I would end up overlooking some angle. I was not a criminal mastermind, I was a fucking plumber.

At the moment, I was doing as much business as I needed to. One of the hardest things is keeping yourself in check. It is too easy. I couldn't let the situation get away from me. It was time to get my priorities back in check. I had to focus harder on work so I didn't get in trouble with the boss. I had built up a lot of goodwill there and I couldn't ruin it. I had to make sure Aida knew she was number one to me. I couldn't do anything stupid.

## Chapter 11

It was Friday night and my brother had invited us out earlier in the week. We were preparing to head out and getting dressed up for the occasion. Aida dressed to impress and was looking damn fine. She already spurned my sexual advances on numerous occasions as she was getting ready. She hated when I did that, which was often.

"What is on the agenda tonight anyway?" she asked.

"I am not exactly sure," I replied. I wasn't. G hadn't told me what we were up to. He had told me he had this group of friends that were a lot of fun that were heading out this weekend and he wanted us to join. I was hoping that they weren't a bunch of assholes. G sometimes gave too much credit to some people. Nice people meant boring, fun people meant crazy, and hot chicks meant whores. I had gotten used to his definitions of characters.

Aida began giving me her regular riot act. "Well as long as you know that I have to be back at a reasonable hour tonight. I have things I have to do tomorrow so I won't be able to stay out too late. If you end up getting loaded or this is looking like it will be a runaway, I may attempt to bail on you."

I knew there was no changing her mind in this.

"I'll take it easy too then. We will come home at a decent hour."

"Ha, we will see about that. I love you honey, but your self-control while partying is something to be laughed at. You will forget about that comment by the time someone orders the first round of shots. By the second round you will be buying the third and fourth, so let's be a little more honest with ourselves okay?"

I wished she was joking. That was a standard night out for me. I have little self-control with alcohol. I decided not to fight her on the issue and



defend myself. I didn't want her to throw the retort in my face tomorrow morning if that did in fact happen.

We got to the bar and G had secured a large corner booth. It was a trendy place. The kind that spends a fortune on how to use enough fixtures to barely light a place. The furniture was all brand new and looked like trendy Ikea's furniture. Everything was blocky and wooden. We had these couches wrapping around the corner with a few stools around the table. G had ten people there already.

My brother ran through everyone's name in the room in order from left to right but skipped the guy in the middle. At the time, I hoped it wasn't because he was black. I got concerned it came off as racist. I knew that couldn't have been the case. My brother was a lot of things, but he wasn't racist.

When he made it through everyone he made it back to the guy and introduced him as Jam. Everyone called him that because he was Jamaican. Not exactly a clever nickname. At least now I saw the skipped introduction wasn't because he was black. He was important in some way. My brother obviously liked the guy and wanted me to meet him. I reached over the table and shook his hand. He grabbed my hand firm and stared me straight in the eye while shaking. A good shake is a rare find.

"Nice ta meet you mon," he said with a thick Jamaican accent.

He was a tall skinny bastard, and at the risk of sounding racist myself now, the most stereotypical Jamaican I had ever met. He had a dark complexion with dreads that came down to his waist. His head was covered by one of those Jamaican knitted hats. I wondered if he was high, drinking Malibu, and I would have loved to hear him talk of the Jamaican bobsled team (Cool Runnings being the majority of my Jamaican knowledge).

Either way, he was genuine and carried a smile on himself from ear to ear. He looked like he could be one of the nicest people at the table. I introduced myself and Aida to everyone else one more time. I like to lock down the names. We ordered some drinks to get us started.

I loved hanging out with Aida in these situations. We were both comfortable in working the room together or on our own. She was as adventurous talking to other people as I was, so neither of us had to babysit each other when out in public. We both had a few drinks and carried our own conversation. I sometimes caught myself watching Aida do her thing, she was so at ease talking to people. She carried a large smile and made it look effortless. I was not such a natural. I had developed a system over the years of questions and tactics to start conversations with new people. To start with, I always began with the regular pleasantries:

“What do you do?”

“Where are you from originally?” (Few people were from here.)

“What keeps you busy when you're not working?”

I was listening to answers and asking a bunch of questions. People love talking about themselves. Luckily for me I actually find it interesting. Some people are cool, some people are fucked up. Both are fun to talk to. During this time I try my best to bust out one-liners and get a good laugh from them. The more I have to drink, the more risqué my jokes become. I am always testing the waters. I know that when I cross the line I would have a gentle squeeze of my forearm from Aida. Depending on how drunk I am will determine how well I take the hint.

I had talked to a lot of people at the table at this point but still hadn't had a chance to talk with Jam. I was now at one side of the booth and he was at the other. When Aida got up to go use the restroom, I took this as my opportunity to switch seats.

I took an open seat next to Jam. He smiled politely and I returned the gesture. He was wearing a button up light shirt as if he was at the beach. It was the middle of winter. A culture thing I am sure. His top buttons were not done up and I couldn't help but look at his chiseled bare chest that peaked out from behind his shirt. I am sure Jam had no problem with the ladies. He was handsome and had an athletic build.

I started with some small talk, like how he knew my brother through a random connection, who he knew in the group and the condition of the bar

we were in. Then I started with the standard questions and his answers were nowhere near standard.

"What do you do Jam?"

"What do I not do mon? I am a student of dee world. I travel, I write, I create."

"Sounds like too much fun," I responded to his vague answer, "so does that pay the bills?"

"I make sure I ave enough chedda to make myself appy. What you do brudda?"

"I'm a plumber." No matter how long I have been doing it, for some reason that always stung to say. At least I always told the truth. Most guys called themselves tradesman, or contractors. Lying to themselves.

"I am sure dat could be interestin." People never knew how to respond either.

"It can be some days actually. It is good to work with your hands and meet all sorts of people. I met Aida through work, so it can't be all bad." That was the best justification of them all.

"So where are you from originally?" I changed the subject.

"You may ave guessed, but if not, I am from Jamaica mon."

"I was positive your accent was Scottish," I responded sarcastically, "I was way off. So where in Jamaica are you from?"

"If I told you, would you know? Ave you been to Jamaica?" he asked back. I wasn't sure if he was being sincere or a dick at this point, so I played along.

"Well I have never been, but I know mostly that Kingston is the largest city and capital and the names of most the tourist type places. I have read a few articles, you know, the Wikipedia entry and all. Curious about where you come from or what brought you here," I defended myself.

"No worries mon. I am in fact from Montego Bay. Tourist country. I dealt wit Americans all dee time. I was tired of living off dere money, decided I could come eere and make it on my own. Left my family behind and tryin to make a name for myself eva since."

I asked him a lot of questions about what that entailed. The uneasiness I had at the start of our conversation dissipated as I got to know the man. Aida came back and sat next to me to join our conversation. He was the most interesting guy I could ever remember meeting. I wish I had half the adventures under my belt as he had. He did as he pleased. It was as though he wandered through life aimlessly, but had no problem with that. He was just living. Aida liked him as well. He paid compliments to the both of us for how we were together, especially out in public. He said we were a great 'power couple'.

"What about you Jam? You have a special girl?"

"I ope so mon. She is out dare somewhere. I am patient, I will find er someday."

"There is no better city for it. No shortage of fish in this sea. With all your traveling, you have intentions of living here for a while?"

"I believe so. I like dis place. I ave actually bought a ouse eere, so I ope I can make it my ome. When I got to dis city, it frightened me. As I got to know dee place, it grow on you. I feel as doe I could stay eere for a while."

"Now if you will excuse me brudda, I must use da facilities. I am sure I will talk to you lata. It was very nice to meet you both."

He got up and made his way to the bathroom. As he did, G came over and took his seat next to me.

He leaned over and asked, "What do you think of Jam?"

I found this evening so strange already, especially with G's man crush on this guy Jam. I responded, "He is pretty cool, but why do you have a hard-on for the guy and why are you trying to introduce me to him?"

My brother leaned in even closer and said, "They call him the Mushroom Man."

## Chapter 12

The Mushroom Man was the nickname beyond the nickname that was bestowed upon Jam. Jam was the name they used in his presence. The Mushroom Man was what they called him when he wasn't around.

My brother told me that he had met him through a buddy at a bar one night. They had hung out a couple times. One time Jam had some amazing mushrooms. They were far better than any other ones he has ever experienced and that I had to try them. G filled me in on his plan that he had all along. He wanted to get into the mushroom trade and he believed Jam would be the guy to talk to. As he was finishing explaining all this, Jam made it back to the table. I awkwardly stood up as he returned and asked G to accompany me outside.

I wanted to make sure to drive the point home immediately. I ranted on him outside where the smokers hang out. I was quiet so we would go unheard by the others, but stern enough for G to know I was serious.

"We are not drug dealers. We are not trying to grow some empire. We are a couple of guys who could use some extra cash. We get that by providing some weed to some of our closest friends and trusted acquaintances. What do we know about mushrooms? I like your enthusiasm and all, but let's take a step back here. You got a good group of friends out there that came out to party with you. Forget about the money, our side business, any thoughts of mushrooms and let's have some fun. I don't mean to be harsh, but I don't want things to get out of hand man."

G looked dejected. He was looking at his shoes as he shuffled his feet. He was taking a moment, but I could see that he understood. I may have bursted his bubble a little too abruptly. I wished he could be that enthusiastic in other aspects of his life. I waited another moment for a response.

"Are we cool?" I asked finally.

"Ya man, I see where you are coming from. Sorry for springing this on you like that. It was an inappropriate way of trying to bring it up. Let me grab some drinks and we will have a good time."

"Sounds good brother."

G was headstrong and normally would put up a huge fight. Sometimes, when I was stern enough, he would back down easily. This time he didn't have any fight in him. After everything we had been through, I was like his dad. He listened. It was a humbling feeling for me, and it was odd to be so respected by someone.

I went back to the table and sat down next to Aida. My brother followed shortly with a round of drinks and a round of shots. He passed them around and the crowd cheered. This was a classic G overcorrection. He was feeling a little sheepish, so he bought everyone drinks. The two rounds most likely cost around two hundred bucks. He shouldn't have been spending that kind of money. I thought I had scolded him enough, and he was trying to do something nice, so I didn't say anything. The party was about to begin anyway. Aida doesn't do shots so when nobody was looking I had to down hers too. Things were about to get ugly. This is exactly what Aida knew was going to happen.

We started getting after it. At one point I started to wonder if maybe one of my drinks had drugs in it. It would have been hard to tell which shot of the eighteen shots of Jäger someone could have put something in. There was a good chance I was actually flat out drunk. It was okay, we were having a great time. I was talking up a storm with a few people at the table, including Jam, who was the center of attention in the large group. Our table being that one in the bar that was too loud. The rest of the bar was left wondering what the hell was so funny as we erupted in laughter every couple minutes. Meanwhile, we were putting down drink, after drink, after drink.

It was getting late but the party showed no signs of slowing down. Aida was getting concerned. There was talk of moving to a new venue instead of going home. The group was discussing where to go when Jam suggested a place he knew. He said nobody has heard of it, and that we

should trust him. He said it would be an adventure. This was the opportunity Aida needed to pull the chute and bail from the situation. Instead of saying goodbye to everyone and taking shit from them for ditching, she squeezed my arm and whispered into my ear, "I'm outta here. I'll see you at home."

When she made a statement like that, there was nothing I could do. She was going home. She had even warned me this was going to happen. She got up as if she was going to the bathroom. Instead, she Houdini'd out of the party. It wasn't until we were getting cabs that someone noticed her absence. I let them know she had already gone.

We took several cabs to an address Jam gave to everyone. I rode in the one with Jam. He interviewed the cab driver for the entire ride. He tried to learn so much about him in a ten minute span. Some of the things he managed to pull out of him in that short period of time were impressive. The cab driver looked disappointed to see him go when we arrived at our location.

We got to the address first which was good. Looking around I would have had no idea where to even go. I didn't see any club around. We waited for everyone to arrive so Jam could lead us to where we were going. We were downtown, but not in any district that has many bars. It was a lot darker, quieter and a little eerier than I was used to. During the day, it would be full of pedestrian traffic. At this hour, it was not the most comfortable place. The tall structures lit up, but the street level was lacking in the comforting glow of neon signs and store front shops. We went halfway down an alley and I am sure I was not the only one who was wondering where the fuck we were going. The darkness began to close in on us and the smell of urine began to fill the air. Jam was going to get us mugged, raped, or murdered. Hopefully not all three, or at least not in that order.

We walked up to this giant metal door. It was unmarked and in the side of a giant dark brick wall. I had definitely never been to this place. It was way off the beaten path. I was nervous. Sometimes these places turned out to be fantastic hidden gems though. I could live next door to the greatest bar



for years and not even know that it existed. You find new places all the time.

We walked through the first metal door and a large man with a beard that would shame a lumberjack was sitting on a stool in a small room next to another door. Jam was saying a few words to him and the big man stood up from his stool and opened the next door. As the second door opened the music became almost unbearable. It was loud enough to kill most conversation. It was also dark, as the room was lit up sporadically with lasers that darted throughout the room. Didn't seem like any trendy hidden pub. It was too low tech. That's when I noticed Candy descending from the ceiling with grace. Guys started whooping and hollering immediately.

Candy was a stripper. A big titted stripper sliding down a metal pole. We were at the peelers.

I was never a huge fan of the strippers. Something about them made me uncomfortable. I think it was the underlying sadness of it all. I wanted to stay out with the group, so I played along. I took a seat next to Jam on perv row, the row of chairs that lined the stage. As close as you can get to the dancers. You could tell Jam liked strippers as he didn't hesitate to grab his chair. We grabbed drinks and continued to chat as if there wasn't a naked girl dancing two feet from us. Jam's eyes did not leave Candy's body, then Jasmine's, then Crystal's. All the while we chatted. Jam was definitely the most interesting character at the party. He had stories from all over the world. For a broke ass kid living off tips from tourists in Montego Bay, he had made a life for himself. I was jealous of him. That may be why I was so drawn to him. I wanted to learn how he did it, how he made it look so easy.

I didn't have as many interesting stories as him. I did tell him all about Canadian strippers though. Canada was the one interesting place I could tell him about that he didn't know. In Canada they take it all off, including the bottoms. They get their cooches right up in your face. Then they do the oddest thing. They have this thing called a loonie, a one dollar coin. It has a picture of a loon on it. They have a toonie which is two dollars with a polar bear on it. The name doesn't make sense. Sounds like someone's lazy

marketing. Anyway, they lick these coins and stick it on their breasts or near their vagina. You take a roll of your own loonies and you throw them at the girl, trying to knock the coin off their body. It's how they make their tips instead of getting bills tucked in their G-string. Jam thought this was hilarious. He swore to me he would make the trip up north to witness it.

We were so busy chatting and watching naked women that we didn't notice the party trickling out. My brother was shit faced and struggled to speak when he tapped me on the shoulder and said he was bailing. Soon it was Jam and I, still pounding drinks and hanging out on perv row.

It was four in the morning when they said the show was ending. The lights started coming on. A waitress brought over our bill and Jam picked it up. I argued, I still didn't understand how he had money, but he paid the tab. I was gracious and tried to give him some cash, but he refused to take it.

We walked outside and were now on the street. They say this is the city that never sleeps, but around four in the morning it can get pretty fucking quiet. The odd car was driving by. Thankfully the odd taxi was too. Before I flagged one down, Jam asked if I wanted a smoke. He pulled out a monster joint. I was far too drunk to say no to something like that. We smoked it and it was not long before I was feeling it.

I was floating in the clouds. My mind was swimming and it felt that I had lost my ability to do basic math, yet I felt capable of understanding the intricacies of the universe. Had we began to start talking it out, I am sure at that moment, I was capable of bringing peace to the Middle East.

With all that going through my head, the only words I managed to muster out were, "Holy shit man, this stuff is amazing."

That's when it hit me. I got higher than ever before with a man I had just met. "Um, what else is in this shit?"

"Dat me mon, is dee purest, cleanest and best ganga that as eva been grown. I arvested it myself earlier today. I call it da red leaf."

"You grew this? Why is it called red leaf?"

"Tell you what mon. Come by me place Sunday. I will be kicking around at home. I'll show you."

He passed me a card with an address on it and turned and walked away. Just like that, I was standing there by myself. I was as high as I have ever been, in downtown Manhattan, in the middle of the night.

I couldn't have felt better.

## Chapter 13

Whatever effect that weed had on me the previous night, it was gone the next morning. It was replaced by the worst hangover I had ever experienced. To be fair, once you hit a certain age, every new hangover is the worst one you have ever had. My mouth was so dry that I didn't think I could open it for fear of cracking. I opened my eyes and managed to focus on the clock. Nine. Too early. Next to the clock on the end table was a giant pitcher of water. Sometimes I am proud of my drunk self. I took the pitcher in hand and guzzled its entire contents. Immediately I put my head back on the pillow and shut my eyes again.

Eleven. That ability to fall back asleep saved my life that day. It was now time to get up.

I was at home which was a surprise. I normally would make my way over to Aida's. She had some stuff to take care of that morning, so I'm glad I didn't bother her by crawling in sometime around five in the morning. More selfishly, I was glad she didn't bother me sometime around seven or eight when she got up to head out. I sat up on the couch and held my head in my hands. I tried to will my body into recovery.

G came walking out of the bedroom looking like a sack of shit. He was moping around in his underwear and shuffling his feet, seemingly unable to lift them off the ground. He was such a skinny bastard, you could confuse his thinness with being in shape. The reality was that his abs popped because there was no meat on top of them. He walked right by me, unaware of my presence and judgements. I had crashed on the couch when I walked in last night and he didn't know I was there. I was watching and listening to him moan and groan with his back to me as he ran some cold water from the sink. He was about to take a drink when I announced my presence.

"Hey," I threw out there.

He jolted so hard his glass of water spilled down his bare chest. Washboard abs he would always attempt to call them.

"Jesus Christ," he yelled, "where the fuck did you come from?" He was now awake. He came over to the couch and had a seat next to me.

"I must have come home last night, I don't actually remember." I was going through my phone, looking for any evidence in a couple texts I had sent last night. "I know it was sometime around five in the morning. I sent a text to Aida at 4:45 to say I was home safe. I got a little fucked up last night."

"You and me both. How bout them strippers? Hilarious little place. I had no idea it even existed. Jam is cool like that. He knows these things somehow."

"Ya, I chatted him up a lot last night. Good dude. We smoked a gagger at one point and I was so fucked up. I think I walked around aimlessly for like thirty minutes afterwards. Some amazing shit."

"I believe it. That man has connections. You should try the shrooms we got off him once. They made you feel like a super stud. I felt like I was a foot taller, looking down at other people. Was some trippy shit."

"Ya, I'm not sure I need that." We sat in silence for a moment, before I wanted to address the mushrooms that he brought up again. "About that G, sorry for freaking out on your last night. I was a little surprised when you sprung that on me. I know we have a pretty good thing going right now, I don't want to ruin it. It isn't worth the risk."

"Hey, I get it. It was a stupid thing to bring to you when I had invited you out for the night. I shouldn't have an agenda when we hang out. I am sorry too." He paused a minute, clearly uncomfortable. He wanted to move on. "What's your plan for the rest of the day?" G asked.

"Not sure. Nurse my wounds I guess. I'm thinking television, couch and quite possibly the fetal position all sound good right about now. You?"

"Well I have to work later tonight. Any recovery I do has to happen in the next six hours. I am working behind the bar tonight, so I want to make sure to do well. Tony is helping me out a lot, so I don't want to let him down."

“You have no idea how happy that makes me to hear you say that.” Seriously, my brother was making an effort. I know he was drunk until two or three in the morning last night, but what bartender isn’t?

My phone rang as I beamed with pride at my brother and it was Aida. She had been out with some friends that morning as she had planned. She was happy to hear I was still alive. When she asked me what I planned to do today, I told her the exact same thing I had told G. She told me to come over to her place to do that. She would take care of me. She would love a day of doing nothing also. G was not going to be getting up to much either, so I said bye and took her up on the offer.

I arrived at Aida's house and she had picked up some sodas and assorted junk foods. They were spread out across the coffee table. All my favorites were there. She was in her favorite lazy clothes, some sweats and T-shirt, and sitting on the couch already. It was an inviting scene.

"Hey babe. This looks fucking fantastic."

“I thought you would like it,” she replied. "Come sit. Take your clothes off if you want."

"You know I do." I stripped down into my underwear and crawled under the blankets next to her. She sat on the end and I stretched out with my head in her lap. She stroked my hair as I told her about the rest of the evening after she had left. She was disappointed I went to the strippers without her. She would have liked to have seen the show.

She reached over me onto the coffee table and grabbed a joint. "I'm assuming you want in on this?" she asked.

"Seems like a great idea."

We smoked a joint together and my hangover started to float away with the rest of any issues I may have had. We put on a movie and ate some munchies, wasting the day away. It was perfect. This girl knew how to treat a guy. I was thinking that I was going to have to remember this day the next time she was hung-over. I definitely owed her one.

When we finished our movie we remained in our horizontal position. I snuggled up to her and we laid there for another hour chatting. Eventually, she steered the conversation to how things were going in my side business. Not that she wanted to be involved in it at all. She was curious how things were working out. I was honest with her and we had a good talk. I think it gave her some relief to talk about it.

The rest of the day was as expected on a major hangover. We lied on the couch and watched several more movies. We smoked a few joints and ate far too much terrible food. For someone who was a health nut, she had a soft spot for terrible snacks. Weed didn't help. As it got later, we fell asleep during a movie. When she woke me up we decided to give up and move to the bed. It was a complete waste of a day, and I loved every minute of it.

She was something special and I was so in love with the girl. I would do anything for her. I would kill for her. I would die for her. Hopefully, it would never come to the latter.

## Chapter 14

Sunday morning I woke up and snuck out of bed without Aida noticing. She had treated me so well the day before that I wanted to do something special for her. I wanted to make her breakfast in bed so I started cooking some food. I didn't make it five minutes before she woke up to the noise and came out to see what I was up to. I had the hash browns on the go and was preparing some bacon for the grill. She came up behind me and put her arms around me as I stood at the stove. It felt relaxing as I closed my eyes and leaned my head back onto her shoulders.

"I was going to make you breakfast in bed," I told her as she kissed my neck.

"How about you come back to bed before making me breakfast?"

That was all I needed to hear. I turned the stove off. Cooking could be started back up later. We made our way into the bedroom and had torn apart the bedding and tossed our clothes in a matter of seconds. Things had escalated quickly.

We laid there quietly intertwined for a few minutes as we tried to regain our composure. She stroked my hair and I stared into the roof without a care in the world. Finally she broke the silence.

"So," she began. She stared into my eyes lying next to me naked, the blankets no longer even near the bed, "Breakfast?" she asked slyly. Teasing me.

"I'll get right on that," I grinned.

She showered up and got ready as I prepared the meal. She came out glowing, telling me how she was waiting for that morning session all day yesterday as I was recovering from my drunk. I was glad I could appease her. I finished up breakfast and served her at our tiny table. We rarely ate at the table. It was nice as we discussed our plans for the week. I had my visit with my new little brother and I was going to visit Jam later that afternoon.



He had invited me over. She was going to go visit Daisy and we would meet up for a late dinner that evening. I was looking forward to it.

My new little brother was this little Japanese kid named Toshi. He was hilarious and I got a kick out of him. He wasn't all that popular with other kids. He was all into dungeons and dragons, reading and history. Toshi would not be fending off the ladies anytime soon, but he was super smart and insightful for his age. I even learned a thing or two from him. If nothing else, I was teaching him a few social cues. He ate up pretty much anything in front of him.

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I had received the invitation from Jam to come check out why he calls his weed red leaf. I had been excited and intrigued even though I was still hung-over from the entire day prior. The things my brother had been telling me piqued my interest. This guy was mysterious. I couldn't help but want to get to know him better. I went to the address he had given me and walked up to this brownstone in Brooklyn. Like most houses in the area it was old, yet the minute you took it all in you fell in love with it. Vines were crawling up the front bricks and there were water stains down the top of the house which added character. On either side of the steps were magnificent flowers. I am not much for this type of thing to explain it well, but I knew it was impressive. There may have been four square feet of soil on either side with concrete surrounding it. It was hard to believe a guy known as the 'Mushroom Man' got to live in a place like this.

I stood in front of the house for some time. It had hit me. What was I even doing there? The short turn of events from two nights prior left me standing in front of a stranger's house who I knew as either Jam or the Mushroom Man. I didn't even know the guy's real name. I wasn't even sure why I was there. I had little recollection of how everything went down. I just knew that I was invited and I had this address on the back of a stripper's card. I thought of turning around and heading back home. I was beginning to sweat. I wasn't sure why I found this guy so intimidating.

I began to wonder why I was so concerned. Those situations are where great stories usually begin. I decided not to wuss out.

I walked up the few concrete steps and searched for the doorbell. There wasn't one. It had one of those old fashion knockers which I had never used before. I guess that was a first. Everything about this guy was an adventure. I took the handle from the golden lion's mouth and lifted it to produce three loud bangs on the door. I stared at the golden lion with a large mane that was intricately designed. It appeared to be expensive, maybe even real plated gold. It scowled at me as I waited.

A few moments later Jam opened the door wide and greeted me with a big friendly hello. This caught me off guard. I don't know what I was expecting. I guess when going to check out a man's drug operation I thought something a little different than this. Maybe a sliding slot in the door and the use of a password like 'the ducks fly north in summer'. At least something a little more sly and discreet.

I walked into the house and Jam closed the door behind me. It was a beautiful, normal looking place. We entered the living room which boasted some vintage furniture that worked well in the space. There was no TV, which didn't surprise me. I didn't expect Jam wasted a lot of time watching television. You could see the kitchen through numerous white archways that made up a hallway lined with full bookshelves. By the bookshelf was a vintage metal spiral staircase that led you to the second floor. Jam told me to take a seat on the couches as I surveyed the living room in detail.

There were plenty of flowers displayed around the living room. I guessed we would be heading somewhere else to show me his red leaf operation. This looked as though he lived with his mother or his girlfriend. I was sure he had said he didn't have a girlfriend the other night. Since my memory was foggy and I didn't want to appear as though I hadn't been paying attention, I thought I would start a little more open.

"You have a beautiful place Jam. You live here on your own or do you have a roommate or something?"

"No mon, I live on my own. I like people and all, but I like my private place to be alone. Ow bout you? You seem to ave a beautiful gurl who was wit you on Friday. Very lucky mon. You ave a future, I can tell dees tings."

"Ya, I hope so. We are basically living together at this point. I would hope to make it official sometime in the near future, now that my brother has a job and can probably support himself."

"Ah yes, G. I like dat man. Eee seems like a straight shoota. You and him seem similar, yet so different."

"Ya, he has had a rough go. He will come out on top though. I am sure of it."

We continued this small talk for a while. Feeling each other out I guess, as our last visit was such a blur of booze and breasts. We started reminiscing about our crazy Friday night. As we did, we got to talking about the end of the evening.

"Well then you pulled out that joint the size of a rocket ship and I got so fuckin high. I think it counteracted the booze quite a bit and I was more high than drunk. Then my hangover yesterday was the worst thing ever," I explained to him.

"Ya mon, I ear you. I should ave sent you a red leaf for dee next day to get you troo. It ese a wonder drug."

"That stuff was amazing," I admitted, "where do you come across weed like that?" I finally asked him.

"Come wit me man, I'll show you ow I do."

I headed to the door thinking we were heading out. However, he waved me over to the spiral staircase by his kitchen. We climbed up and the aroma started to take over. As he opened the door at the top of the stairs, the smell was overpowering. I peered in and all I could see was a forest of red plants. It was almost frightening as it looked blood red.

I could not see any of the walls beyond the plants that were growing in this room. It was marijuana, the smell was unmistakable. The leaves were

familiar in shape, except for their color which happened to be red. Looking closer, the unmistakable bud was still present, and still green, providing a bright contrast on the plants. Some were a few feet tall while others were starting to graze the roof. Covering the roof were many bright lights and tubing ran above each plant, most likely irrigation hoses.

I surveyed the room with my jaw on the floor. I was blown away. I turned and faced Jam, his face was beaming and his smile was from ear to ear. His arms were crossed and he leaned back like a proud papa.

"Welcome to my shop of strange and wonderful tings."

## Chapter 15

"What the hell is this?" I asked.

"It is my farm mon. I ave been piecin it togedda since I moved eere. I afford it by sellin some of my mushrooms on dee side and dee odd bud when dey come in. I ave been tryin to use my experience to grow dee best plant possible."

"How is this even possible?" I was flabbergasted. I began walking through the garden, brushing by the plants. Bud was grazing my cheeks and the aroma was overwhelming. I worried I could overdose by standing in the room. It made no sense, but it was intoxicating.

"I ave studied in biochemistry, cytology and dee genetics of plant structures. I took classes at Cornell for a brief period in botany to learn dee science be'ind it. From der I ave travelled dee world, moving from place to place, culture to culture, where a varietee of plants are grown in a varietee of environments. I learnt so much. It amazes me ow small we ave made dis world but still do not share our information. Not because we are tryin to keep secrets, but because different cultures do not care because dey all tink dey know everytin. It's a crazy world my mon."

I was still walking around the room. Touching. Examining. Trying to wrap my head around it. He kept talking.

"When I came back to dee United States afta six years of travellin, I began to experiment. I ave tried all sorts of fertilizations, chemical treatments and cross breedin great aspects from different plants. Two years of effort and it as allowed me to create dis marvel dat stands before you today."

He was speaking gibberish to me. I didn't understand a fucking word that came out of his mouth. I was more curious how he managed to have such a setup.

"So that shit's crazy and all, but how do you even get away with this? This is a huge grow operation in a place like this."

"Well I ave taken measures to ensure I don't get caught, if dat's what you are asking. I sourced everytin from multiple stores in multiple locations. I have done all dee work myself, so nobodee even knows dis exists, except for one guy and I trust him completely. One of dee biggest issues is dee amount of electricity I require to run dese lights." He pointed at them as if I didn't know which lights he was talking about. The things were blinding me. "I ave a good friend, an electrician dat works for dee power company. He has done some work in dis area. Did it before I even moved in to avoid any suspicion. It's dee reason I live in dis specific ouse. Dee power that connects to dis ouse is a combination of juice coming from dee entire city block. A large increase in power, small when it split between 30 ouses. I also installed a bunch of filters dat I found to circulate all dee air in my ouse out dee roof. As you can tell mon, dis is some sticky weed. I don't need my neighbors catching whiffs."

"Well what happens when someone else notices? A different electrician working this area, noticing the lines not doing what they are supposed to or whatever?"

"I am not an electrician mon. I could not tell you sheet about ow it works. I can only tell you dat I ave a friend whom I trust. Ee ese an electrician, and ee tells me dat I am safe."

"Jesus," I was at a loss, so I turned my attention back to the plants. "So why are the leaves red?"

"Dee red leaves are dee brain child of ingenuity and blind luck. I ave travelled and studied many different cultures of marijuana, and I managed to take da best from all to create dis. Dee secrets and ingredients dat lie wittin stay wit me. I show you dis because I want you to feel comfortable standing be'ind your product."

"My product?" My face must have portrayed my confusion.

"Ya mon," he stated matter of fact.

"You want me to sell your weed?"

"You sell already mon, but you sell sheet. Why not sell dee best?"

I sat there dumbfounded and searched my brain for a response. Where the hell was all this coming from? How did he even know I sold weed? What did he know about me? The questions were circling through my head. I stared down into the floor as I tried to process the situation.

"Why me? You met me two days ago? How can you trust me? How can I trust you for that matter?"

"Like I said mon, I ave travelled dee world, met all sorts of people. I believe I am a good judge of people, and you mon, are good people. If dat wasn't enough, I ave asked around. You are well known and it's not for your weed sellin. You ave a good steady job and a great girl. I am not in dis to make a fortune, just to share my weed with dee world and make enough to be appy. I believe you are dee same. Because of dis, you are careful, no?"

"Well ya, but this doesn't seem all that careful."

"Look mon, I ave brought you to my ome. I ave shown you my operation. I am not messing wit you. In terms of careful, I ave some ideas. We can discuss. What you tink mon?"

"I have no idea what to think man. I wasn't sure what I was expecting coming here, but I wasn't expecting this." I was staring around his farm. It was glorious. I had never seen anything like it. I was not sure anyone had.

"Well mon, I can grow dee sheet. You ave tried it and I assume it is dee best you have ever ad?"

"Ya, but," he cut me off right there.

"Look mon, I can grow it. I love to grow it. I don't care about dee money all dat much and I especially do not care bout avin to sell it. I am not lookin to grow any more dan I ave already. I want to keeck back, spend time workin on new tings, and ave someone else look after dee selling and dee money. Can I count on you to do dis?"

## Chapter 16

I didn't know what to do. Things had escalated rather quickly. I was an intermediary of marijuana to friends. This was a legitimate operation that I was not sure I was even capable of being a part of. I would officially be a drug dealer. Jam could see that I struggled with the idea.

"Like I said mon, I am not lookin to make a fortune. I grow what I can fit into my ouse. I have split my entire upstairs into 4 sections. Dere are tree different settings for dee different gestation periods of dee plant. Den a section for dee arvested crops for dryin and bagging." He showed me the preparation area.

He had a small table in the corner next to a whole lot of bud that was hanging from a rack. It looked like seaweed, a tangled mess of green spread like a sheet. There were a couple fans running and placed around the rack, keeping air flowing by, causing the bud to swing to and fro. This was his dehumidifier. On the small table was a scale and some baggies. Not much different than the table in my apartment where G was working. Except where I used sandwich bags, Jam had large freezer bags. This was the big time. There were bags of weed lined up all in clear Ziploc bags. Next to them was a pile of smaller red Ziploc bags and a few green bags. The color of the bags was hiding what was inside them. They were set aside though, as if they were something special.

"What are those?" I asked, pointing at the colored bags.

"Those are dee mushrooms I grow. Dee red are 50 dollars a gram. Most people need tree grams, so 150 for high. Expensive, but almost dee best mushrooms you will evva ave. Make you feel big and strong. Dee green are a special blend. Dey are difficult to make. They cost 1000 a gram. Dose are dee best mushrooms you can evva ave."

My jaw dropped. "1000 a gram? What the fuck?"

"Ya mon. Dey is some amazing sheet. But I don't want to talk to you about mushrooms today. Mushrooms are my hobby. I don't grow much and



it is mostly for personal use. I ave dat andled. Weed is my passion. In regards to dee weed, as you can see I ave a smooth operation rollin eere. By my calculations I can grow and arvest a pound a week all year roun wit a good rotation.”

"A pound a week?" I felt like I couldn't handle any more shocks. "I don't even sell half of that. I am not looking to get rich either, so this is starting to get crazy. I don't think I can even move that volume or need that much heat."

"Why would dis bring more eat? It's dee same ting, just sell a bit more," he retorted.

"You make it sound so easy. I don't sell to someone unless I trust them. And I don't mean trust them to not be cops. I need to trust them not to share or sell to someone who is retarded and could do something stupid. I do this because I make a little extra money and it is completely harmless. I don't hurt anybody. I don't want this to turn into something that could. That's a lot of responsibility."

"You work wit you brudda right? Maybe step back and let im andle a lot of dee face to faces. I ave a feeling you can trust im to nevva breed a word of you or drop your name to anyone."

"My brother can be trusted one hundred percent to not say a fucking word about me. Unfortunately, I cannot trust him to not get himself in trouble. I care about my brother and don't want to see him get hurt." My brother hadn't even crossed my mind yet. He would not be happy with me making any decisions like this without him. For the last two days I have scolded him for trying this exact thing. I would be sending him a terrible message if I went ahead with this. My head was swimming and I struggled to keep up as Jam kept going.

"Well ow bout you keep your brudda completely in dee dark. We don't need to be friends. Just business partners. Ideally we would set tings up and ave no more contact anyway."

We discussed the details of what all this would entail. I wasn't sure how I always got myself into these situations. I wasn't sold on the idea of

doing this, but I wanted to talk it out. So we discussed how it could work. We would do blind drops. I would leave cash, he would leave product. We would never be in the same place at the same time.

I would pay him the same thing I pay my dealer now. Aside from the product changing, and my need to increase volume, not much should change from my end. This could bring in more money on higher volume. I would also have the benefit of selling a way better product. We talked for hours and by the end I started to feel pretty good about the plan. I had let my guard down to discuss it, and Jam took advantage. I think he knew he had me.

"Let us celebrate our new partnership wit a special smoke," he said as if I had already agreed. I tried to ignore his confidence.

"A special smoke? What does that mean?"

"I will show you mon."

We made our way up to another stairwell. This one led us to the roof. On the roof were pigeon coops. Several of them. This man got more and more interesting every minute. Granted, I had not known him for many minutes. Most of them were also spent intoxicated in some form.

"You keep pigeons too?"

"Ya mon. I love dee little rascals. Where some people see pests, I see a beautiful creature. Not to mention I like to run many experiments and dey just so appen to like getting igh. Dee ones in dis cage are of particular interest," he said, as he made his way inside a coop. I stood back hoping he wouldn't invite me in. Just because this was interesting did not mean I enjoyed the smell. I was also not walking into any situation in which I could be shit on.

"What makes these different than the rest?" I asked from the safety of outside the coop.

"I ave tested many different diets on deese pigeons. I ave done some chemical enhancements to dem wit an interestin side effect."

He grabs one of the pigeons and holds it firm in one hand. He grabs one of the largest feathers and plucks it from the bird, then places the bird back in its cage with care. There were scissors sitting on the corner of the cage that he used to cut a piece of the feather end off. He took the feather and stuck it into what was the end of a pipe used for smoking. It had a screen that had been burnt black. I could see where this is going. The bones that make up a wing are hollow and the smoke would pass through the wing. He took the fresh weed he had in his pocket and packed the bowl. He passed me the makeshift pipe ceremoniously with two hands. I was about to smoke through the wing of a pigeon.

"It is a peace pipe mon. We smoke togedda to form a bond. Let us stick to our arrangement and we both shall prosper."

I accepted the pipe and he lit the bud with a match, and I inhaled. There was definitely an odd taste as I did. The weed was the same stuff we smoked the night before. Strong as ever. The taste was the remnants of a bird wing that I found unsettling. I was happy to see him take the pipe from me and hit it himself. I was assured I had not been poisoned. Good sign.

We sat and continued to talk details out. However, we were now high as fuck. Our conversations were now dipping in and out of business and were mostly about life. An hour later I looked at my watch and realized that I needed to get going. I was so high, I was uncomfortable with the idea of leaving. The general public would have me paranoid.

"I gotta go, but shit, I am still so high," I told Jam.

He laughed loud and heavy. "Don't expect dat to stop anytime soon. Like I said mon, interestin side effects. You will be stayin dat igh for a few more ours mon. Get comfortable. Let me see you out."

Who was this guy and how did he manage to do these things? He should have been curing diseases or something. Instead he was a pot prodigy. What a crazy world we leave in. If only people had the right priorities. Meanwhile I was a fucking plumber, high as fuck. Maybe he did have the right priorities.

We got to the front door and he showed me out. He had grabbed a large bag of weed upstairs which he proceeded to hand to me at the door.

“Eere is dee first pound,” he says to me. I had still been on the fence this whole time. Now I was standing at the front door with a huge bag of marijuana in my hands. He pulled another small bag out of his pocket. A red Ziploc bag.

“Take deese mushrooms too, as a gift. Try dem out.” He passed me the bag. I stuffed both into my jacket. I was high and I went along with it. I was so intimidated by him and enamored at the same time. He made it all sound so easy. The extra money would help, but I wasn’t positive I could do it all safely. I was so high. It just kind of happened. Apparently, I was going through with the deal.

“Unfortunately, I opefully will not see you again for a long time. You are a good man, but I need a dealer I can trust more dan a friend. Take it as a compliment mon. If you do ave to talk to me, I ope it is of dee direst situation. Avin said dat, I look forward to doin business wit you. Good luck,” he said as he closed the door behind me.

For the second time in three nights, I was alone in the city after getting higher than I have ever been. This time I have a pound of grass and a bag of mushrooms under my jacket and I left a legitimate drug dealer. I was already running late for my planned dinner night. I knew it would be hard to explain to Aida. Hell, it was difficult to rationalize it to myself.

## Chapter 17

Things had happened so fast there were some aspects I hadn't thought through. First, I had to bring this to G. I spent all day at work the next day trying to think it over. Mostly, I was trying to justify it to myself. G was obviously upset when I told him I made this decision without him.

"What the hell bro? Where is this weed coming from? What am I supposed to tell my buddy who we're getting from right now? How the hell are we supposed to move that much weight? Just the other day you were cursing me out about expanding our business. You are a fucking asshole man." He was angry and ranting on. He made some valid points.

My first step was to roll him a joint with the red leaf and get him to try the weed. That would ease some tension.

I busted up a piece of bud from the huge bag in front of us. "Already breaking your other rules and smoking off the stash," he commented. He was pissed off. I chose to ignore this comment and carried on rolling.

I passed him the joint and a lighter, almost as if it were a peace offering, to let him light it up. He took a deep pull off the joint and held it. He was holding in a coughing spurt and his eyes were watering in his effort. Finally he exhaled and wiped his eyes clean. He knew this was good stuff. He passed the joint back to me for a pull. We finished smoking it in silence. It didn't take long for it to hit him.

"Holy fuck man," G was high as a kite already, "this shit is fucking amazing. Why the hell do you call it red leaf?"

I began to explain everything I could. I had made a promise to Jam to keep him out of it. I intended to keep it.

"They call it red leaf because apparently the leaves of the plants it grows on grow red." I decided to lie and pretend like I hadn't seen the grow-op. "It's some pretty potent shit though. I am not sure what we can tell your guy, but we obviously want to sell this primo stuff over his shit. I don't

know if you can tell him the truth and that we have another supplier. Maybe tell him you decided to get out of the drug dealing business. Can I leave that for you to take care of?" I asked.

G was high. He was staring off into the corner as I was talking to him. He still nodded in acknowledgment.

"Now with this weight, we are going to have to step up our game I guess. We have to quadruple our business. I have made a deal that we will double it over the next month, then double it again the month after that. This first month we will have to look for additional customers. We will also have to find a few people we trust to sell some extra weight for us. Maybe a few of our regulars can be trusted to take a little extra for cheaper and sell some off themselves. I don't think we will have a problem moving this much weight, especially with how good it is. Moving it to people we like and trust may be the difficult part."

"Well, let's start by not being so fucking high while we discuss this," G said, "because I don't think I can trust myself to make smart decisions right now."

Like always, G surprised me.

We decided to sit back and watch a movie instead. G said he wanted to watch a classic, so he pulled out an old cassette. I don't even know where he got a VCR. There wasn't one in my place before.

"I haven't even used this thing yet. Hope it works," he tells me as he is kneeling in front of the TV, prepping the movie. The screen goes black and nothing was coming on.

"Take the cartridge out, blow in it. The VCR and the cartridge. Pretty sure that will do it." He followed my instructions and tried again. This time the movie started. Classic old school shit.

"Why the hell are we about to watch a VHS anyway?"

"Sometimes," he paused, "you just gotta go retro."

We watched some trippy old movie my brother must have picked up from a pawn shop along with the VCR. I was too high to give a shit. I think the movie was awesome. It is hard to tell when you are that stoned. By the time it was done my high was coming down and I had crushed two liters of Coke and a large bag of Lays Dill Pickle Chips. My munchies always got the best of me.

"Okay. How you feeling? Should we figure out this mess I got us in?" I asked.

We sat down and started planning. We had lists that we were making of potential clients and even pros and cons of certain actions we were looking to take. We split the list of people we needed to talk to about moving some product on their own. We were each going to have to talk to five guys about moving a little weed on their own. These were ten people we trusted and would be the safest and also most excited. We chatted about details like the money, and what we would do with it. We would be bringing in much more and I didn't want G walking around in a fur coat or something stupid. After a couple of hours we both felt confident about moving forward with our new arrangements.

Happy with our work, we decided to burn another and watch another VHS. It was classic cinema.

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G had to go back to his dealer and this time tell him he was not taking another bag. Apparently he wasn't too happy about this. I hadn't considered that when talking to Jam. This guy losing a customer who took a pound a month was obviously going to make him angry. G told him we were out of the dealing business and he was going to have to deal with it. I still hadn't met this guy. G swore to me he was a buddy and was harmless and he wouldn't be a concern. He said it would fall to him to deal with it if he had issues.

Off the start all we had to do was transition off the old weed to the red leaf. The guys we were selling to trusted us and they were stoked with the increase in quality. Talking to a few guys who were keen on moving a little bit of product, a small sample was all it took to convince them it was a good idea.

I started picking up our weed and leaving cash for Jam just like we had planned. He left the pound of weed in a box in an alley. He said I would know which one. There were piles of boxes next to the garbage in the alley we discussed. I was looking through them when I saw one at the bottom that had a question mark written on it in felt marker. That was going to be it. I opened it up to find a bag of grass which I stuffed into the collapsible cooler I had brought. I took the money I had stored in the cooler, 2000 bucks, and put it in the box. Jam would be back to pick it up in a while.

The way we had figured, I wouldn't always be available to make the exchange, and Jam didn't want to meet anyone else. It was also in neutral territory, so neither of us was too close to home. It was a quiet neighborhood, and not many homeless rooting around. The garbage men never came until late in the evening, so our marked box should be fine in the two hour span we may be exchanging. If we were to lose a transaction we would revisit this plan. There was a lot of trust involved that we wouldn't screw each other over.

I put the box back in the pile and looked up and down the alley to see if anyone could have seen. There were no windows in this particular alley, so we didn't expect anyone to ever see us working. Jam's plan appeared fine in theory, but I wasn't comfortable leaving cash in a box with no protection. I was worried some homeless man was sleeping in those boxes for God sakes. He said that was the beauty of it. I felt uneasy. I was going to have to trust Jam that his plan would work. I was sure I would hear from him if he was to not get a delivery. For the time being, no news was good news.



## Chapter 18

If I had any fear of moving that much weed, it dissipated in a hurry. There was definitely no issue in moving grass when it was that good. The issue came in vetting all the new people we were selling to. We had to remain cautious. We didn't want anyone who would sell to the wrong people. They could sell to kids too young, people who are stupid enough to drive, or carry a large bag into the wrong place. If those people caused trouble, it could lead back to us. We had to be diligent.

Luckily our regulars started to take more off of us. They must have enjoyed getting high for the first time again. That time when you wondered what the sensation was, and if everyone else was feeling that way. This helped us a lot in getting by those first couple weeks. We had wanted to double our sales in the first month. That was easy. The issue became doubling again the next month.

We had expanded our network as far as we could. We would have to take on new clients. We started by contacting people from our past in roundabout ways. Some were even people we didn't like that much. I even let G talk to Dubs. I couldn't do it because I worked with the guy. Plus I didn't want to deal with him. I had a feeling he smoked but I never brought it up out of fear he would want to talk about it. Apparently he was an easy convert and was ecstatic just to hang out with G. Once he tried the weed he ended up taking enough for him and three close friends. It was actually a big help. I was even more impressed by the fact that he had three close friends.

We had also been getting closer with two bouncers whose clubs we were frequenting. I had a discussion with them that ended well. They could sell, but the issue with them was trying to hold them back. These guys knew people, a lot of people. They made my network look small. They were also way too exposed for my liking. I made them choose three people and explain to me why they would be good customers. There was a lot of confusion from this tactic. It took some explaining, and I almost didn't go

forward with it. They so badly wanted to be involved with red leaf. They abided by my rules.

That was what I was learning. It wasn't about the money for all these people. The profit wasn't life changing. They were just happy to be connected to red leaf. It guaranteed their own personal supply and would make them popular with quite a few people when they pulled it out at parties. They only made a few extra bucks every week, but it didn't matter. It was a status thing. This made my job way easier than expected.

Things were going great in all aspects of my life. Aida and I were doing awesome. G and I were having a blast. There was one weekend Aida had to be out of town. She was visiting a friend across the river. G and I decided to have a party night and finally do those mushrooms in the red bag that Jam had given me. I hadn't done shrooms in a few years so I was a little nervous. They could trip a guy out. My last memories of mushrooms were good though. They can be fun. I was excited to try them again. I had gone back to my apartment to hang out with G. I opened the bag, gave half to G and kept my half. I didn't waste any time. I tossed them all in and forced them down my throat. I chased them down with a beer for flavor.

We headed out to the bar before they kicked in. I was getting increasingly nervous in anticipation. I knew it was going to be crazy. I was getting giddy at the prospect of tripping balls out and about. It would be hilarious. G and I made some plans for if the high started to turn and it got weird. It was always good to have a backup plan when lit in public. We would meet back at the apartment.

G wanted to go to a dance club. It was a club where the majority of people were on some sort of drug. This way we wouldn't stand out all that much. They were either on ecstasy or MDMA. I was never a fan of the stuff. Tough to keep your wits about you, and no adult should enjoy glow sticks that much.

It had been thirty minutes since we ingested the shrooms. They were about to kick in any minute as we walked into the dance club. The club was massive. A wide open space like it used to be a warehouse. The place was dominated by a lower dance floor. Any chance to hang out had to be done

on the balconies surrounding the main area. The dance floor bounced with sweaty bodies jumping and rubbing up on each other. The lights changed every instant, with bright flashes of changing colors. The music was so loud I couldn't even converse with G. I started to second guess our idea of coming to a place like this. I wasn't a huge fan at any time. Now that I had a girlfriend at home, I wondered what I was even supposed to do at a place like this.

I leaned over to G and told him it was a bad idea and that we should go. He only yelled 'Cool' back. I am sure he didn't hear a word I said. He clearly enjoyed the atmosphere as he surveyed the scene in front of us. I had to focus on being a good wingman for my brother. It was tough as the mushrooms started to sweep over me.

My heart rate began to increase rapidly. I began to notice how the lights were moving to the music, dancing with it. The people in front of me were turning into a parade that passed by, all interesting in their own right. I felt as though they couldn't even see me, not while I was in a different world. I started to understand the appeal of the bar. The mushrooms were starting to fuck with me.

The mushrooms had a different effect than what I remembered from my previous experiences. I started to feel gigantic. I was the most confident man in the bar, that was a guarantee. Old feelings of my tough guy persona that I had repressed for so long were coming to the surface. I was strutting around as if to dare anyone to mess with me. I felt like I could have taken on an army platoon. There was an added effect that felt like time was slowing. That only served to make me even more confident. Had a prolific UFC fighter or boxer bumped into me and looked at me even a little crooked, I wouldn't have thought twice.

G and I walked right through the dance floor to the bar on the other side. I was invincible. My shoulders plowed their way through the crowd and opened a space for G to follow behind. We stood in line at the bar and I confided in G, "I am tripping balls man. In a good way. I feel great, like I could take on the world."

"I know what you mean. I was telling you, these things will make you feel ten feet tall. Try to maintain composure," he yelled at the top of his lungs.

G had no interest in moving or picking up women that evening, which suited me just fine. I spent the next three hours people watching. I felt like they were all there just for me. I watched and contemplated life. If I ever felt like I was getting old and it was depressing me, I would have to return to one of these clubs. I watched these young people and didn't envy them in the least. They acted like children. I was happy to have grown out of this, to be with Aida. The prospect of grinding up on any of these girls was disgusting to me. I longed to have Aida there with me.

We eventually left to walk the streets. It was far too much to handle in there for any longer. Secretly, I was hoping to stumble across some street thugs or a mugging. I wanted to come in as the hero and save the day. It had been almost ten years since I had gotten in a fight. I was poised and ready to go at the moment. Not towards anyone though, only someone who deserved it. Those mushrooms were twisting me up. My adrenaline had not been that revved up in a long time.

When we got home I crashed hard. It had been a good evening. Not too eventful, but I hadn't done something like that in a long time. It was fun to try it out again. I was worried that they were too good. You could see how someone would want to keep taking those mushrooms. I had to lay off them.

I would settle for my pot business.

## Chapter 19

Red leaf was gaining a reputation. It was, by far, the best weed one could get in the city. Gone were the days of people talking about Canadian grass or Jamaican grass. The only word out there was about red leaf. I had even started to see a few graffiti tags showing up in some alleys. Either that or some proud Canadians were tagging the maple leaf around town. Although I think they would be too polite to do something like that. 'That could devalue the building eh?'

I should have been nervous that there was so much attention drawn to a product I was selling. The product was making a name for itself. People in our network that we assumed to be tight, were obviously talking. Word was out, and interest in red leaf was not good for anonymity. It didn't bother me as much as it should have. I was too filled with pride. Everyone knew we existed. Nobody knew who we were.

I realize that this pride was dangerous, but I got blinded by the fame of it all. It wasn't even the money. When I walked the streets, though nobody around me knew it, I felt like a big deal. All of a sudden I could see the appeal, why criminals try too hard, get too big. It's not the money at all. It's the pride.

Not that we still didn't want all the money. It turned out my regulars had realized the monetary value of my product. They were definitely buying a lot more these days. I thought it was because they were smoking a lot more. Maybe they were having fun with the new weed and sharing with friends. How else was everyone finding out about red leaf? Turned out an entire distribution channel was setting up below us. We were selling this stuff at our standard fifty dollars for an eighth of an ounce. My buddies/customers were busting it up. Some of them were even adding moisture weight or mixing it with standard stuff. Then they would sell it off to new people. This stuff was so popular they were selling joints at ten dollars a pop. My naivety and my pride had gotten in the way. I was so pumped about being so popular that I was unaware of how much a good strain of weed could go for. I was leaving money on the table. Jam had

given me the same price I was paying my previous dealer so it didn't even occur to me to raise the price of this product. I was a fucking amateur.

My brother was getting all sorts of pressure to bring more weed in and at that time we could keep up with demand. However, it was starting to get out of hand. If there was that much demand and other people were making more money out of it, we were going to have to do something about it. It was simple economics. If supply is low, and demand is high, price needs to increase. The pricing strategy was going to need some tweaking. It was time to gouge those potheads.

I thought I would have to ease people into the situation. My only experience with price increases was through work. In the plumbing business we told our regular customers at least three months before a price increase. That way they could take advantage of any work that needed to be done before it came into effect. People felt like they were getting a deal at the current hourly rate. Then they prepared for the price increase. It was surprising how well they would take the increase after. This was how I learned to do business, so that's what I proposed to G. G set me straight.

We weren't a regular business. We were selling something and we were running short on supply. If they wanted it, they would have to buy it at a higher price. We discussed what would be a reasonable price for some time. Most of the people we were selling to I would have considered my friends. I didn't want to gouge them too. G didn't think it was gouging. It was the market price. He was pretty convincing. He can be pretty damn smart when he applies himself. He even used the word equilibrium price at one point. He had to have done some research online before our discussion. We decided on a fifty percent increase on our bags.

I thought people would be choked. When I went to my first delivery after we had made our decision, I hadn't told them of the price increase yet. I was just going to ask for it when I got there. It was quite a bit more money too. I thought there was no way this would go well. G told me to stick to the fact that we would be able to sell it elsewhere. It wasn't a lie. We wouldn't struggle to get rid of any of it at this point. We didn't want to lose our current customers and have to find new ones either.

I stammered through my explanation to my first buddy I brought it to. I tried to bring up the price increase. I felt uncomfortable and almost a little shameful as I stared at the floor sitting on his couch. I danced around it until I managed to spit it out. My buddy didn't even balk when I mentioned it. He literally only said "Dude, I understand. This shit is the shit." That was that. Tough sale. After that, I portrayed a little more confidence with other people.

Only one of my guys balked at the price. At that point my confidence was up as everyone else didn't have any issues. I told him I would hang on to it, someone else was asking me for more and I would sell it to him. He caved immediately.

This weed was way better than I could have imagined. When you smoked it, it would actually remind you of that first time you got high. When your heart would beat so fast you thought it may leap out of your chest. Then you imagined exactly that happening and you giggled to yourself for a full minute. All that fun without the full blown paranoia that some people get from smoking too much.

The business was so easy when you had the best product. I was now making way more money and I hadn't spent any of it. I was living off my regular salary from my actual job. My day to day job of plumbing was going fine, but it did make me wonder about the necessity of it. With the extra money coming in and no issues, I pushed those thoughts down every time I had them.

It was about time I started taking advantage of my situation. What started off as a shoe box of cash had turned into a briefcase full. There were probably better places to keep money. I couldn't help but keep a briefcase full of drug cash though. It was awesome.

Doing the math, once I got going, I was going to be pulling in approximately 25,000 a year, tax free. I could definitely get used to that. Especially this easy money. I didn't fear the police even slightly. We had been careful and I had a good group of people surrounding me. Aida was being supportive of me too. She hadn't asked too much about it around then. She knew I was selling a lot more, but she stayed in the dark when it

came to the day to day activities. I don't think she wanted to know. That was fine. The venture was going great. There was nothing for her to worry about. It was time for us to celebrate. I had started it for her after all.



## Chapter 20

I decided to finally spend a small portion of the extra money I was bringing in. As it was meant to, it was all going to be on Aida. I wanted to take her to dinner and a show. I kept all the details of our evening a secret and only told her that she had to dress nice and I would take care of the rest. She was uncomfortable being in the dark and relinquishing so much power to me. Yet I could tell it excited her.

We decided to have our date night on a Thursday to leave our weekend plans open. I made a reservation at one of the nicest restaurants I could find near Broadway. I brought her to a small and private dining experience that served the fanciest Italian food in the area. We received the best service you can get at a restaurant.

I was getting used to guys fawning over my girlfriend from time to time. She was hot. This particular server was completely in love with her. From the moment we sat down, you could see how he focused his attention solely in her direction. He did not treat me with much respect at the beginning. I think guys are hoping that I turn out to be a loser or a jerk. They want to think they have a chance or to tell themselves that the girl wouldn't be their type anyway. At least that is what I used to do all the time. Since he spent more time at our table, the waiter started talking to us a lot more and he began to fall in love with me as well. By the end, he bragged about how awesome it was to serve the two of us and how much he enjoyed our company. He pulled a complete one eighty on us. We received a free bottle of wine and a free dessert. Shit like this didn't happen to me before I started sitting beside Aida. She had this attraction about her that people loved. Not just hot, but beautiful.

The food was impressive and it started our night out perfectly. We had to move on as I had all sorts of plans for us that night. I told her we would go for a walk and watch all the tourists who were gawking around on Broadway. We both cracked jokes as tourists all rubber necked their way through the streets.

Having grown up in NYC it was weird I had never seen a Broadway show. They had never interested me. I never wanted to waste my money on one. However, Aida loved Broadway and I had never taken her to one. She had been talking about this one show for weeks. We were passing the theatre and I stopped her outside the theatre. I reached into my pocket to pull out two tickets. She giggled like a school girl and threw her arms around me thanking me. It felt so good to make her happy.

She loved the show, and I have to admit, I didn't hate it. The singing, the dancing, it was much better than I had anticipated. They even managed to have me bursting out laughing on a couple of occasions. I could see myself trying some additional shows. I was growing as a human being. Becoming cultured.

We stopped off for a quick drink after to discuss the show and chat. She had to gloat, making sure to rub in how much I liked it even though I was trying to hold back how much I did. I didn't want her to say 'I told you so'. We didn't last long at drinks. Aida was a bottle of wine and a couple drinks in already. I think she appreciated the night, as she looked at me with lustful eyes. She leaned over and whispered into my ear, "I want to take you home, and make your fucking day."

I paid the cheque.

The morning after, we still had to go to work for one more day of the week. Aida and I went our separate ways in the morning and shared a romantic goodbye at the door of her apartment. She was still appreciative of the expertly executed date night. I had bought some goodwill for a while.

It was an easy day. I was thinking of how lucky I was to be with such an awesome girl. I was looking forward to getting home as we were going to have a night in. Aida would have to wait a little while. I had a few errands to run after work.

I had to make a few drops to some buddies and then I headed to the grocery store for a few items for dinner. I was walking down the sidewalk when a group of guys started walking towards me. They were standing abreast taking up the entire sidewalk. I got annoyed by people that did not

have common sense on proper sidewalk etiquette. I decided if they were not going to file into a single line on their side of the sidewalk, I was going to walk right through them. I looked up to make eye contact with the guy standing in the middle and he was already looking right at me. This was not coincidental eye contact. There was intent behind it. I began searching my memory for where I might have met this guy because it appeared as though he might try to talk to me. I gave a quick scan over him to try and figure it out.

There was no way I had met this douchebag before. If I had, I would have remembered him. First off, he was a ginger. I never forget someone with red hair. Especially when he had the bushiest eyebrows I've ever seen. They looked like two moustaches that had migrated to above his eyes. He was also wearing a leather jacket with metal spikes and studs all over the back. Not the typical wardrobe of people I intentionally meet or hang out with. I was thinking that maybe I had done a job in his house before, but he doesn't look like the type to even fix a leak. Even if I did a job for his mom, he would have been in the basement listening to his Skrillex. There was no way I knew him.

This made my resolve to walk right through this group stronger, keeping my shoulders tight. As I approached them I maneuvered to work through a hole between Skrillex and one of his companions. This leather jacket wearing ginger sidestepped to stand directly in front of me.

I was not about to get mugged by this petty street gang. Granted, this guy was big. He had seen the inside of a gym, and more likely, himself in the mirror at the gym a lot. He had taken his share of pricks in the ass too. I don't know if he was gay, he might be, but he was definitely on steroids.

He eyeballed me and said, "Sup? I heard you hang around this area."

The only thing I could muster up was a puzzled look as I met his eyes. Finally I managed to stammer out, "Do I know you?"

The guy stared me down as I got more uncomfortable. It was broad daylight. The middle of the afternoon and people were walking the streets. A few people had even managed to stagger past this awkward group

standing in the middle of the sidewalk. They didn't even noticing how weird the whole situation was. I doubted that I was about to get stabbed or beaten up. Then again, you never know.

The guy finally started talking again with his goons standing behind him looking tough. There were at least three Affliction shirts and two Tap-Out shirts worn among them. I am sure there were fewer skulls in the average graveyard than on their collection of t-shirts. Surprisingly more brains though. They looked like Italians. I am confident these guys dreamed of working for the mafia. It was a shame they were more than likely too dumb. It was sad they settled for this ginger fuck. A discredit to our heritage, too stereotypical.

"You may not recognize me, but I am sure you know who I am."

He was one of those fucking guys. Thinks he is a big deal. He tells me his name. It is never worth repeating. Sounds like a nickname he gave himself even though it would be better suited for his fat lazy pit bull he probably had at home. I still had no idea who this fuck was.

"Sorry man. I am not sure who you are but I am sure that we have no business together. I'm going to head out on my way if you don't mind."

"Oh, but I do mind," he replied as he put his hand to my chest when I made a move to walk by. "For you see, you may not know me, but I know you. At first I ignored your little operation. I know you and your brother were selling a little weed to friends and acquaintances. Nothing I needed to concern myself about. Now, something has come up that we need to discuss."

My eyes had been darting around the group as he started talking, trying to get a read on the situation. With everything he had just said to me, he had now grabbed my attention and my eyes focused solely on his. I was standing rigidly in front of him at a loss for words, continuing to listen to his diatribe.

"You stopped buying. That, I originally could ignore. I got told you were out of the dope business. A man has a right to change vocations if he so chooses. Then I find out you haven't stopped selling, you changed

product. Strike one. Then you get the nerve to try sell my guy some of your new fucking dope. Well that is just bat shit crazy. Strike two. However, I did have a little try at it," he paused for a moment and his mouth curled into an awkward smile, "and it was fantastic. You have got yourself some fine cheeba my friend. So much so, you have managed to raise your price substantially and people are willing to pay it. They want, and are hunting down, your so called 'red leaf' over any standard product. Strike three. Now this is something that gets my attention. Enough so that I took time out of my busy schedule to come and talk to you face to face. I want you to understand the seriousness of this situation. I am going to have to ask you where you got it."

Now it was official. I had no idea what was going on and the situation confused me. We were standing in the street and people were everywhere. I felt the swarms of people rushing around us. I wanted to look around as if to think someone else was as baffled at this situation as I was. Who the fuck was this guy? The situation was going to require some thought and tact.

"Fuck you," I told him.

Not a great plan. It didn't seem all that bad at the time either.

"Come on now buddy. I have come to you, I have been polite, and I ask you this so we can maybe become friends. Is this is how you treat your friends? Tell you what, since you don't know who I am, I am going to give you one week from today. October 31st. Cool? Halloween. How exciting." This guy was weird. He was clearly insane, but he tried to hide it beneath a veneer of creepy friendliness and eccentricity. He continued talking. "One week from today I will have some of my guys come and talk to you. In the meantime you can ask around. Talk to your supplier and maybe you will come to your senses."

Just like that he nodded his head and walked passed. His gang of goombas followed him while bumping my shoulders as they walked past. I believe they were trying to be intimidating. I felt like jumping the last one right then and there and leaving his face looking like one of their fucked up skull t-shirts. It would have been a poor decision, so I stood there dumbfounded instead.

I was going to have to talk to my brother. For some reason I thought he may have caused this, or at least he could explain what was happening. My night at home with Aida was going to have to wait.

## Chapter 21

"I am sorry, you know." G was trailing off. His head was down looking at his feet. "When we first started selling red leaf we had all that extra weight to move. I didn't know how we were going to move four pounds a month at the time. I went to go tell my buddy that we would no longer be taking the half pound off him every two weeks. I told him we were done selling. He was disappointed. After the first two weeks of trying to get rid of that first pound I didn't think I was going to be able to do it. I thought, who better to move weight than the guy who already moves a lot of weight? I went back to him, told him I had got a hold of some new stuff. I gave him a small sample bag and told him to give it a shot. Maybe he would want to take some serious weight off us and we wouldn't have any issues. I honestly thought I was helping."

"You don't think your buddy has a supplier, and that guy has a supplier, and when something like that happens they don't get pissed? Come on, use your fucking head!" I had lost my cool. "How did it even come to me anyway? Why didn't this guy come to you?" I wondered.

G was still staring at the ground in shock. He felt like shit. He should have. I already knew it was his fault. I needed to hear how he fucked it up.

"Look, I had never mentioned you. Not ever. Like you told me. When I went there trying to sell him the red leaf, he had questions. Questions I didn't have answers to because you were keeping me in the dark."

"Don't you fucking dare try putting this on me," I interrupted.

"I'm not. I'm just saying, I thought he was showing some interest in buying the stuff so I had to tell him something. I mentioned that I have a brother and he is taking care of the supply. They must have checked into you. I swear I didn't tell him anything else."

"Well fuck, now what?" I asked, not knowing where we were going to go with this. "What do you know of this ginger douchebag?"

"Just the rumours that go around. He is the kingpin. You hear about him though nobody sees him. For you to have talked to him must actually be a big deal because nobody knows where he even lives. He is the biggest drug dealer in the city."

"These are details I should have known earlier." I stated to G. In reality, I felt pretty stupid myself. I didn't bother to look into where the drugs were coming from when G was getting them. They obviously had to trickle down from somewhere. That's the weird part of the drug world. You only think of the guy you are buying off of. You forget there are probably ten layers of people above him. All responsible to the next just like any large corporation. This guy was the CEO.

"So is this guy dangerous?" I asked.

"You hear rumours and shit. You don't know what's real and what's not."

"Well I need something here G. What do you hear?" I asked. I was getting to the end of my rope with G and his bullshit.

"The rumours say that he is crazy and does some pretty wacko shit. He has fucked some people up. He is supposedly a big fucking dude. "

"I can attest to that. Looked like a roid monkey. I am still confident I could kick his ass, but he surrounded himself with other big roid monkeys. If he was alone I would have painted the sidewalk with his face," I was starting to get angry. My hands clenched into fists and it took a lot of strength to not punch a hole through my own wall.

I calmed myself down and decided I needed to go see Jam to talk to him about this. I had sworn to him that I would never show up at his door unexpectedly. I didn't know what else to do. This was not a possibility that we had discussed. I told my brother not to mention a word of this to anyone. I would deal with it and so I left him there to think about what he had done.

I hadn't seen Jam in a couple months now with all the dead drops. I wasn't sure how he would take me showing up at his front door considering we had discussed it to be against the rules. These were special



circumstances. I didn't even have a phone number or anything for him, so this was my only option. I hoped he was home.

I wasn't too sure about these guys threatening me. My paranoia had me doubling back and jumping on trains at the last moment. I was shoulder checking the whole way. I had confidence I was alone when I walked up to the house again and rapped the lions mouth on his front door. Three hard knocks on the door and I stood on his front porch. The gravity of the situation started to sink in. I became nervous and sweaty. Jam came to the door with a big smile on his face and welcomed me with a loud voice and a smile. It alleviated a lot of my anxiety to have this warm welcome while arriving at his house uninvited.

"Ey mon, good to see you," as he ushered me through the door.

As the door closed behind me his demeanour changed immediately. He did not invite me in or offer me a seat. I was standing in the entrance and he no longer had a smile on his face. He was staring right through me. It wasn't starting well.

"So mon, what you doin eere? You know dis is not what we discussed." His pronunciation was harsh and his words were cut and hard.

Any comfort I had ten seconds ago evaporated in an instant. "I know, I know. I am sorry. Something came up and I needed to bring it to you. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't important."

"Dis betta be good," he told me.

I began to go over the whole situation as it had unfolded to me. Jam listened and did not ask any questions or interrupt me at any time. Once I completed I had to ask him flat out.

"So I think the guy is after red leaf. I don't know if he wants to know who you are so you can grow for him, or if he wants to be taught how you do it or what, but that is what he is asking of me. I just need to know what you think. He says he is going to come and talk to me next week, on Halloween." I waited with bated breath. With what little I knew of Jam, I was sure I knew what the answer would be.

"What dee shit mon?" He finally blurted out. "Dis is exactly what I did not want. I refuse to work for any buddy. I am my own mon. I don't want to expand. I don't want to give away what I ave worked my life for." You could see it started with anger. It was turning to sadness and grief. I felt awful for the situation I was putting him into. I was only thinking of myself until now. He had gone quiet again in contemplation.

"So," I let that linger for a moment as we both knew what was coming, "what do you want me to do?"

"Ee can not ave my sheet. No way. You tell dat mudda fucka it is not for sale. I grow what I grow, and dat is it."

"And if that answer is insufficient?"

"Den ee can go fuck imself. I leave dat up to you to andle. Do not, I repeat mon, do not give up who or where I am."

"You know you can trust me Jam. I will keep this shit under wraps I promise."

I had to leave. There was nothing I was going to say that was going to change his mind. I knew this wouldn't be the end of it though. I didn't think I would be able to say no to this guy and that would be it. I would have to play the cards as they got dealt to me.

I needed to get home. Aida was waiting for me for our quiet night at home together. I thought maybe that was what I needed. Relax and move on like nothing had happened. I was potentially over reacting. What could go wrong?

## Chapter 22

A week came and went. My mind was preoccupied most of the time, wondering what was going to become of my side operation. I went through the motions of the work week. I was hardly present. Was there any threat of violence from this ginger douchebag? Was I going to have to fight my way out of this? Maybe I would have to give up Jam. Was that an option after so many times of me telling him it wasn't? What about just taking off if it came down to it? I thought my mom would take me in. Moving to Canada was an option. I promised Aida nothing bad would come from the dealing. I am not sure how she would have felt about a move to Canada. My mother hadn't even met her yet. The uncertainties were haunting me my entire week.

I had been so careful. We had attempted to mitigate all risk of getting caught by the police. I had not seen this angle coming. I was going to have to protect Aida from my concerns. I wasn't telling her anything about it, so it had to be business as usual at home. I didn't want her to worry about it. It may have been for more selfish reasons. I didn't want her to freak out. It was a delicate situation as I was not exactly living a clean life at the moment. I worried for my own freedom if things got out of hand.

The week was painful. I put on a show for Aida and pretended like I wasn't thinking about this one issue at all times. It was difficult to act. Halloween approached and fell on the Friday. I was going to have to party it up after work to stay acting normal. Like every Halloween, I procrastinated a little too much getting a costume. With a drug kingpin threatening me, I was even more unprepared. It was now five o'clock and I had just finished work. I had somewhere to be at six and I was completely unprepared. Going out without a costume always made you look like a dick that was too cool to get involved in the party so I had to improvise. Since my improvisation skills were poor, I was going out dressed like a plumber. I knew Aida would call me lazy. Everyone else would believe it to be a legitimate costume. That was good enough for me.

I wore a uniform at my job. It was part of our marketing. We had red denim overalls. This was for one reason only. Everyone knows the common stereotype with plumbers. You see the crack of their ass as they worked under your sink. My boss started his company up with the slogan 'We will fix your plumbing without showing you ours'. It was printed on the back of our overalls and was surprisingly effective. Most people knew us by that line alone. That was the reason Aida called us. Lucky me. We also had red caps with our logo on the front and I kept some tools on my belt just to give it a legit look for the costume. The tools were real and expensive, so I had to be careful with them. If nothing else, I had one joke in my arsenal for the night. With a pipe wrench in hand, I could say I was getting ready to lay some pipe.

Since my costume came together effortlessly, I still had an hour to spare. I smoked a quick joint to try and calm my nerves. I had not smoked since running into the ginger. I was trying to keep a clear head. Now that the deadline of his ultimatum had arrived, I was too stressed. It immediately calmed me down. It helped me believe I had been overreacting. I took a long stroll instead of a cab to get to the party at the bar.

I walked passed a long line of colorful characters at the front door. I introduced myself to the doorman and he pulled the rope letting me walk straight in. One of my bouncer buddies had hooked us up. Everyone was in costume. There were no slouches at the party. People went all out as they had amazing outfits. It was only six o'clock and people were already getting hammered. I walked around the bar looking for the group of people I was with. The first person I saw was Aida. She was sitting at the table looking more beautiful than ever. She dressed like a princess. A sexy seductive princess. She looked fucking good. Wearing a tiara with her hair down, she wore a pink dress with silky material that hugged all the right places. The right places being very few places. She had decided to finally join the Halloween trend that had girls going more provocative every year.

She knew how to turn me on. I loved seeing her sit there, unaware I had arrived yet, watching her. It gave me a thrill to know that I would be the envy of almost every guy in the bar, maybe other than that guy

dressed as Elton John. I felt as though that costume wasn't a stretch for him. Much like mine, it was probably already hanging in his closet.

I walked over to my girlfriend and gave her a long passionate kiss. I let my lips linger on hers to let her know how good she looked and to let the other guys in the bar see me mark my territory. She was taken aback by my rare public display of affection and repaid me with a smile that caused me to blush. I took a seat next to her and ordered a beer to kick off the evening.

It was a typical Halloween party night. People were getting shit faced. One of the worst offenders was Daisy. Her behavior was actually getting embarrassing by eight o'clock. Dubs hadn't even got there yet. Aida decided she would have to take her home. She told me to stay and hang out as she was going to have to take care of Daisy for a while anyway. I would also have to wait for Dubs to get there. Just great.

After thirty minutes and a few more drinks, Dubs made it down. Some dinner with a family member had gone long. I had to explain to him what happened to Daisy. He decided he would just hang out with me and my friends if Aida had it under control. I advised him that it was a bad idea. I had to persuade him to go home and take care of his girlfriend. Leave me the fuck alone. It took some convincing, but after a couple beers and a phone call from a sick Daisy, he decided it would be best to go home.

With all that was going on I was thinking I should head home myself. However, it was the best I felt all week. I was surrounded by friends and the vibe was intoxicating. Even more intoxicating was the alcohol. The later the night got, I was sure it was all a big bluff anyway. Nobody was going to come see me. As midnight approached, I considered myself done with it. The more I thought about it, the less it made sense. I was just a 'citizen'. They wouldn't want to hurt me. I was not a 'player'. It wouldn't be right. I was pretty sure that was always how it worked on television.

I partied until around one in the morning at the bar. I had been texting with Aida most of the night to see how she was doing with Daisy. Dubs had come and taken her place so she had gone home and wanted me to join her. I liked the idea and decided to ditch the party.

I took off and thought I could make the walk home instead of getting a cab. I wondered if I should have been a little worried about the threats I had received, but it was past the deadline. Between that and the intoxication, my fears were subsiding. I strolled home without a care in the world

It was an interesting walk as there were a lot of costumes out and about which were quite funny. One guy was walking down the street in just a pair of jeans. No shoes, no shirt, nothing. He was with a group of people so he couldn't have just been homeless. I was curious, so I asked what he was supposed to be.

"I am a premature ejaculator," he tells me. He waited for me to think about it a moment as I didn't get it. "I just came in my jeans," he finished the joke. I had a pretty good laugh over that one. It was clever, but he was probably freezing. I am sure that joke got tiring after telling it a hundred times that night too.

More costumes walked by. Some super heroes, some villains, and the odd guy in drag that made you question his sexuality. Which is fine as long as it didn't it didn't make me question mine. I continued people watching as four ninja turtles approached me. They stopped on the sidewalk in front of me, blocking off the entire sidewalk.

"Excuse me Mikey," I said to the orange one as I tried to slink by.

"Not so fast," Leonardo said.

Raphael held his three fingered hand up to stop me from walking by.

If this was some Halloween skit I wasn't getting it. "The one time of year you guys are on surface and nobody questions you hey? Good times turtles." I tried joking with them. "I'm trying to get home so if you will just excuse me," I tried to walk by again but was still held up by a green three fingered mitten.

"We were sent to come and talk to you. Now that we have some alone time, I think we should have a little chat." Leonardo had established himself as the leader. Made sense.

Realizing what was happening, my tone had to change. "Your boss didn't want to come see me himself or what?" I paused but nobody was flinching. "And what if I got nothing for you huh?" My temperature started to rise and my heart rate increased. I tried to keep my nervousness hidden, but I had no idea where this was going to go. I had been replaying this scenario for a week straight in my head. I started with some of the questions I had thought of.

"What if I don't know anything?" I repeated.

"We don't believe you," he snapped back.

"What if I refuse to tell you?"

"Then we will have to beat the shit out of you," he was growing more agitated.

"What would that accomplish?"

"Enough beatings and you will tell us what we want to know I guess. We were told to come back with your connection, or beat the shit out of you. Luckily for you, you get to make the decision on which one it is. So that is what we are going to do."

These guys were not the brightest but they sure got to the point. They made it sound like a simple business transaction. I didn't like either of my options. I offered them a third option that crossed my mind.

"And what happens if I beat the shit out of you guys?"

They laughed at this. These four were idiots in bulky turtle costumes. I doubted their papier-mache half shells offered the protection the cartoons had. Their limited range of motion would give me a distinct advantage. I didn't think it was funny.

I weighed my options. If I told them about Jam I would be screwing over my business, screwing over Jam and just caving like a chump. My pride did not like that option. I could stay here and fight. If I took a beating I would be in limbo again wondering where that would go, waiting for the next one. If I happened to come out on top in the fight, I can almost

guarantee that they would come back soon and in greater numbers. None of these options were great. There was only one option left. I hoped they didn't know exactly where Aida lived.

I bolted. They saw that coming. They were hot on my heels. However, the papier-mache was causing them issues as expected. I was outrunning them, but not by enough. I was half drunk and my lungs and legs were failing me early in the chase. It didn't help that I was wearing a full tool belt. It was bouncing around as my thighs slapped the tools around.

I had been walking home down a quiet side street so I turned the corner and brought the chase onto a main road. I was hoping to get lost in some crowds. It was late and it wasn't busy enough. The turtles were still right behind me. I didn't think I was going to win the stamina race. I had to try losing them. I saw a hotel coming up with a doorman out front so the doors would still be open. I ran right by him and he yelled after me. I sped by so fast he could do nothing about it. The four turtles plowed through him and all crashed at the front door. I took a moment to look around the vintage boutique hotel lobby. It had been around a long time. Updates and renovations made it look fancy and expensive. Not his usual clientele, the front desk clerk stared at me with confusion as I was clearly flustered, scanning the room. I saw the door for the stairs. My brain didn't reason with it. It saw an option and I made for the door.

I kept climbing stairs, all the while wondering where I was planning to go with this. I should have been trying to come up with a plan. Instead, I proceeded to run up the stairs as fast I could. They were in the stairway following me. The only thought I could conjure up was how stupid this was to further corner myself. I hit a dead end when I hit the roof access door after five floors. I ran at full speed and put all my weight into the door to barrel through it. I hope that door was locked. Otherwise I destroyed my shoulder and crushed every one of my vital organs for nothing. With little breath left in my lungs, I picked myself off the floor (or roof or whatever, not sure how that works). I scanned around for somewhere to run or hide. I could hear their footsteps still coming up the stairs. Aside from a few vents there was nowhere to go. The neighboring building was at least twelve stories taller. The hotel was on the corner so I peered over the other side to



the pavement below. I didn't think I could survive that leap. These guys needed to beat the shit out of me to teach me a lesson, but I think I would keep my life, so that option was out. I ran to the front of the building and was peering down when the four turtles made it through the roof entrance.

Leonardo was trying to say something, but he was right out of breath. "Come on man.....don't make this .....any more difficult....." he stated between gasps.

I took another peak over the edge at the front of the building. I was thinking I could make it. I was pretty confident, but wasn't sure it was going to be worth the risk. I turned and faced the turtles and walked towards them. I didn't like that they had weapons. A fight could have ended bloody. Then again, those sais may be a plastic part of the costume. The sword just may have been a handle sticking out. The police would grab a guy with a sword walking around town. Nobody even knows how to use nun chucks. The bo staff looked legit though. A long stick would be an effective weapon, especially against my short pipe wrench. Walking towards them, I thought I was about to attempt to fight them. Looking at the four of them standing on a rooftop, I had a quick change of heart.

I turned and ran towards the front of the building. In a full sprint I planted one foot on the ledge and I launched myself towards the flag pole at the front of the building. Grabbing the pole below the flag, I hung on for my life. As I was sliding down the pole I laughed to myself and thought I was pretty damn funny when I yelled, "So long fuckers!" The four turtles ran to the edge and peered over to see me sliding down the pole. At that moment I went from being proud of myself to deep concern in a heartbeat. I immediately recalled a story from my early teen years.

A kid from my school had climbed on the roof of our school and attempted this very thing. He jumped off a building and rode the flag pole down. The problem was he had forgotten to think of the hooks that are commonly on the bottom of flag poles. The ones the rope ties to after running the flag up the pole. His scrotum had caught the hook and resulted in a lost testicle and more stitches than anyone ever wants near their penis. The answer to which is one, one is too many. With that in mind, I neared the

bottom and I pushed off the pole. I landed with a thud on the red carpeted pavement in front the hotel. For the second time in the last five minutes I destroyed a limb while simultaneously compressing all internal organs. This time vertically instead of horizontally.

The bellman almost shit his pants as he rushed to me and helped me to my feet. He was frantic and asking me all sorts of questions in a loud and hysterical fashion. I didn't have time for this as I knew the four turtles would be rushing back down. Instead I said, "Taxi," and took out a twenty which I shook into his hand. He looked at me confused and asked if I wanted an ambulance instead. I repeated my original request. He had one flagged in ten seconds and I threw myself in and was on my way. I was going to be sore tomorrow but my limbs, and more importantly, my testicles, were all still operational.

## Chapter 23

I got to the apartment and crawled into bed next to my girlfriend. She cooed a little when I snuggled up behind her. My body ached. I felt the strain of the chase all over. It had exhausted me. When she turned and kissed me, I knew that I would have to play through the pain. She had looked damned fine that evening and I hadn't forgotten. It got a little awkward, as getting out of overalls always is. Trying to maintain a shred of romance while taking overalls off is impossible. Once they were off she proceeded to kiss me all over my body. For a girl who had already been asleep this evening, she was incredibly into this. We had sex without a word uttered between us until it was over. After, I held her in my arms and told her I loved her. She caressed my chest and said it back. Moments like this, all my problems washed away. I had a beautiful girl that I loved who loved me just as much, if not more. I was the luckiest man alive.

As I woke up in the morning I had a slight hangover. That was nothing compared to the aches from my chase, the fall, then passionate love making. I felt like I needed a shower so I made my way into the bathroom. I hopped out of the shower and was about shave when Aida hollered at me.

"Don't be shaving that mustache. Today is the first of November and I believe you need to start growing that hideous thing."

Due to recent events I hadn't thought about the Movember thing. I didn't want to do it but I hadn't told Aida about my recent issues. As I didn't want to alarm her I decided not to show any red flags and I reluctantly obliged.

I was still going to have to operate business as usual. We had a nice lazy Saturday where we did not stray far from the couch. She knew something was up, but I played it off as nothing. Part of the hangover. I was thinking about the previous night. I had written them off, but I could see now that these guys meant business. I would have to come up with some sort of plan. My self-appointed 'civilian status' was not going to prevent me from getting shit kicked.

I doubted they knew where I was when I stayed with Aida most of the time otherwise they would have found me there. The fact that they only found me after midnight made me think they were out looking for me all evening. I had to lay low, not go to my usual spots, but still keep myself busy to not scare Aida. The situation was definitely fucked up, but it was nothing I couldn't handle. I believed it was best to keep her in dark until the situation blew over. I was starting to think the worst case was I would have to bail from the weed business altogether. I could maybe take a beating for it. Nothing I hadn't experienced before.

I thought about it constantly while continuing my regular routine. Sunday was traditional stuff. I talked to my mother on the phone for fifteen minutes. She was still unaware of all the crazy activities that had been going on in my and G's lives. She still hadn't met Aida and I couldn't convince her to fly back home for a few days. G and I had told her we weren't coming to Calgary for Thanksgiving that year. We were too busy with our side operation. I thought that would get her to come home. I was wrong. It had been a couple weeks since then. I think she was still sour over it.

I was still doing my Big Brother thing and I couldn't ditch on that responsibility, even with everything that had been happening. Aida was so proud of me for doing it so I had to keep it up.

I had a great visit with Toshi, my other little brother, that afternoon. I had met his mother the previous week and she really took to me and trusted me. I had asked if I could take Toshi off the island to take him to a go-kart track. He needed to try something a little sportier and something out of his comfort zone. It was one of my favorite activities as a kid. This was going above and beyond for the program. I cared for the kid and wanted to do something special for him. His mother was all for it. I had to turn down the money she kept trying to give me for it. I had to refuse multiple times as she shoved it at me. They didn't have a lot of money and there was no way I could make her pay for something I wanted to do with him.

We had a great time and he thoroughly enjoyed himself. He embraced it whole heartedly and giggled the entire time he got to drive. It was

amazing to see the smile it put on his face. Selfishly, I was proud of myself for doing this for him.

On the drive home we chatted about how school was going. There were some bullies that were taking advantage of him. I told him of my own troubles as a kid. The fights, the teasing and the issues with the school. The thing with bullies is that they generally don't stop. You have to be stronger than them, if not physically, then mentally. Sometimes there is one option, to hold out. These people will get what is coming to them. They will get what they deserve at some point and he will be fine in the long run. It is tough for a kid to hear, but sometimes I am not sure there are any alternatives. I hoped the kid could handle it.

After my visit with Toshi I felt drained and was happy to be hanging out back at home. It had been an exhausting week and now I did not know what to expect going forward. I kept trying to think of some pre-emptive move. Something I could do to prevent anything from happening. I was at a loss. I guess I was waiting for something to happen, although I didn't know what.

It left me quite uneasy but I had to soldier on. Business as usual. The next day I picked up my pound of red leaf. It was there as always. I left the cash for Jam and thought nothing of it. I distributed the portions to the proper parties and collected my money. All the while I was the mild mannered plumber working like a regular guy. A girlfriend at home and everything was ordinary to anyone outside looking in. As time went on, it was like nothing ever happened. Three weeks later and I began to forget about the situation entirely. I had not heard or seen a thing. The paranoia faded away and I actually returned to business as usual, instead of just pretending.

My mustache was growing in thicker and thicker. G and I were raising twice the money for Movember as we did the year prior. I think people wanted to keep their good will with their drug dealer. My time with Aida became more natural too. She finally stopped questioning me if 'something was up'.

At my real job, it was the regular routine. I had finished work on the Wednesday night prior to the holiday long weekend. I got to Aida's house and she wasn't home. I sat down on the couch and started to watch TV. I had put about an hour of television down and still no sign of her. She was supposed to be home and I started to wonder what was keeping her. I was not one to be checking up on her. I simply wondered where she was. She was not one to be late without a phone call or even a text. I grabbed my phone and decided to call her. As the ringing began in my ear, I heard her ringtone. It was coming from the bedroom. I walked in and searched the room and didn't see her phone. I got down on all fours and looked under the bed to the source of the noise. A bright light from the phone was illuminating the dust that was collecting under the bed. This was weird. I grabbed the phone and hung mine up. I was staring at it while on my knees beside the bed. I couldn't comprehend what it could mean.

The bed in front of me was made perfectly normal except for a piece of paper on the pillow. She had left me a note. Of course she had left me a note.

“Yo. I kidnapped your girlfriend while you were running around. Don't be a hero, do what is right and just give up the red leaf. She will be safe. Don't do anything stupid. Don't involve the cops. Just deliver what I want. I'll be in touch.”

My eyes went wide and the paper in my hands began to shake. I don't know if it was fear, anger or helplessness. My body was not reacting in a way I deemed appropriate. I tried to convince myself that I was dreaming. This kind of shit doesn't happen in real life, does it? It had to be a joke. Maybe G thought this was funny. When I tried to think of Aida in the hands of that guy, it made me sick. I considered vomiting right there on my knees beside the bed. I swallowed the urge, trying to focus my thoughts.

I stayed there on my knees by the bed for another minute running it through my head. Then I let out the loudest F-bomb I have ever dropped. I started to see red. I was screaming and pulling at my hair. I got up and was running around the apartment. I picked up my phone, ready to place a call but I did not know to whom. Do I call the police? What if they weren't

kidding? Do I call Jam? Shit, I didn't even have his number. It took a lot of restraint not to punch several holes in the wall. The only thing that stopped me was that I didn't want Aida upset about it when I got her back home.

I was going to do anything to get her back. I wasn't sure what I had to offer. I couldn't think. I am not a religious man, but I found myself trying to talk to God. I was back down on my knees, the note still in my hand, looking up to the heavens and begging him to undo what had happened. I had reached a low point, and it turns out, even I could turn to God.

I fell to the ground and was lying down when I burst into tears. I cried. I started to bawl my eyes out like the day I lost my father when I was ten. I lost all bodily control as I convulsed on the ground, taking giant sobs and struggling to inhale.

This wasn't going to help her either. I needed to pull myself together if I wanted her back. I had to do something, and there was only one man I could talk to. He was not going to be happy to see me.

## Chapter 24

I didn't know what else to do.

I went to Jam's house. Again, I doubled back several times. I was careful not to get followed. When I got there, I felt immediately uneasy. Something was not right. The plants that were so beautiful on his front step were withering away. That did not seem like him. I hopped up the three stairs to the door and the familiar lion's face was missing. I put my hands on the splintered remains left behind. Someone had torn it off the door. I knocked. No answer. I waited a while longer and wrapped again. Nothing. I grabbed the knob and turned. It was unlocked.

As I pushed the door open and entered the house, I instantly got sick. It was like all my internal organs had been torn from my insides. It was empty. Both my stomach and the house. I ran up the flight of stairs and peered into the farm, nothing. The irrigation hoses and wiring for the lights hung from the roof. Any trace of the marijuana plants or the man who grew them were gone. On one of the irrigation hoses hung a piece of paper. I snagged it off the line and read it. I couldn't help but hear his Jamaican accent in my head while I read it.

"Ey mon, I'm sorry for aving to do dis. I did not foresee sometin like dis appenin. I know I am leaving you in a tough situation, but I cannot get involved in dis type of ting. I wish you all dee best. Good luck.

P.S. Take deese contents. Dey will elp you along your way."

Taped to the back of the note was a green Ziploc bag. Inside, mushrooms. I was furious. The man had screwed me. I swore if they hurt Aida I would track him down and beat him senseless. If he thought he could make amends by leaving me some of his super expensive mushrooms he could go fuck himself. Jam was the only leverage I had. I wondered if I should search the house, maybe find a clue about where he went. This is why he needed all the separation from me. If things went south, he was ready to bail. This was a plan B he had established a long time ago. I felt



used. He had intrigued me and brought me close and I dove right in. I was fucked. He fucked me.

I stuffed the mushrooms into my pocket and made my way out of the house. I walked to the subway to head back into the city. As I was walking I began to feel uneasy, as if someone was watching me. It was probably because of the six fucking dudes who were watching me. They were not exactly subtle. It's hard to miss six giant muscle heads strutting down the sidewalk, all with the same stupid haircut. These were probably the ninja turtles I met the other night dressed in their other costume. Meat heads. They must have found two new members in the protein isle of a supplements store.

My ability to not have someone follow me had failed. Another failure on a growing list. I went down into the subway and they followed. I went to the far end of the platform and awaited my train. They stood at the bottom of the steps acting nonchalantly as if they were not following and watching me. All the while blatantly watching me. My train arrived and I waited until the last possible moment to squeeze through the doors. They had been standing near the edge of the platform. I hoped they never made the train.

I continued my ride staring out the window as nothingness flew by. Blackness, with the occasional flash of light, streamed past. I was getting back into the city and was several stops from home. I carried on looking out the window, trying to hide my face from anyone on the train. In the reflection, I saw someone sit next to me.

I turned to see Leonardo staring me down and five additional assholes standing over top of me. We were approaching a stop when Leonardo asked me to join him on the platform of the next stop. I got up and exited the train with them. There would be more options on a wide open platform than stuck in that train car. People cleared the platform with few stragglers waiting for the next train. I didn't see any help from these people when we began talking at the far end of the platform. We were a long ways from the stairs.

"Hello there friend," Leonardo said to me. I was maintaining composure at the moment. It would be brief, as I could feel my face going

red.

"Where the fuck is my girlfriend?" I tried to remain calm.

"Where have you been running around to today? Don't you have some pressing matters to attend to?" he ignored my question.

"Shut the fuck up and tell me where she is," my voice got more stern. My hands turned into fists.

"Tell you what, take us to your dealer and I am sure your girlfriend will return home," he demanded. Little did he know that the dealer had skipped town and I knew very little about the man. He was a lost cause. Gone forever. They would never believe it, even though it was true. Letting him know could potentially have gotten me in more trouble. Leaving him to believe that I could still deliver Jam was keeping Aida and me safe at the moment. None of this helped the fact that my blood was now boiling. My fists became tighter and my knuckles were turning white as old feelings started running through my body.

"How about I kick your fucking teeth in? Right after I finish knocking out each of your fucking lackeys. That's my counter offer."

"Even if you thought you could, how would that possibly help Aida? You have one bargaining chip here. It's red leaf. Don't be stupid."

Sadly, he was right. Just because I had red leaf, doesn't mean they couldn't hurt Aida and still dangle her life over my head. I didn't want a toe in the mail or something crazy like you see in the movies. I needed more time to think. My option was down to the same result of these assholes threatening me last time. Run.

The stairs were behind a giant wall of Italian meat. Plus I had already decided not to antagonize them by going through them. I had one option that they didn't expect. I hopped down onto the tracks and started to run.

I took off as fast as I could leaving screams from Leonardo behind me. Four of them jumped down onto the tracks and attempted to follow. They were obviously working on just free weights because their cardio was atrocious. This time I wasn't full of alcohol and I lost them immediately.

I was jogging down the tracks when I started to feel some vibrations. This clued me into a problem I had not put enough thought into. Getting hit by a subway was not one of the ways I wanted to go. I started searching for a way out, just in case I couldn't make it to the next platform. The goombas might have been trying to get there from the surface themselves too. I found a giant metal door in the tunnel and decided to take it. City workers must assume people aren't dumb enough to walk down there, as I was surprised to find the door unlocked.

Now I was walking through absolute darkness. I had no idea where I was, or where I was going. I kept following the tunnel, wondering if I was walking towards or away from any potential exits. The only light I had was my cell phone, whose battery was dangerously low. The glow of the phone bounced off the smooth solid cement walls of the corridors. I took my time as I searched for any signs of light or exits. I was alone. I was lost. Despair struck and I couldn't keep my composure. I found myself sitting on the floor, in the complete dark, and crying my eyes out. I had never felt worse. I don't know how long I was there for. It could have been several hours. I had to keep moving. I hit my cell phone for some light. Nothing. It was dead. I was completely consumed in blackness.

I made my way through the tunnel cautiously, feeling my way through. A few twists and turns and I found myself in the sewer. Not exactly what I was going for. As I walked through the stench and heat, my hand remained on the wall to guide myself through the tunnels. It was so dark, my biggest fear was tripping and falling and getting more than just my feet wet. I wandered for another hour, possibly two. It was difficult to keep moving. I was tired and worn out. I felt like lying down and giving up. The only thing motivating me was thoughts of Aida.

At one point I slowed to take a break. I leaned against the wall and I felt something give a little. The bricks moved. I pushed at the brick as hard as I could and several bricks fell in behind the wall. I began to push over all the bricks and a door took form. Behind it, there was a ladder to surface that was covered in vines. It must have been unused for some time now and they bricked up this particular entrance. I was sure there was some reason for them to block up this exit. At that point all I wanted was out of the stink

that filled the sewer. I could keep venturing on through the dark of the tunnels hoping for the best, or take what could be a shortcut out of there.

I began to climb up the ladder through the thicket of vines that were growing around it. Kicking my feet in and digging through to grab the rungs, I made my way towards the moonlight streaming through a grate at surface. Using my back I pushed up the heavy grate that was keeping me from escaping the tunnels. With all my effort I managed to squeeze through the space, catching only my foot and losing at least the first three layers of skin on my ankles. I looked around and saw myself surrounded by chain link fence. It was like I was in some sort of cage. Looking around I saw a door. It had a lock on the outside. Luckily I always carry a small tool (habit of the trade) and it happened to have a utility knife. It took some aggressive digging, with my hands barely squeezing through the cage, but I managed to pry open the lock and free myself of the cage. I finally felt like I could breathe again.

I was walking out of the complex when I had a realization of where I was. Looking around there were plenty of trees towering the area. There was only one place in the city like this. Looking at the fences and other facilities I realized that I was in Central Park. The zoo. At this point I started to worry about security. Also, because it was the middle of the night and in the park, I feared for almost everything else. I bolted as fast as I could in hopes that nobody would notice I was even there.

As I made my way back home I reflected on my situation. I had been threatened on numerous occasions, had to evade those goons twice, and my girlfriend was missing. All those pricks were responsible. It was time to go on the offensive.

## Chapter 25-1

I went to Aida's and regrouped. It was five in the morning when I finally walked into the apartment. I had been walking for hours. Intertwined with emotional outbursts, my body begged for rest. I needed to lie down on the couch to gather my thoughts. I closed my eyes for a minute as I processed all the information that was hounding me. Embarrassingly, I fell asleep. All the shit that was going on, and I took a nap. People in movies and TV shows always vow to not rest until they get someone back, but being that angry and confused is exhausting. It just kind of happened. I awoke several hours later and jumped off the couch. I needed to do something.

I didn't exactly have a plan. I only thought I should get some more one on one time with the guys in this organization. I didn't know where to start so I decided I could start by chasing down the weed. I assumed that G's buddy that was originally selling us weed was somehow connected. When the ginger knew so much about us and what we were doing, he had to have heard it through him. G had told me he was timid, a shy guy, I could most likely count on him for some information. It was time that he and I finally met.

I had known where he lived as I had required that information from G in the first place. I wanted to know where to find him in case anything had ever went sideways. This wasn't a scenario I had imagined. I wasn't sure how to proceed, so I walked up to his place and I introduced myself at the door. I don't think he had a clue what was going on. There was no way he would be that excited to meet me. His excitement also told me that G told him more than he was ever supposed to. He invited me in and I immediately told him the whole story why I was there.

“What the fuck man? I hope you know I have nothing to do with this. I didn't even know I was getting it from that guy. I just get it from some punk a buddy had introduced me to. I thought I would just get a pound for myself to share with my friends, and G and I were talking about it, so I told him I

would get an extra pound to share with him. I never asked my guy where he got it from. Thought I was better off not knowing, you know?"

The guy seemed upset. He was not a drug dealer. He lived in a nice apartment and looked like a decent guy. Down to earth. He was a buddy of G's and got caught up in something. That didn't mean he didn't involuntarily fuck things up. I still had questions for him.

"Is that why you told him about red leaf? Where it was coming from?"

"Well I mentioned it to my guy. It was amazing stuff. G had brought me over a small amount, thought maybe I could sell some for him, but it was a small bag. I thought I could make some more money if maybe my guy could get his hands on some. He told me he would eventually, but that I wasn't allowed to take it from G. Otherwise I could be cut off. I didn't mean any harm by it."

"Nobody ever fucking does." I responded. "I am going to need to talk to your guy. Where can I find him?"

"There is a stash house he uses. Not that far from here. It's a small little apartment in Harlem. The windows are blacked out with garbage bags. It's a sketchy little place. The guy is a punk. I would be surprised if he knew anything. His name is Larry. You will recognize him as he has a mohawk thing going."

I stood up to leave. There was no reason not to trust this guy. As I was walking out he called after me.

"I'm really sorry man. Tell G I really am."

I had stopped, turned around and was staring at him. Maybe I should have enlisted his help or something. Instead, I nodded at him and shut the door behind me as I left.

I was making my way to the dealers place, walking down the sidewalk. I noticed a crowd gathering ahead of me. They were all staring up at the scaffolding on a building being renovated. As I was on a mission I tried not to pay too much attention. However, the crowd was growing and there was something odd about the situation. There was a lot of banging and shaking

of the scaffolding and I swear I could even hear monkey noises. The city can be weird so I didn't concern myself and continued to walk. Maybe they were filming a movie or something. That's when a five gallon pail fell from above and landed in front of me. I was already in a bad mood and could have beaten the shit out of whoever let this happen. It could have prevented me from finding my girlfriend had I gotten injured.

I looked up and sure enough there was a fucking monkey loose in the city. He was swinging around the pipes of the scaffolding, jumping from one section to another. He was a quick son of a bitch. There was what appeared to be animal trainers on top of the building and down on the sidewalk below. They were attempting to trap the animal. They had no idea what to do about the situation. The crowd was watching this whole ordeal. Almost all were laughing at the spectacle.

The monkey was going nuts as they closed in on him. He was beginning to throw whatever he could find at anybody who was getting too close. This was a crazy scene to witness. I stood there in awe watching this monkey bouncing around. I overheard the conversation with what appeared to be the animal experts and a police officer that had arrived at the scene. The monkey was in a temporary holding cage at the Central Park Zoo and it managed to escape due to a defective locking mechanism on the gate. He had been on the run for about thirty minutes.

Fuck me. There was a good chance I was responsible for that debacle. I thought of trying to lend my assistance. I decided against it as I had more important things to attend to. If this monkey had kidnapped my girlfriend I would have thrown his ass off that building. Right then I had to keep my priorities in check. How hard could it be to subdue a monkey anyway? At least the building was not on fire and was structurally sound. I was sure they would figure it out. I left that mess behind and set out to do what I intended. Find a drug dealer.

The rest of my walk was uneventful as I marched through the streets of NYC. It was a bright and sunny Thanksgiving afternoon and the streets were busy with tourists. I turned off the busy thoroughfare and headed towards the apartment building I was hunting down. At the address given to

me there were ten units in the place. I noted the one with garbage bags in the window. I rang every buzzer except that one. A few people called down asking who it was, but the door still buzzed and I was allowed entrance to the building. You could always count on one person to have little care for the security of their building.

I walked up the stairs and down the hall. The carpet stained with all sorts of mysterious fluids. It was gross and made my patience thin. I approached the door and I realized I didn't know what I was thinking. Maybe it was because of how bad it smelled in there, maybe it was how gross and moldy the door was. I didn't want to even touch it by knocking, so I booted it down. It crumbled at my feet in the fucking shithole of a building.

There was one tiny little man inside, sitting at a table with a giant bag in front of him. He was splitting his bags up. He immediately jumped up from the table and faced me. He was the punk I was looking for, mohawk and all. He was so scrawny. He tried to compensate by trying to look tough, or at least what he thought tough looked like. His torn up black jeans were more like capris, showing off his tiny chicken legs. His vest only accentuated how skinny he was. He had more metal attached to his face than hell raiser and I would have thought the weight would have made him top heavy and cause him to tip over. Worst of all, he had giant spacers in each of his ears. I knew I would actually enjoy this.

"Where is my girlfriend?" I thought I would be direct to see if he knew anything. A light bulb definitely went on as he immediately knew who I was.

"Who are you and what do you want?" He tried to sound tough. The fear in his voice betrayed him. I stared at him before he continued talking unprovoked. "I am sorry man, but your girlfriend must be in a different stash house."

"So you know who I am then?"

"Listen man, I've just heard rumours. Everyone knows about this new red leaf stuff and everyone is talking about it. I had heard there were plans



in the works to get to the supplier so we could get in on that shit. Yesterday I heard some rumours that they found the guy and he wasn't giving it up so they were going to hold his girlfriend hostage until he did. We would have this new red leaf in no time. Dude, I have nothing to do with it man. I am just a dealer. I couldn't even fathom doing something like this man."

"What do you mean you couldn't fathom? Look at you, you are a tough guy." I was laying on the sarcasm thick. "You are a big drug dealer. I am sure you get up to all sorts of nefarious business. You must be rolling in dough to live in a place like this." I began moving towards him and he was growing nervous.

"I don't even live here man. I just rent it to do my business." This stopped me in my tracks.

"Are you fucking serious, why the hell would you want to come here?" I couldn't understand this. "You could catch an STD from taking a leak while standing up. The clap is probably strong enough to swim upstream. Why the hell would come here?"

"Look, it doesn't fucking matter. Why are you here?"

"I came to find my girlfriend, so where do I find her?" I asked as I inched closer to the guy.

"I have no idea." His hands rose up with both palms out, attempting to slow me down.

"Well, where do I find him? You know who I am talking about and don't fucking lie to me. I will squeeze the life out of you if I have to."

"How should I know man? I swear. I don't know where to find him," he pleaded, "there are layers to prevent this kind of thing. I get mine from a guy, who gets theirs from a guy and so on. My guess is the boss has her."

"How do I get to him?" I was now standing directly in front of him. His hands were now down at his side. He was well aware of what I could do to him.

"Seriously dude, how am I supposed to know? I am at, like, the bottom rung. I am a peon, I'm nothing." He was now shaking, and pleading with me.

"Well who do you get your weed from? How many layers are there?" At this point I had both my index fingers wrapped through his spacers in his ears. I was gently pulling at both of them as his ears were gradually pulling away from his face.

He told me everything I needed to know without flinching. I had the name, description and address of the dealer he bought from. From what he had heard, there were eight layers, at least seven more dealers above him. Guys weren't supposed to ever know more than one layer above. It kept the distance to the top. While I was at it, I asked him why he came to this shithole apartment, it was bugging me. The little fucker lived with his parents. He was a privileged little bastard pretending to be a bad ass. He attended private school. He was damn near crying after he spilled all the beans to me. I let him know if he had been lying, I would be back to rip his ears right off his head. His parents would question the new look.

The cops are at an unfair disadvantage when trying to crack down on drugs. It is not like it's hard to find drugs. That is all you need to start. Find some drugs and climb the ladder. Everybody has a boss. They just have nothing to bargain with when dealing with these guys in the confines of the law. However, when faced with either telling you who they work for or strangling the life out of them, they always talk. Sometimes it's almost impressive how fast you can get them to spill it. This was one of those times.

## Chapter 25-2

The kid had given me enough to find the man I was looking for. The man was supposed to be so fat that it would be impossible to miss him. He made it sound like I was looking for a sumo wrestler, except he was black. That was a weird thought. I wondered if there had there ever been a black sumo wrestler. I eventually looked it up. Emanuel Yarbrough.

I was walking to the address which wasn't far away. I was noticing that I could see my breath exhaling from my mouth. It was getting cold and winter was beginning. It had been a long fall and the weather had been nice until now. My mustache was starting to capture the moisture of my breath. Stupid mustache. Even with how much I hated it, I wasn't going to remove it until I saw Aida again. I had promised her I would keep it.

When I arrived at the house I could tell it was full of people. This guy was hosting Thanksgiving dinner. There was no way I was going to be able to go in with that many people there. Even though I wanted walk right in and get some answers, a cooler head prevailed. I had to wait it out. It was chilly outside and there wasn't a point in waiting at the house. I left to find a nearby diner. Thanksgiving dinner alone in some shitty diner. Time hardly moved as I tried to occupy myself with the paper, which I read three times over. I waited till eight o'clock when I figured people may be moving on from the festivities. They would retire home to suffer in silence from over indulging.

Approaching the house again, I was happy to see it was much quieter. Then I caught an even luckier break. It was about time something worked out for me. At that moment, a man walked out of the house. There was no question who the man walking out of it was. The kid's portrayal to the man's girth was incredibly accurate. He was coming my way. He wasn't walking towards me so much as waddling. It must have been difficult to move such a mass. It actually moved one side at a time. It was almost a runway model walk, all hips, except it was the furthest thing from sexy. It reminded me of the girl who turned into the blueberry at the Wonka Factory. This guy must have eaten a forbidden dark chocolate snack. He

came waddling towards me, unaware of who I was. Otherwise he wouldn't have walked calmly into the shit storm I was about to bring down on him.

"Morton," I called out to him.

"Do I know you?" His bald head was sheen with perspiration from the thirty second stroll he had taken. With the temperature as low as it was, he was still sweating profusely. If it wasn't for the layers of fat insulating him, he was a high candidate for hypothermia.

I began to ramble, waiting for it to click with the big man. "Maybe. Maybe not. I am sure you have heard of a guy at this point. The odd rumor about some guy and something called red leaf. Maybe how this guy has a girl, and this girl has gone missing. You might not know the man, but does this story sound familiar? Hell, maybe the man even knows you."

"Listen man, I don't know what you are talking about," he said as he turned and started to walk away, back towards his house. I called out after him.

"Seems weird you're going back home then Morton. Seems to me like you were headed this way ten seconds ago."

I looked around the street. Not a lot of pedestrian traffic. If shit turned ugly the odd bystander may stick around. Generally you can trust a lot of New Yorkers to turn a blind eye. Even if it happened right there in the streets.

I started to follow him down the sidewalk. I could see him attempt to speed up. Faster and faster until his entire body was moving like a waterbed. He busted into his version of a sprint and I busted out laughing.

"Really Morton? You are going to run from me? Where do you think you're fucking going?"

I caught up to him immediately and passed him. Then I turned around as he was still waddling along and I started to back pedal in front of him. I kept chatting with him as I walked backwards in front of the big man.

"Listen to me Morton. Most of the time people in these situations say things like, don't worry, I am not going to hurt you." I was still back peddling as he was dripping sweat and breathing alarmingly heavy.

"Stop Morton. Listen. I am going to fucking hurt you, that is, if you don't have a goddamned heart attack first. Where do you think you are fucking going anyway?" I was at a loss for words. This fat fuck couldn't produce any words either, even if he wanted to. He was going to keel over and die. He finally stopped. He bent over hyperventilating, trying to catch his breath. I walked up close to him and put my hand on his shoulder. I was about to comfort him. I felt so bad for him. Then he showed a surprisingly quick maneuver, as he was standing and grasping his arms around me. I found myself in a tight bear hug.

I was not expecting that.

This man was fat and slow as fuck. I don't know how he managed to grab me. When he did, I found out he was strong. He was squeezing so hard that I couldn't muster a scream of shock, let alone a breath. The real concern passing through my mind was that if he fell forward, it would kill me. He probably thought of this too. He would have had a tough time explaining to the police why he was lying on top of me when they showed up though. He would have been unable to stand himself back up.

When he had lunged for me I had managed to keep the arm that I had on his shoulder free. The other stayed trapped between his arm and my body. It was currently crushed into my rib cage. He was grunting and breathing heavy as he attempted to squeeze the life out of me. He squeezed hard enough to stop my breathing. Luckily my rib cage was holding out and he was not squeezing me hard enough to crush my internal organs. That meant I had enough time to react. As I ran out of air I could feel the pressure building up in my body. My eyes felt like they wanted to pop out of my head.

My fight or flight reflex was telling me to thrash about. That would have only served to exhaust me and allow more air to be squeezed from my system. I had one free arm and I had to decide how to use it best. Lucky for me, I focused and thought about my next move. I took my free hand and

brought it back as far as I could. I cupped my hand and swung it as hard as I could over his ear.

He immediately dropped me to the ground and began screaming in agony. He would not hear anything from that ear for some time. There was potential for it to be permanent, depending on the internal damage. Keeping a tight seal with the cupped hand when I struck, I had pressured up his inner ear and most likely ruptured his ear drum. Hurts like hell. I didn't get my hearing back for three weeks after I had it done to me once.

"Sorry about that Morton. You didn't leave me much choice."

"Mmmuuup.....Mmmup," he was making sounds to test his hearing. He was down on one knee with his finger in his ear, wiggling it around in there while his face grimaced.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. It's going to be like a mosquito bite. It will feel great to scratch but it will only make things worse. If fluid starts coming out it will be time for a doctor." I was here to get information from him and I had no problem using violence. What I didn't know was how much he deserved going deaf at this point. I almost felt bad. Maybe it was because I had experienced that pain before. I had sympathy.

"Listen Morton. No more funny business. I came here to find out what or who you know. I know you get your dope from him, if only indirectly, so you tell me how to find him. Or at least tell me who knows how to find him. You don't want to go deaf in both ears over this. If you take it far enough you will end up blind too."

I figured that threat should do the trick.

From there it was too easy. He put up some resistance. The usual stuff about not knowing anything or how much trouble he could get in for talking. They could kick the shit out of him or kill him. In the end he knew that there was no way out for him but to spill the beans. He was lucky too because torturing him was not going to be difficult and may have even been comical. I had so many options. I could have starved him and then left a pile of McDonald's just out of reach. I am sure he would have sold out his mother for a Big Mac within an hour.

The big man stayed down on one knee for the remainder of the interrogation. He was in discomfort with his ear. I moved to the other side of his body so he could better hear me. I remained far enough away that he wouldn't try anything funny again. Shame on me if I were to get caught up with him twice.

I asked him a bunch of questions to which he had few answers for. The guy wasn't a big bad guy or anything. He was in the middle of hosting family dinner and he still had family at his house. He was only running out for ice at the moment. He wasn't trying to be some gangster. He actually told me he wasn't a drug dealer. He called himself an intermediary between friends. I felt terrible all a sudden for his ear. Not every guy is a bad guy.

Since he didn't know much he only told me where he goes to buy his weed. It was a woman. I asked if I should be concerned about her and he told me he wasn't sure. He could see how she could be a feisty one. I apologized to him for the ear again, and hoped that everything would be all right. I wasn't too sorry though. I still stole his cell phone before parting ways with Morton. My battery had died with all my running around and he had this girl's number in his phone. I was going to need it.

I was climbing the ladder. The second dealer. Possibly another six. This was going to take a while. Unfortunately for them, my resolve was high. I headed away from Morton's place. It was perfect timing as I could see fireworks over the horizon. It was Thanksgiving evening and someone was illegally setting them off in a park or their backyard. They lit up the darkening sky.

I looked at them and thought of the celebration. It was a family weekend. I missed Aida. I wasn't going to slow down now.

## Chapter 25-3

It was getting late. Coming up on midnight. I figured the woman could be out at this hour on a holiday weekend. There was no harm in checking her place out. What else was I going to do mid-rampage?

I made my way to her shitty little apartment in Chinatown. The whole neighborhood reeked from the day's activities. At this hour, the lights still lit up the main roads. It was a ghost town in the alleys that were typically packed with people and their shitty wares during the day. A couple blocks off the main road and it got darker and ominous as I walked up to the place. I looked to the apartment window that I believed to be hers. There were no lights on. I thought I could try something as simple as ringing the buzzer. No answer. It could have been a long night if I had to sit there waiting for her to come home. I had one other shot.

I had taken Morton's cell phone, so I figured I may as well use it. Her name was in the address book. I gave it a call. Sure enough she answered. I had no idea what I was going to say. Calling may have been a bad idea. It was loud in the background, and while I knew she was speaking, I couldn't hear a word she said. It sounded like she was in a night club listening to some God-awful house music. I hung up as it wasn't going anywhere. The phone call was bad idea anyway. I sent her a text instead.

*Me: Where are you?*

*Her: What the fuck do you want?*

*Me: I'm in need. Needs done tonight. Got a good thing going. Can you help me out?*

I needed to be as vague as possible. At this point she would have no reason to believe that she wasn't talking to Morton. If I used language that Morton would never use or tipped her off in any way it could have been dangerous. I waited for a response.



*Her: You are not supposed to text me you fat fuck. Be at my place in 15, we gotta make this quick.*

I hid in the shadows for the next fifteen minutes. As a normal human being, I always feared someone jumping out from a dark corner. You are nervous anyone could be waiting for you. It is odd when you become that guy in the corner. I was nervous as the guy hiding too. My adrenaline was pumping as I sat in the shadows and waited.

A few people came walking by during those fifteen minutes. I was never sure which one was going to be the one I was looking for. When she did come by, I knew right away. She had been at a club and dressed appropriately. With a red and white dress on and a big bow in her hair that had a ribbon running down her backside, this girl was ready to party. She made a move to the front door of her building that confirmed it. That is when I stepped out from the shadow.

She jumped and clutched at her chest when I called out her name. After the initial shock I caught her making glances to her keys that were still hanging in the lock of her door. Her eyes were wide and she held her arms crossed to her chest as if to protect her body from me in fear. I totally understood. I was a strange man that just ambushed her at her front door. I could tell she was ready to run. I tried to alleviate her fears.

"Don't worry," I said, trying to calm her, "Morton sent me. I just need to chat with you."

"What did that fat fuck get me into?" she asked.

I stepped towards her. Now that I was close enough to prevent her getting inside, I said "Morton may not be around too much anymore. Not near you at least. I came here for answers, not weed. I need to meet your boss." I grabbed her arm and brought her in closer to me.

I had told myself to keep my guard up. I had made the mistake with Morton already. I had learned nothing. Shame on me. I didn't expect this chick to have it in her so I wasn't prepared for it when she kneed me square in the nuts. My initial reaction was shock as I let out a deep groan and felt myself fold over. She shook her arm free and backed away, trying to catch

my next move. I attempted to straighten up, only to be reminded how much a shot in the nuts hurts. I went down on one knee and struggled to stay upright as I braced myself on the pavement with my free hand. The initial pain is from shock, followed by a brief moment where you think you will be all right. That is when the pain goes from the balls and travels up to the stomach making you believe you may throw up. I swear I could have in that moment had I let it go. Then it continues to move up the body and gets stuck in your throat. You inexplicably start coughing. Finally it hits your eyes. They are shut tight and when you open them, a single tear falls from your bloodshot and watered sockets. I watched through my teary eyes as she turned and started to run away from me. She wasn't moving too fast in her heels.

I controlled the urge to vomit. My testicles had migrated to my throat and I swallowed to get them back down to where they belonged. I ignored the tears that were streaking down my cheeks as I did my best to limp after the bitch. When I finally caught her I tackled her to the ground. I was still reeling from the shot to the nads, so I did nothing but hold on to her while she flailed about. I was breathing deep, trying to compose myself.

I got back to my feet once I had regained some self-control, holding on to her as I straightened up. She was still squirming as I was still trying to get my wits about me. I shook her to get her attention and let her know she wasn't going anywhere. When she finally stopped moving I had an urge to slap her across the face. I had never hit a woman before, but my boys wanted vengeance. I maintained my thirty year streak of not striking a woman. I realized I had sprung up on her and she reacted as any reasonable woman would have. I should have expected that sort of response.

She attempted a new strategy and let out a large scream while trying to writhe out of my grasp. I scolded her. "Shut up! Go sit down and don't do anything stupid." I pointed at a bus bench. I scanned the streets and didn't see anyone watching. No lights flickered on with her outcry. Probably a common occurrence around there. She sat on the bench while rubbing her arm as if I hurt her. I felt like I got the worst of the exchange.

I had already wasted too much time and energy on this woman. I quickly explained my situation as I had to her cohorts before her. I concluded with telling her I needed to find her boss.

"I can't tell you. He will kill me." I was getting real fucking tired of hearing that. People watch too many movies. People should learn that the only real threat is the one in front of you.

"He will be lucky to be around when I get a hold of him. I wouldn't worry about him." My patience was thin and I wasn't giving much thought to my answers.

"And if you fail, what will I do? The guy is fucking crazy."

"You probably have money. I am not robbing you. Go back to China or some shit." I answered.

"I'm from Korea you fucking asshole."

"Oh, me so sorry," I responded with a terrible accent and my hands pressed together as I bowed to her. I knew it was unnecessarily racist. My temper was short and my balls were killing me. I made sure to get nice and angry as I yelled at her, "I don't give a shit what you do. All I know, is I will literally fucking kill you this fucking minute if you don't tell me what I want to hear."

I think this snapped her out of her confusion and self-pity. The flood gates opened as she started spilling everything as if the gears in her head shifted completely.

"I'll tell you who I get my shit from. He is a skin headed Aryan Nation prick. If you were to kill him you would be doing this world a favor. He treats me like shit every time I see him. This is who they put me in touch with." You could see her frustration had been building for some time. I was the catalyst that was unleashing her thoughts. Maybe she saw this as a way out.

"I've tried to switch dealers but I think they get a kick out of this guy. He is a total whacko. I don't know why I even considered protecting him. I

guess I am just afraid for myself. If you don't get him to talk, you have to kill him or run him out of town. Otherwise I am as good as dead."

"Don't worry. I will take care of every asshole that stands in my way."

"The guy is tough not to notice. Anyone with a swastika neck tattoo usually stands out in a crowd. He is a skinny white bitch with a shaved head. They use him for a lot of their dirty work. He keeps a lot of the street people in line. He is not afraid to get his hands dirty. He especially likes fucking with all the colored folk. Fucking prick." Her hatred of this guy was oozing through now. She wasn't going to hold back at this point. We kept talking as she gave me all the details about him.

"If you hate him so much, why do you even deal with him?" People like her confused me.

"I need weed, and he is the only guy they will let me buy from." Her answers were simple and made sense to her, even though they were idiotic to me.

"Maybe you shouldn't be selling weed. Why do you?"

"Shit man, I am just trying to make it, I need money. I can't afford to complain. I got family still in Korea trying to get over here. Do you have any idea how costly that is?"

"Well then get a real job, or at least a new supplier. This one is going out of business. Make better decisions," I told her, talking down to her. I was growing tired of excuses.

"Says the guy who let his girlfriend get kidnapped. Worry about your own shit."

That actually hurt to hear. My motivations were not the best either and definitely caused me issues. I was already learning my lesson the hard way and I didn't need to hear that shit. Not from her.

"Watch your mouth. You don't know anything about me."

“Fuck you. You probably have a cunt of a girlfriend and you deserve all this. I hope she is getting raped and beaten for all the shit you’ve caused.” It was like she switched gears again. Maybe she was bipolar.

“Cut that shit out right now,” I yelled at her as I stood up from the bench. She was getting more aggressive. Maybe she sensed that I didn’t have it in me to be violent with a woman. She stood up, getting in my face and becoming more confrontational.

“You fucking pussy. I don’t know why I have even told you anything. You think you are so fucking tough. You are probably going to get killed for all this. When you do, I am going to find your grave and take a piss on it.” Things had turned quickly. I couldn’t even understand it as I already had what I wanted. I gave her a look that basically equated to ‘whatever’ and turned to walk away.

She grabbed me, spun me around and dove in for a kiss. Right on the lips. I went to push her away but at that moment she grabbed onto my cock. Not in a nice way. She may have thought someone could enjoy that, but I was not pleased.

I slapped her across the face. I didn’t feel great about it. I didn’t feel bad either. A thirty year streak ended. At least my balls were freed and were avenged. They rejoiced.

She sat back down on the bench, rubbing her cheek looking incredulous.

"Are you embarrassed? You look like your blushing." I joked about her cheek turning bright red from the impact of my hand.

"Fuck you," she retorted. She didn't find me funny. This made me laugh. This bitch was insane and I had little empathy for her.

It was now getting real late. I didn’t have any more time to deal with the broad so I left her there on the park bench, holding her cheek. It was on to the next dealer. I was going to have to surprise this guy in the middle of the night. It was well past midnight. Black Friday.

## Chapter 25-4

I grabbed a cab and gave the driver an address to the next stash house. The fourth dealer. At that pace things were going to catch up to me. I had been squeezed into a near coma, kneed in the balls so hard I was still struggling to swallow and now I was going to some skin head's lair. Shit was getting progressively worse. I leaned my head against the window as I watched the city go by. The buildings and streets got darker and sketchier as we drove.

The cab driver dropped me off and peeled out of the neighborhood. It was not pretty. This piece of garbage lived in an apartment building that looked like it housed some of the lowest people in the city. You would think some of these Aryan Nation mother fuckers would notice some correlation with what they do and how they always live. I guess that is why they are so angry. Not to mention this building was in an ethnic neighborhood. Do they choose to live amongst those they hate, or is it why they become this way? Blame those around them? It makes little sense for them to live there. It's like someone with a peanut allergy working in the Planters factory. Something I will never understand.

I walked through the building's security door that was no longer providing much security. It was off its hinges and hung more like the dilapidated screen door from the deep south. I closed it behind me with care. I was afraid it would fall off and wake the whole building.

It was late and I was at the point where my brain was not working as well as it should. I was not sure how to approach the situation and struggled to concoct a plan. I walked up a few flights to his door at the top of the stairs on the third floor. I was standing at this door, staring at it. I was at a loss. It was two in the morning. I tried to think, instead I knocked with conviction. I was continuing to improvise.

I heard some shuffling around. He was in there. I could hear the muffled curses as he moved about and came to the door. He opened it up and I saw this man for the first time. He had been sleeping and he answered

the door in a pair of boxer shorts, exposing his numerous tattoos. The majority of them were hate related. There was anger in his eyes as he narrowed them at me, furrowing the brow of his shaven head trying to figure out who I was. He stared at me and with a scowl on his face he directed his yelling and cursing at me.

"Who the fuck are you and why the fuck are you knocking on my door at two in the fucking morning?"

I threw a quick punch right in his fucking face. I could already tell there was going to be no negotiating. Not with this fuck. I was going to have to beat it all out of him. Needless to say I caught him by surprise. One minute he is sleeping, the next he is eating my fist. Tough night for him.

That must have woken him up. He was surely confused but now he was coming at me. He fought wildly, like a rabid dog. Although he had clearly done this before, he fought with pure strength, determination and ability to take a punch. He lacked discipline. You have to fight with your head first.

He wound up for haymakers to try land that one glorious punch to end it. These telegraphed so far in advance. A simple step to the side or keeping ones forearms up to block the attack was all it took to avoid any damage.

Short jabs were actually the most efficient form of attack even in a street fight. I pulled my elbow back keeping my forearm straight and continued to throw them right at the soft bridge of his nose. I was aiming for blood as soon as possible. The adrenaline would overtake any pain from punches landed and would not slow him down. The sight of gushing blood from ones face would usually incite a response though. This guy only went wilder. He grabbed me by both shoulders and bull rushed me into the wall where we crashed through the drywall. My back left an imprint of where we landed. If we would have hit a stud, that would have hurt.

Both his hands were clutching at my shirt as he tried to jab at my face while not letting go. Although he was giving me a few shots to my chin and lower lip, these were of little threat. He would have to let go to do any damage and that was when I could strike. He pulled his right hand off to

throw a punch and I used my now free left to grab at his bicep and push back. This opened his stance as his foot had to back up with the push to maintain balance. That is when my knee came up and had a direct shot into his balls.

I have been in a lot of fights and have won the majority of them. One of the reasons was because I had no issues fighting dirty. The more they deserved it, the less I felt bad about it. He keeled over but didn't go down to the ground. He doubled over and turned his head up to me and I brought down my right hand onto the side of his face. This time he went down. I thought that might finish him. I underestimated how resilient this cock sucker was. He began to rise up and I didn't want to give him a second of recovery time. I took the three steps that were between us in a half run and tackled him back down to the ground. We wrestled for a short time. The few big shots he had taken left him in no shape to manage the fight. I got on top of him and I unleashed a flurry of punches down on him as he squirmed and attempted to block them with his hands. When I finished raining down fists upon him, I leaned back and stood up over top of him.

He was a sorry looking sight. This guy was lying on his own living room floor at two in the morning, his nose broken, missing at least one of his front teeth with another chipped, and his left eye was swelling up. All of that and he was still only cradling and massaging his balls. He was covered in both of our blood. My blood was dripping from my bloodied knuckles. It was probably the result of knocking out his teeth. I had to remember to disinfect my hands later. This guy was dirty.

He lay there, gasping for air and spitting blood out at the sides. I opened up to talk to him for the first time.

"I know you are hurting. Keep in mind that I can still make things much worse. Tell me how I find the girl."

"Fuck you," he squeezed out. Relentless fuck.

I put my foot down on top of his groin and started to put my weight on it. He started to groan.

"You may want to re-think your attitude."



"Okay, okay," he yelled.

I let off with my foot and took a step back. He started to get up and I didn't see any harm in it. I was confident he didn't have any fight left in him. He struggled to his feet. He was holding his insides and moaning every inch of the way. He stood up only to flop down onto the nearby couch. He was bleeding all over his shitty furniture.

"So you're the guy hey? Red leaf?" he asked me.

"Maybe I am. Maybe I'm a friend of his."

"Well friend, I may know some people. I could get you real close to your little girlfriend. Or at least to the guy who knows exactly where she is. Why should I help you?"

"Because I have no qualms with wiping you off the face of this earth. I feel like it would be my duty as a human being to improve this world. Now I would rather not have to do that to you, as I believe you could maybe turn it around." I was trying to give him a glimmer of hope. I didn't have high hopes for the guy.

"I'll tell you what. I know where you can find a guy who will know. He is a couple steps up the ladder, way up on the chain. Maybe I can give you him."

"How do you know him then? I thought there was separation between the layers."

"If I were to guess, they doubted that I would blow the whistle on this guy. I don't take kindly to police officers or threats. I also don't take kindly to Jews and colored folk either. This guy is the right hand man. When they need shit taken care of in the streets he comes and talks to me directly. I take care of the streets. But this guy needs to go. He is a goddamn nigger. I am tired of taking orders from him. Even, still, what are you gonna do for me?"

"Don't be asking what I can do for you, and start asking what I could do to you. You feel that pain in your balls right now? I will make sure you feel ten times that pain. That will be before I fucking cut them off. How's

that for a start? You aren't getting anywhere in that condition and I got all night."

"All right, all right. You let me go and I'll give him to you. That guy shouldn't have that much money and power anyway. Thinking he can tell me what to do. Guys I need to take care of. He should be on the nigger duties. Meanwhile he is living the high life, pretending to be white. Makes me sick."

This guy was a real piece of work.

"Where do I find him?" I asked.

"At his house or his yacht. He has all sorts of money. The yacht season is over, so I imagine it's in the slip down at the harbour. He stores stuff there in the winter." He was laboring through the words. Spitting blood on his carpet between sentences.

He filled me in on all sorts of information. All the while he was looking around, fidgeting on the couch. I figure he was testing how his body still worked. I was beginning to see that he was plotting something. He was dragging on his details and descriptions as if he was trying to drag this out for more time. Finally I had all the info I needed.

"That is everything I need. For being a good sport about this, I promise I will keep you out of this. Nobody will know you gave them up. Does that work for you?" I wanted to be done with him and it was time to go. As I walked to the door he called out to me.

"Yeah, that works for me. I wouldn't have told you anything if I thought I would let you leave here alive anyway." I was standing in the doorway that was still open. I turned back to see he had gotten up off the couch and was charging at me. He had a knife that he must have had stashed in or around the couch. I was halfway out the door and standing at the top of the stairs. While he rushed at me my only thought was evasion. As he approached I was standing square to him as if prepared to fight him. He was running with such velocity to tackle me that when he lunged I merely side stepped him. A matador escaping the gouge of a bull's horn. He managed to clasp onto my arm with his free hand and pulled me with him

as we both began to fall down the stairs. I managed to grab the railing at the top as my body spread out over the top four steps.

He was not so lucky. He rolled down the steps and collapsed at the bottom. He did not flinch. With the ruckus on the steps I knew someone would peak out of their apartment to see what the commotion was about. I backed into his room. Someone did come out and saw him on the landing. A little Spanish lady in her nightgown came from the floor below and I watched as she turned him over. His own knife lodged into his chest during the fall. The woman screamed and looked around as I backed into the apartment unseen, the door still wide open. I checked out the kitchen window to find a different exit and was happy to see a fire escape. I climbed down as fast as I could and got the hell out of there. The cops would be there shortly.

As I made my way home I thought of anything that could link me to the place. Aside from some of my blood from our fight, and the evidence of the beating he took at my hands, there was nothing. With no reference to compare that strange blood to and no possible connection for them to ever come looking for me, I was in the clear. I didn't kill him anyway. That was accidental suicide, and by God if he didn't deserve it.

## Chapter 25-7

That had been a close call. I needed to keep moving. If Aida was housed with someone like that, she was in great danger and it was my job to protect her. I had little left in me, but couldn't imagine having to deal with another Nazi. I would have to find the resolve as needed.

My improvisation worked pretty well, even if it ended with a dead skin head. I was getting closer, so I decided to keep it up. I had to take a train to the next house as it was nowhere near where I was. There were not a lot of cabs cruising that disgusting neighborhood looking for fares. It took several trains and a cab ride to get to the fancy neighborhood I was heading to. When I finally made it to his place, it was a fancy fucking house too. A mansion some may call it.

It was now four in the morning. I would have suspected to arrive at another quiet house like the last. This guy was still awake. All the lights were on and I could hear music pounding inside. Techno. I thought he might be having a party. I couldn't hear any people and didn't see a whole lot of vehicles around. I was getting sick of all this shit and didn't know what to do. It had worked once before so I went ahead and rang the doorbell.

There may not have been a traditional party happening at the house, but this guy was partying. He opened the door, revealing a short, stocky, clean cut African American male. His pupils were not any larger than two pinholes and I figured him to be coked up. It explained the four in the morning dance party by himself. Aside from that, he fit the part for his house. If this guy was a huge drug dealer he made himself up like any other Wall Street money man. I decided to take a different tactic than I did with the Nazi. I wasn't going to punch him in the face immediately.

"Can I help you?" he asked me, adjusting his cuffs on his suit as he must have thrown his jacket on when he heard the doorbell ring. Maybe he was expecting someone. He was pulling and tugging things straight as if to

present himself to me. It appeared to be an expensive suit, but I was not the guy that got impressed by it. Let alone be able to tell the difference.

"I came to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind." I was sizing him up. He wasn't a big guy, kind of short actually. Put together and well groomed. He would probably be afraid of taking a punch to the face. I was hoping that would work to my advantage.

"You a cop or something?" he asked.

"Nope, just some guy with some questions"

With only that, he waved me into his home. We entered into a large foyer. The classic rich persons house with a large staircase wrapping around the room. There was one small table with flowers on it in the centre of the foyer. He walked in and let me soak it all in. Again, it felt like he was trying to show off to me. I found his willingness to talk to some stranger odd. Once I was inside he shut the door and turned to me.

"What can I help you with?" he asked. The techno music was still blaring upstairs. He ignored its existence and focused all his attention on me.

"Well," I wasn't sure how I was going to begin. He looked like a regular enough guy. I thought I could be straight with him. "I'm the guy everyone has been talking about. The guy with red leaf," as I made quotation signs in the air around red leaf. "My girlfriend has gone missing and I need to find her. I want nothing to do with all this and would like to take her home."

I thought I was being cordial, but the more I talked the more agitated he became.

"How did you come to find me?" he asked. A frown broke on his brow.

"One of your dealers. He told me where to find you. I just need you to tell me where to find my girlfriend." I was trying to become more forceful to see if he would cave. He only got more upset.

"Who? Who told you?"

"It doesn't matter." I replied.

He was getting angry. "It does fucking matter. I will fucking kill him." He was now irate and was beginning to lose his calm and collected demeanor. I had a feeling it was not the best time to tell him he was already dead. The situation was escalating. The tension was telling me I would have to resort to violence again.

"Listen, all I want to know is where my girlfriend is. You tell me that and I leave here without any trouble."

The guy started to laugh. A loud and boisterous laugh. I didn't know what he found so fucking funny. It came across as cocky and I was starting to realize that he was not what he portrayed himself to be. Now I was getting irate. I decided that was enough talk. The laugh sealed it. I took a step towards him.

He kicked me. I literally didn't see it coming. It's not something bar brawlers get into. He managed to kick me right in the face before I even flinched. I dropped to the ground and immediately crawled back on to my feet to reset. His eyes never left me while he removed his jacket, as if getting ready for dinner, and placed it over the stair railing. Somehow I managed to underestimate another cock sucker. I must have been tired, because I was starting to have a poor track record with these assholes.

He turned to face me again and got into a fighting stance, like someone in the matrix or the octagon. It had one way to go now. I ran at him to tackle him to the floor which he defended like a professional. His legs went back as he braced himself by leaning into me and started dropping sharp elbows onto my back. I tried to pull away but he put me in a head lock before I managed to back up. He tossed me aside, wrenching my neck further than I believe it is supposed to go.

I jumped back to my feet and got my hands up. He came towards me and slipped my hands and landed a couple shots in my face. I backed off again, trying to regain some semblance of control. I was leaking a fair amount of blood over my left eye already. I wasn't going to let it deter me. He came at me now, thinking I was weak and he threw a hook that I

managed to counter with a solid shot to his cheek bone. He staggered back. Thank God, he was human.

My celebration didn't last long as he threw a flurry of gut shots. My abs were not exactly developed for this type of punishment. I was going breathless. He then reached down and grabbed my left leg, lifted it in the air, and slammed his body into my chest. It took me down to the floor and removed any trace of wind I had left.

He maneuvered to be sitting on my chest and started raining blows directly to my face. I went limp after the third shot, and judging by the pain and bruising, I would say he may have struck me three more times. I must have blacked out. When I came to he was standing over me. He was asking me questions and rambling on as if I wasn't half dead on the floor.

"The only reason you are alive is because you have the best weed. My boss wants you alive. If it were up to me, you would be dead already. I guess there would be a concern that someone else could start up with red leaf. Whatever, I'm not paid to think," he was rambling. I think he realized this and broke it up by kicking me in the ribs. Fuck me, it hurt.

"So just tell me where to find this weed. Stop making this difficult on yourself," he said as he leaned down and pulled my head closer to his by grabbing a handful of my hair. He pulled his other arm back for what was about to be a devastating blow to my face.

"It's one guy," I blurted out, "and he is gone. He took off when shit hit the fan. There is nothing I can do. I just want to make sure my girlfriend is safe. She has nothing to do with this. Please." I had turned to begging. I had nothing left. This guy had taught me a lesson in fighting in under thirty seconds. For the first time I realized how much trouble I was in. These weren't bar fights, these guys meant business. I was in over my head and terrified.

"You better go find him then. Do whatever it takes to track him down. I'll give you two days and you will come back and see me. If you don't come back, or come back without the information I want, I will personally

cut your girlfriends pretty little throat." He continued to give me instructions. I continued to lie on the floor bleeding.

"I'll be watching you. Don't fuck about. If you try to run, if you try anything smart, next time I won't stop. I will end you, no matter how good your pot is." He paused and walked over to the mantle where he picked up a jewelry box and brought it over.

"I want you to take a good look at this." He showed me a box he pulled off the mantle. Inside was a collection of jewellery, watches, rings, even a shoelace. "This may not look like much, but you do not yet know what it means. This is a piece of every person that has screwed with me. They are all gone now. Gone by my hand. If you fuck with me, I will rip that ugly fucking mustache right off your face and find a way to keep it in here. You understand me?"

He was confident I wouldn't screw him. Also confident I didn't pose any threat to him at this point either. I hadn't put up much of a fight. I tried to pull myself off the floor. My face was stuck as the blood was drying between my face and the tile. I peeled myself back and struggled to pull myself up. First, onto my hands and knees, where I had to stop and take a breath.

"That's it my man. Pull yourself together. I know you can do it," the cocky asshole joked.

I managed to bring myself to my feet, holding my rib cage as I was short of breath. I was staring out through a red tint as blood had flowed into my eyes. The taste of blood was rampant throughout my mouth and I wanted to spit in the worst way. The guy might have killed me if I did. I wobbled my way to the door, staggering and grasping at the wall and tables as I went. He was chuckling behind me.

I wanted to stay. I wanted to continue trying to fight him. I wanted to beg for mercy, beg for my girlfriend. I was done. I was at a loss. I contemplated turning around, telling him everything, start to finish, try to appeal to his decency. I knew nothing would help. I was going home. It was



my only option. Maybe if I tried hard enough, I thought I could even find Jam. I opened the door.

"Don't forget man. I expect to see you soon. Don't let my boss down. However, if you do, you will actually be making me happy. This was fun. Let's do it again sometime."

I was out the door before he finished and began searching for a cab. When one finally pulled over for me he didn't want to let me in as he was afraid of getting blood on the car. I threw cash through the open window and pleaded for a little bit of sympathy as I had just been hit by a truck.

"Why don't you get ambulance? They take care of you." He shouted in some thick foreign accent.

I merely said my address and told him I would be careful not to bleed on his fucking plastic seats.

It was an uncomfortable ride home. Some of that was because he kept checking me out in his mirror with disgust, but mostly because it felt like I had actually been hit by a fucking truck.

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I went back to Aida's house and I hopped in the shower to clean myself up. I rinsed off with water that felt like acid burning my skin. The water flowed off me red and pooled in the drain. As I climbed out of the shower I was afraid to towel off. I stood there naked, drip drying all over the floor in front of the sink. My face was on fire, and I was afraid to glance in the mirror. I took a deep breath and lifted my head. After an ocular assessment of the damage, I concluded that I should be all right. I had no broken bones and most of my wounds would heal with band aids and time. I was still covered in a shit load of cuts and bruises. Worse yet was the terrible unnerving depression that I may have got my girlfriend and I killed. Oh, and hoping for no internal bleeding.

After I got cleaned up I fell onto my bed and immediately drifted to sleep. I had the craziest dream. I was gardening, something I have never done before, and I was picking turnips. I don't even like turnips. A big frog appeared out of nowhere and started hopping towards me. It was like he meant to do me harm so I took one of the turnips and whipped it at him as hard as I could. When it hit him, he exploded into bubbles, like soap bubbles or some shit, and floated away. Freud could impress me if he could analyze that shit. It was probably a concussion from a kick to the face. It was messing with my brain. It was uncomfortable to say the least. I woke up confused in a cold sweat.

Pain replaced confusion in a hurry as my body reminded me of what had happened. Everything hurt. I checked the clock and it was eleven in the morning. I had been out six hours and had wasted more time. My worry for Aida started to compound the soreness. I went through the house to find anything that could dull the hurt. I took the remaining four aspirin in the bottle, but I knew that would not cut it. I was out of everything else. Not even a bottle of booze. I could have called my brother. Tell him to bring something. I was not sure he would react in an appropriate way if he saw me. Best to keep him away from me at the moment.

I was on the couch, contemplating what my next move was. There was no way I was going to find Jam. The man had shown me how clever he was. If he didn't want to be found, I was not going to find him. I had no red leaf and would never in a million years be able to figure out how he made it. I thought maybe if I told him whose it was, they could try track down Jam. Then they could let her go. I would tell them everything I knew about him. The problem was, I did not know that much. I didn't even know his real name. He played this a lot better than I did. Maybe he knew something like this could happen. Even if I gave them everything I had on Jam, I don't think he would let Aida and I go. There was no way he would be that reasonable. I was fucked. I broke down and began to cry again. I had cried more in those two days than all the times since I was twelve combined. I had no idea what I was going to do. As the tears ran down my cheek, the salty discharge ran into my wounds on my face and I began to feel their sting. At that moment I saw the green bag of mushrooms on the table. Jam

had told me they would bring me new life. When I was down they would save me.

Getting high was not the answer. What I needed to do was think and that's not something I have ever done well while on mushrooms. I was convincing myself how bad of an idea it would be, all the way until I had finished the whole bag. If these were special mushrooms, they still tasted like regular ones. Shitty.

If there was one I had ever learned in life, it was that when your girlfriend had been kidnapped, your life was in shambles, and you may be facing an imminent death, you shouldn't do mushrooms. However, in this particular moment it seemed logical. At least it would get me through the next several hours physically. Maybe, just maybe, I was hoping come up with some fucked up idea I haven't thought of yet to solve my current dilemma.

Then it happened. About forty five minutes later after swallowing a bag of mushrooms, they hit me. Hard. At first my body went numb, which made me ecstatic. All my physical pain was gone. My emotional pain was still present. I was going to have to think. I got up and darted around the apartment.

Then my phone rang. I checked the call ID. It was Toshi. Shit. He would want to discuss what we were planning on doing Sunday. I know this was not an appropriate time to talk on the phone with a child. A beat up drug dealer high on mushrooms was not the best role model. I had legitimate concerns that it might be my last time talking to him. I picked up the phone.

"Hey Toshi, I am so sorry. I am going to have to cancel this Sunday. I have so much on the go and I'm so busy. I'm sorry bud."

"Oh, ok. I understand." He sounded dejected.

"I know bud, and hopefully I can make it up to you. I just have some things to take care of. Okay?"

"Okay. Is there anything I can help with?" He was so innocent, if only he actually could. I tried my best to explain it to him.

"No bud, sorry, you can't. Remember a couple weeks ago when you told me about your bullies? Well I have some bullies of my own that I am not sure how to take care of. They are stronger than me."

"Well," he said, "I know you said you have to be stronger than them, either physically or mentally. So maybe you can be stronger or smarter? You said they usually get what they deserve in the end. The question I only thought of later, was what if you were the thing that was supposed to give them what they deserved?"

"I hear you buddy. I'll see what I can do. I gotta run for now though, but you take care. I'll talk to you later okay?"

"Okay," he responded and we both hung up.

I sat there, thinking about what Toshi said.

These guys deserved punishment. I could try my best to sell out Jam. I could go to the police. I could get help from someone else. Then again, maybe I was the man to take them down. On the other hand, I could have been super high at the moment.

I thought about what had happened. I went in there too hot. Too angry. It had been a long day. My exhaustion was no match for his coked up body. I let that cloud my judgment. I should have put some thought into what I was doing. I had no idea what I was getting into. On these mushrooms, I could feel no pain, time had slowed and my thoughts were clearer than they had been for days. I had went in there and tried to fight the guy. That was my mistake. I wouldn't win a fight with him, so why even try? So what the hell was I going to do?

If a guy was bigger and stronger than me, and my cause was honourable, you had to fight dirty. I wouldn't fight this guy, I would ambush him. I wouldn't try punching him. I would kick him in the nuts. If he got me in one of those holds, I'd bite him as hard as I could. This shit was serious. I would do whatever it takes. I was going to have to do something nasty. The

situation called for it. This guy was bragging about people he had killed, he deserved punishment. I am the man that would give him what he deserves. I came to the conclusion that I may have to end the prick's life.

These mushrooms had brought back my confidence. I had no fear and felt stronger than ever. The guy expects me to come walking into his house tomorrow, with my tail between my legs. I will spring on him right away with a new found conviction. I would end this asshole's reign of terror on the city.

I made my way back to the guy's house and all the lights were out this time. I crept around the property with stealth and peered in a few windows. Nobody was home. The Nazi had told me of his yacht and how much time he spent there. I thought that was even better. He would never expect me showing up there. It was in the marina for the winter, so I could count on him being in the slip if he was at the yacht. It was worth a shot.

When I made it to the marina I saw him immediately. He was standing on the bow of his yacht smoking a cigar. I ducked behind some barrels. I didn't want him to see me. I watched him as he finished his cigar looking out toward downtown. Once he went back in the cabin I made my way closer.

I had a plan this time. It was to attack him before he even saw me. Try to land a devastating blow before he even knew who or what hit him. Then I would use any method of fighting I had in my arsenal, which included biting, hair pulling and whatever else I thought would give me an advantage. I was higher than shit on mushrooms and I felt like I could take on an army. Confidence was not going to be an issue, neither was pain. If he landed one of those fancy kicks I would keep going at him.

I crept up to his boat and crawled my way on board. I climbed up on top of the cabin and positioned myself above the door I had seen him go in. So far things were working surprisingly well. He would have to come out sooner or later. Hopefully sooner, it was cold out.

It wasn't five minutes before I heard the latch on the door. I was standing now, ready to strike. He had no idea I was there when he came

sauntering out the door. I jumped down and dropped on him with my knee. He turned when he must have sensed something coming. My knee dropped on top of his head. A good start. He was confused, angry and most likely groggy. He went down to the ground but turned to see me.

"You. You fucking idiot. I'll fucking kill you." Yup. He was pissed. He came at me throwing a number of punches and quick combos. I kept my hands up and took some glancing blows as he moved closer. When he got in tight enough, I grabbed him by the hair. He squealed as I pulled him towards my other fist. He pulled away and a handful of hair stayed in my fist. I tossed it aside and tried to keep on the offense. As I neared him, he threw a kick that landed on its mark in my rib cage. Instead of keeling over, the mushrooms dulled any pain. I caught his leg and spun him around, throwing him towards the cabin. I intended to slam him up against the wall but he wound up crashing through a window. Aiming a body being thrown is not a science. I couldn't argue with the results regardless. I jumped in after him. He was bleeding all over his fancy carpet from fresh cuts all over his body.

I attempted to step in and land the type of punch that ends fights. He was still quick enough to duck the punch, no matter how injured he was. As he ducked, he grabbed my arm and I got spun around and in a choke hold before I knew what happened. It was deep but he was bringing his second arm in to lock the hold when his hand went past my face. I didn't hesitate and I took a chomp at his hand and caught two fingers. His blood ran from my mouth as I clamped down. The hold eased off enough for me to push off. He looked down at the damage on his hands when I grabbed his coffee mug he had on the table and smashed it upside his head. He went down hard. This time he wasn't getting up.

He was out cold. I hoped not for too long, I still needed him for information. I checked his breathing just in case. Luckily I didn't kill him. I decided to tie him to a chair while I had him at a complete disadvantage.

He came to after a minute. I was still tying him to a chair. Confused, he started tugging at the duct tape. You could see he couldn't recall what had

happened. I'm sure his blurry vision finally took shape of me, standing over him.

"You cheap fucking cunt." He spit blood and tried to muster out some additional curses and homophobic insults. He squirmed in the chair, trying to pull free. His chair began rocking back and forth as he got more aggressive.

There happened to be a golf bag in the corner of the cabin. I sauntered over and grabbed a nine iron. I walked back to the pile of human sitting in the chair. I spun the club in my hand.

"Do you even golf? These things are brand new, never used. Do you buy stuff for the sake of buying stuff or what?"

"Shut the fuck up, I will fucking kill you." It made him angrier when I started talking smack about him.

"Do you so desperately want to appear like a normal Wall Street rich guy or what is your deal?" I was still checking out the club. The things cost thousands of dollars and he had never swung them.

"I am rich," he tried to say with pride, even though he was currently bleeding on himself tied to a chair in his own boat.

"Nah, you are a drug dealer and a murderer. Not some classy playboy you pretend to be. You are a gangster. A common thug." It was amazing to see how angry this made him.

"Fuck you. I am an entrepreneur. I came from nothing, unlike most of the old money white boys running around here. I am better than them."

"You mean the guys you want to fit in with? Just so you know, you will never fit in." The guy had a serious problem with his identity. I watched him squirm and struggle to break free from his chair. I would leave him with his demons. I needed to find my girlfriend.

"You showed me mercy once, and I am willing to do the same. Just tell me where I find him."

"I ain't telling you shit!" he was screaming at me.

"I figured you would say that. You know," I paused to jump onto the coffee table in front of his chair and take my golf stance. I did the little golf waggle they all do, "I am not very good at this game. Sometimes I take some big divots, especially with this backwards lefty club," I lined up the club next to his knee. He began to scream random gibberish. I wasn't going to pay attention until he told me what I wanted to hear.

I was swinging with the wrong hand when I wound up the club. I came down with the club head direct to his knee. He let out a blood curdling scream. "Damn," I said, "it's going to be hard to do those fancy kicks you do with that knee now. It is one thing to sacrifice your kicking ability for your boss, but I am much better right handed." I turned the club backwards and lined up the back of the club head to his right knee, "Are you willing to sacrifice your ability to walk?"

He was pleading with me now. Begging me not to do it. I had little sympathy for him since he had such an easy way out. I explained this to him, but I think his hatred for me was deep enough that he wanted to see this through. I took a long slow backswing.

"Stop. Stop. Stop!" he was yelling. "I'll tell you what you need to know."

I thought he would try to skimp on details, tell me obvious lies, but he ranted all about the guy. He was being truthful. He was afraid I would bust him up. Mission accomplished. Not that I was bluffing anyway.

"Now let me go, I gotta get to the hospital man."

I sat there thinking for some time. I didn't know how to proceed. If I let this guy go, he would definitely want to kill me. He may not be capable of doing so now, but when he was healthy he would come after me for sure. This could come at any time. I didn't want to be looking over my shoulder the rest of my life. I had to get rid of him. I didn't think I could kill this guy in cold blood. Not while tied up. That is some evil shit. I wasn't that guy.



I decided on a different fate. Thinking of the trophies, the drugs, the cash, and everything he has between this yacht and his house, he would never get out of prison. I only needed to make sure they found it all.

I took his cell phone from his pocket and started dialling.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I am sorry, but you are dangerous. I can't trust you not to come after me or my girlfriend. I either call the cops, or I kill you. I take it you would rather take your chances with the police." I pressed talk on the 911 call.

I gave them everything as an anonymous tip. He was cursing me out the entire time. Threatening me.

"What makes you think I won't give you up?" He kept yelling.

I asked him what he had on me.

"I no longer have the red leaf. It is gone. I wasn't lying about that. I am now clean. I am just a plumber trying to make his way. All you can do is tell them I'm the one that called you in. I'll tell them you tried to kill me. You showed me your trophies as your little ritual before you killed me to take mine. I escaped after your savage beating," I pointed to my face, "and I will go on to be a hero. I will make the talk show circuit. I will be famous. I may even meet Oprah. Go ahead tell them about me."

I walked out of the cabin and off the boat. He was still cursing my name.

## Chapter 25-8

I was close. Aida had to be there. I had to make it through one more man. I wasn't going to make my previous mistakes though. I thought it through. I surveyed the address that Judo McKickmyface had told me where to find him. It was a castle. Right on the edge of central park. A beautiful four story brick mansion. The place had the structure of an old hotel. I walked by it all the time and had always assumed it still was. Obviously, this guy sold a lot more drugs than I did.

People were crawling all over the place. They appeared to be hired goons. While surveilling the place I recognized some goombas who I had met before. Leonardo came out to talk to the doormen a couple times. I had no way to see what was happening inside the house, or how many guys were in there. It didn't take long before I realized I wasn't going to be able to do this on my own. If I was going to go in to get Aida from this fortress, I would need reinforcements. After some deliberation, I made my way back home.

I went and saw G for the first time since everything started. My face must have looked as bad as it felt. The concern on his face when he opened the door even concerned me. I told him everything. I am not sure what an appropriate action should have been, but G's was only one of pure anger for not coming to him sooner. He was mad at me for not including him since the beginning. He ranted at me for several minutes before I had to cut him off. His concern for me was both valid and adorable, but I needed his help now. That was all I had to say. It didn't matter how dangerous it would be. He was in.

I started to tell him everything I witnessed at the fortress. We were trying to formulate a plan when there was an unexpected knock on the door. I pulled the door wide open to see the last person I had time for. It was Dubs.

"Not now Dubs, I'm busy," I said as I tried to close the door on him. He stopped me and pushed the door open.

"Jesus, what the fuck happened to your face?"

"Don't worry about it," I replied. "I'm busy though, so if you don't mind," I pointed at the door.

"Look, I came here to talk to you about Aida. She hasn't been returning Daisy's calls. Thanksgiving dinner was last night and we were expecting you two. It's not like you guys to no show. Aida isn't answering her phone and yours has been going straight to voicemail. If you want to ignore me, that's one thing. But Aida is important to Daisy and Daisy is important to me, so I need to know what the fuck is going on."

I didn't know how to respond. So G did. He told him everything, even at my interjections. G asked if he could help. A floored Dubs stared at the floor for a minute before responding.

"I'm in. Whatever you need me to do. Let's fuck these guys up." Just like that, we were a three man smashing crew. I was mad at G for bringing Dubs into it, but the extra pair of hands may have been necessary. We all went back to the castle and attempted to formulate a plan.

The fucking goombas were everywhere around the place. There was no way we would be able to just walk in and get her. I came up with a plan. Nobody was a fan of it. Mostly because it was pretty fucking stupid. We kept trying to think of a new strategy, but none of us could settle on anything better.

Fire was our only answer.

We grabbed a can of gasoline from a nearby gas station and strategically placed several puddles around the building when the guards were not paying attention. Then it was time to make it happen. It was five in the afternoon. Between rush hour and foot traffic emergency services would take a couple extra minutes. We designed a couple of molotov cocktails. Gasoline, a dirty rag we stole from the station and some empty glass bottles we took off a homeless man's cart. MacGyvered the shit out of those things. I was now armed with two fireballs.

There were two guards at the front door. G ran up and blindsided the first guy with a right hook that put him on his ass immediately. The second guard came at him and G took off in full sprint. He rounded the corner and passed right by Dubs. That guard didn't recognize the pudgy little bastard, and buckled in half when he took a punch to the nose while in full sprint. Had there been no punch to the face it would have been one of the sweetest dance moves ever. Apparently you look smooth when you lose consciousness and can't control your muscles. Unfortunately, his sweet move landed him on the pavement where Dubs dragged him into the nearby bushes. Dubs was laughing his ass off.

"You see how I folded him in half? You can't punch a man harder," he said with pride.

"I told you this change would come in handy." G said as they both opened their hands to show the roll of quarters they were holding. Punching a man with those in your hand was like hitting them with a brick. All the natural give your fist has is gone. They may as well have used brass knuckles.

It wasn't a bad idea, so I took a roll of quarters off of G.

With the front door guards out of the way, I took one Molotov cocktail, lit the fuse, and ran towards the castle. I threw it at the exterior of the building, lighting all the gas we had poured out. The fire surrounded the structure. Then I ran around to the front door. This was it. I prayed it would work, despite its stupidity. I lit the second fireball. I was about to kick in the front door when I remembered destroying my body going through the roof access door running away from goons before. That had hurt. This time I tried the door. Unlocked. Way easier. Inside the house it still looked like an old hotel. I stepped in to see a large foyer in front of some stairs. I tossed in the second fireball into the middle of the room. Then we waited.

People started piling out of every exit in a hurry. There were guys coming down the fire escapes, out the side doors and even out the windows. A chair flew through one window on the first floor and this mammoth of a man tried to climb out. He struggled and tipped over, flipping out the

window. He was now cut up and bleeding from the broken glass. I was impressed by his ability to keep his cool and not panic.

There was a fair amount of smoke, but the place did not look like it would go up that fast. It was mostly stone. We decided it was better to move quickly though. Dubs, G and I headed for the front door and ran around the scorching hot bonfire I had created in the foyer. Inside, it was spreading fast enough to grab onto the walls and climb curtains. I started to get concerned that it could happen faster than I thought. The bonfire in the middle of the house was burning a round hole in the ceiling above it. I would not feel great about burning my girlfriend alive while trying to rescue her. We had to find her fast.

As we made it up the stairs only a few people remained as they all ignored us running in the opposite direction. Turns out hired goons are worthless when there is a fire. Never trust your life to a man you pay to be brave. I am certain that most are cowards. Otherwise they would have done something with their life on their own. At least the plan was working.

Walking up the stairs on one of the landings was a box on the wall. This was an old hotel. It was an axe encased, the glass saying 'Break in Case of Emergency'. I couldn't think of any better time to do this. I put my elbow through the pane of glass and grabbed the large red axe. I thought it could come in handy. I continued up the stairs. Dubs took the second floor, G took the third floor. Everyone was to sweep the place trying to find her. Then we would clear out before the fire got out of hand. I intentionally chose the top floor. Judo had told me he spent most of his time up there. I guessed he would keep a prisoner nearby.

I made my way through the top floor which had a theme of medieval decorations. There were statues, armor, shields and shit decorating the halls. I carefully made my way through, opening all the doors as I went from one room to another clearing the floor. Nobody had stayed behind. Drugs filled one room and it looked like they controlled all the distribution from there. The room left surprisingly unattended. His hired help was useless. A gym was in the next room. It was all mirrors. Another room housed a huge aquarium filled with what I believed to be piranhas. This guy

was such an ass. Every door I opened made me want to beat the shit out of him even more. Smoke started to fill the hallway. I got to the end of the hall and there were four guys still in the building guarding a large double door. I was heading in the right direction. It was the four turtles. I put my axe down. It wouldn't help me in a situation with four people. It would only slow the process and the fire was already becoming an issue.

No one said a word as I placed the axe on the floor. Two of them came at me immediately. Leonardo and Raphael. They started to run down the hallway towards me. The two others were sure to follow so I needed to make the window of opportunity count. I wanted to take out the biggest guy first. It makes the others nervous. Luckily, Leonardo was the biggest and also the fearless leader, so he was the first to make it to me. One punch was all it took. I felt the roll of quarters break in my hand and they fell to the ground as I followed through on his chin. His jaw broke. In several places. He should have taken his time instead of walking right into it. Raphael was still coming at me. The other two that had begun moving towards me slowed as they watched Leo twitch his leg on the ground. Raph was furious and started throwing a combination of punches. I had to stick to blocking my face. I no longer had the knockout power of my roll of quarters so I was a little more tentative. However, I had to end it quick before the other two came back to their senses. I was blocking the barrage of punches as Raphael got closer and closer to me. He was in so tight I turned on him and fed an elbow to his chin. It stopped him dead in his tracks. He fell to the ground and I proceeded to give him two quick kicks to the ribs, breaking at least one. The next part of my plan required those broken bones. The two incapacitated bodies would need tending to.

The other two guys were standing there, unsure what to do next. I made the decision for them.

"If you guys want to stay alive, and save your friends," I pointed to the two on the ground, Leo not moving and Raphael groaning in pain, "you should leave now and help them out. They won't get out of this building on their own with their injuries. You are going to have to help them. This is your only chance. You don't owe that douche anything." I pointed to the door behind them. "I'll take care of him."

They looked at each other and then nodded in agreement to me. I backed peddled, picked up my axe as they tried to help their buddies to their feet for evacuation. They hobbled by me as I held the axe in ready in case they tried anything stupid.

Once they were by, I made my way to the door they had been guarding. The locked door was nothing an axe couldn't handle. I put my axe right through next to the doorknob. I knew the situation was serious, so I didn't perform my 'Here's Johnny!' yell through the door that crossed my mind. I reached in the hole and unlocked the door.

I went into the master bedroom. It was huge but filled with smoke. There I saw my girl, my princess. My heart skipped a beat as relief washed over me to see her face. The relief was short lived. The douchebag was tying her to a chair in the corner of the room. When she saw me she screamed for me. My heart raced as he stood up from behind the chair he had affixed my girlfriend to. Next to him was a dog, a pit bull. I fucking knew it.

"Nice for you to join us. I had a feeling this was your doing. So you know, I plan on leaving your girlfriend in this chair. That way, once I have beaten you to a pulp, you can lie on my floor and burn to death. You can then still stare her straight in the eyes and admit to her that this was all your fault."

"You don't have to do this, you can let her go. She has nothing to do with this," I pleaded.

"How fucking cliché. She has everything to do with this. You have been running around, trying to destroy my whole network. You are the reason my man got arrested a few hours ago aren't you? You think you are tough? I want you to hurt, to feel pain. I'll make you feel it. Having her here to watch will make it all the better."

He paused and looked down at his dog, "Get'em Boom Boom."

The dog ran right at me. These breeds of dog are ferocious little bastards, but I wasn't too concerned about a tiny dog. I did feel bad that I had to hurt it. The dog didn't understand how his owner was such an

asshole. At this point though, it was me or the dog and I was going to have to do it. I had to stop it with simple timing. As he approached I jumped into the air and came down just in time to place my foot on top of his mouth. It prevented any chance for him to latch on to me. I probably broke its jaw. It had no fight left as it went whimpering and sauntering into the corner.

The ginger was pissed. He no doubt had feelings for that dog. There was a tool belt lying on the nightstand next to the guy. He must have been working on something earlier or he used it for intimidation tactics. Either way he picked the hammer out of the belt and wound up as if he was going to hit Aida with it. She winced and tried her best to pull away, but she was stuck to that damn chair. I let out a loud blood curdling scream, "No!"

"Come on man, your beef is with me. If you take her out, it won't be my fault with the fire. Come over this way, fight me like a man," I put the axe down on the floor.

"Come on you fucking douche. You afraid of me or something?" I pleaded with him, trying to antagonize him.

He started walking towards me. As he got closer he wound up and threw the hammer at me. I wasn't exactly prepared for that. I thought he would want to hold on to the weapon, so I didn't exactly react. The hammer went flying by right over top my head. That could have fucking hurt.

I was still counting my lucky stars from the missed hammer when he stepped into me and punched me right in the guts. I keeled over in agony. Turns out he was big but still agile enough to throw a good punch. I think I wheezed a little.

I had one knee on the floor trying to stand back up when he dropped another punch right down onto my chin. It was still tender from the beating I had taken the day before. The mushrooms had worn off at this point, so it hurt like a motherfucker. Before he could attack again I rolled backwards on the ground to get away. I had to get my feet underneath me once more. I took my time getting up and thought about my next move.

I needed to slow the guy down. I had to target a weak spot, but this guy was one giant muscle. I would have to go for joints, his knees. I thought I



could take a page out of the previous dick's book and try a kick. It may not have been the best time to be trying something new. He was coming at me quick though, and I had to find a way to slow him down. He came in close and I kicked as hard as I could at his right knee. It was successful in the fact that it landed. I am not sure what hurt more though, his knee or my foot. Now we both hobbled after each other. I tried to keep my distance as I backpedalled and let him be the aggressor. I managed to sneak in a few punches as he came within range. When he finally managed to get in tight, we both exchanged blows. It was like he grew tired of it and decided to change it up. He grabbed on to me, picked me up, and threw me. It might have been a distance record. I felt like a rag doll. You wouldn't think that would hurt all that much, but I might as well have fallen from the roof of the building. I coughed and sputtered as he came walking toward me. I needed to recover. I got up and continued to back away from him to pull myself together.

It had become a mess of a fight. I needed to improve to end this quicker. The fire was beginning to engulf the building and the smoke buildup was causing us both to cough and hack. All while trying to engage in physical combat. He came at me again. This time he was at a full sprint and he jumped in the air for a superman punch. I managed to be quick enough to duck under. When he passed me I had a free moment to throw some right hooks into his rib cage and midsection. I pushed him across the room to try keep behind him. He managed to turn himself around but the punches I landed were hard enough that I saw him spit some blood. Something had ruptured. Now I was getting somewhere.

He stood at the other side of the room. I should have made a move at him while I had him hurt. We were both exhausted and bloodied. Many of my previous wounds had opened up, and there were now fresh ones leaking blood down my cheeks. I had landed at least a few damaging blows on him, which was causing his nose to leak. The room was full of smoke. It was seeping through the floorboards in the middle of the room. We were above the foyer where the fire had started. I could feel the floor getting warmer through my shoes.

I was standing between him and Aida and the axe was lying on the floor next to me. I picked it back up. I thought I could maybe let Aida out of the chair if I could keep him back. She would at least get to escape the building while we finished this. I could also try chopping the fucking guy's head clean off too. He didn't give me the chance to get to Aida. He came running at me, even though I had the axe. He threw a punch that looked like he tried to kill me with it. I avoided it and his follow through kept his momentum going another three steps past me. We both stood at the ready, jockeying for position, waiting for the right moment. I managed to maneuver around him so I got back between him and Aida and backed him up to the floor where smoke was seeping through. His eyes were watering and I could see him struggling with the smoke. I wound up and swung the axe with full force. He jumped back and my axe landed in front of him and stuck in the floor.

I pulled the axe loose and he attempted to get closer and closer to me. I wound up swung the axe, forcing him to jump back again. I had to pull the axe out of the floor before he came at me while it was stuck. He attempted several times.

"What do you think you are doing?" He asked. "Put the axe down. It serves you no purpose. You will just keep us here until we all die. Using your words, fight me like a man."

The smoke was venting into the room through the floor and the holes created by the axe. Some loud creaks, moans and groans came from below us. I saw it in his eyes when he realized what was happening. Before he had a chance to move I swung the axe again.

The floor was weak and he was a heavy man. He jumped forward as my axe came down. He landed just shy of the damage the axe and fire had been causing and the hardwood crumbled under his weight. The axe fell through and into the fiery abyss. He managed to catch himself on the remaining floor where a beam was still holding together. He had both elbows up and was dangling his feet below.

He was kicking his feet and trying his best to pull himself up. Without leverage for his legs below, he dangled there unable to lift up his own

weight. He stared at me as I walked over and bent down so I could stare him right in the eyes. I grabbed his two arms and simply said, "Fuck you," and flung him into the fiery four storey hole the fire had created.

I ran over to my tied up girlfriend and freed her from the rope. She threw her arms around me. Unfortunately, I had to tell her we didn't have time for that kind of shit. I was ecstatic to have her in my arms, but with the giant hole in the middle of the room, the smoke had now become unbearable. We needed a way out fast. We checked outside the window, no fire escape. It was out the window in the room next to us. The fire trucks were just arriving. I wasn't sure if we had the time to wait for a ladder with the lack of oxygen about to choke us out. I also preferred not to explain what we were doing in the drug dealer's burning building in the first place. Contemplating a move towards the doorway, something gave way in the floor below us which caused flames to erupt into the room through the hole. I was not too keen on walking around the pit or jumping over. I was unsure of the integrity of the whole building at this point.

As I surveyed the room, I saw the dog. He was still cowering in the corner, whimpering and afraid. I couldn't allow him to stay in there so I ran over to him and picked him up. He was too terrified of the fire to be scared or fight with the man who hurt him.

With a dog cradled in my arms and a girl clasping to my shirt sleeve I checked out the only other window in the room. It was a narrow alleyway. Maybe five feet across. There was a window about four feet lower than the one we were currently looking out of. It was not going to be the safest maneuver in the world, but it happened to be our only hope. I got Aida to hold the dog and lie down on the floor next to the window. We were both coughing and my eyes were burning. We did not have much time. I ran to the other window, peered out, and still saw no sign of an imminent rescue. I grabbed the chair that Aida had previously been affixed to, and from the side of the window, I swung it through. The window shattered to pieces and glass rained down on the people below. I could hear screams from the street as people were no doubt gathered to watch the flames engulf the building. This immediately started to suck the fumes and heat out the window and I damn near choked.

It did create some brief visibility in the room as things vented. As it did, Aida began screaming for me. I made my way over to her and told her what we were going to have to do.

"Aida, the firemen are not going to make it in time to help us. We are going to have to jump."

"Are you fucking insane? It's four fucking stories."

"Not to the ground. I think we can make the jump into that building across the way. See that window right there? Take a good jump and make it through. I'll go first and I will clear the glass and be ready to catch you when you jump. We have to do it babe. It's our only chance."

"I don't think I can do this." She was afraid. Rightly so. It was lunacy. It happened to be our only choice.

"I know it's scary, but I will not let you fall all right? Look at me. I will not let you fall" I said firmly.

"I love you," she told me, sounding defeated.

"Save that shit for when we are safe on the ground, okay?" I responded as reassuringly as I could.

I used the chair again. This time I threw it through the window. It shattered to splinters in the alley below. It was a long way down. I surveyed the scene and lined up the jump into the window across the alley. It did not look easy. There was a suitcase on the floor next to us that I figured I could put to use. It was the perfect size and heavy enough to bust the window in the adjacent building. This would at least prevent my body from having to do it. I picked it up on my shoulder and took two steps as I shot put it right at the window. It was a perfect toss that went right through the window. It left some jagged edges, but this was going to have to get done. I picked up the dog and tucked him under my arm like a football. I thought of what was about to happen. There was a four story chasm between me and a fiery death. I was going to make this jump. I stared Aida right in the eyes as I psyched myself up to start my run.

"As soon as I jump, get ready to go and I'll be waiting in that window for you." She nodded in agreement, terrified. I felt sick for what had I gotten this poor girl into.

I took my three step approach, reached the window and jumped with everything I had. I tucked myself into as small of a ball as I could to avoid shredding myself on broken glass. I headed right for the opening and was going to make the straight shot which was comforting. I did not want to have to drop the dog if I needed to grab the ledge. My arms and legs got destroyed by the remaining glass in the window as I passed through. I started bleeding from my extremities instead of just my face. I put the dog on the ground and picked up a nearby umbrella. I used it to clear out all remaining glass from the windowsill so Aida had a better chance of doing it unharmed. I could see Aida quivering from above, sticking her head out the window for fresh air. The smoke was billowing out the window. There couldn't have been much oxygen left in there.

"I need you to jump. I will catch you."

I put one leg outside the window and kept one in, straddling to reach outside if necessary. I could hear her coughing over the roaring fire.

"Come on baby. Do it. Do it now." I began to panic. If she hesitated any longer she could have succumbed to the smoke. I wouldn't have been able to get back in there to help her.

All a sudden I saw her through the smoke. She ran towards the window and dove through head first. Her aim and velocity looked good. She was going to make it. I stuck my arms out to grab her as she tackled me into the building. She lay on top of me, still coughing and sputtering. We remained there for what felt like an eternity. It was probably only a minute. She finally leaned up after her coughing fit only to start slapping me over and over again. She was crying, screaming at me while she attacked me relentlessly.

"I'm sorry, I am so sorry," I was repeating over and over again.

When she finally finished slapping me, we fell into an embrace and I never wanted to let her go. I asked in her ear if I could take her home. She

only nodded in her exhaustion. As we were standing up to leave, she stopped dead in her tracks.

"Look," she said, pointing at the suitcase I had thrown through the windows. Bulging at the seams, the zipper had come undone and cash was spilling out. Banded cash. I didn't care to stare at it any longer or wonder how much was in there. We picked it up and wheeled it out with us. Lucky for us nobody had been home in the apartment we crashed through. We took one of the bundles of cash and left it on the table. Ten grand should more than cover the damaged window.

There was a mess of fire trucks, police cruisers and ambulances filling the street. We made our way down from the adjacent building, rolling a suitcase and carrying an injured dog. Firemen surrounded us. They brought us away as they evacuated that building as well. They wanted me to get medical attention. I told them my cuts and bruises were an unrelated incident. At the first distraction, Aida and I faded into the crowd and fled the scene.

## Chapter 26

People may wonder what it feels like to kill a man in cold blood. You would think I may feel bad, guilty or have nightmares of some sort. The truth of the matter is, it doesn't faze me even for a second. In all honesty, I don't feel any regret for what I did to him. He made his choice, he tried to hurt me and he hurt my girl. He paid for it with his life.

We met up with G and Dubs after getting out of the building. Nobody had any issues. They had run in and out after clearing their floors. I had Aida and we were going home. We didn't have time to chat as I had to take care of my girl. For the time being we went our separate ways.

The cops eventually blamed the fire on a rival gang. I wasn't the only one he was picking fights with. On the news they said there was only one casualty in the fire, a known drug dealer and suspected murderer. I am sure that is why they didn't investigate too much. I cleaned up what the police couldn't.

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G is still off on his wacky adventures, always trying to make it on his own. I think he is coming to terms with the fact that he can't cut it without his big bro around. When I'm missing, it is just not that fun. I give him work from time to time at my place and I hope he soon decides to settle down and work for me full time. He is a good kid and when he learns to become responsible on his own, he is going to be happier for it. I look forward to the day I get to tell my mom that he has met a nice girl.

I owed Dubs for his help so I bought him a beer once. I am still annoyed that I have to see him so often though, even after I quit my job. He still dates Daisy. He makes her happy so he can't be all bad. Maybe I should start to cut him some slack. He did come through for me when I needed him.

As for me, I am out of the drug world. I made enough cash to start my own successful business. I have completely abandoned the plumbing trade

and I run a go-kart track and party place. Kids are more my style and they are actually paying me a fortune. Plus, they deal in cash. Makes it easy for me to pad the books with a suitcase full of it. I'll have this place paid off in no time.

I even took a bigger role in big brothers. I host a lot of events at my party place on the cheap for them. There are a lot of good kids out there that need some good influences in their lives. I finally think I am one of them now. It might be time for me to have some of my own.

It took a lot of time for me to recover with Aida. She was understandably upset. We both took some serious time off work to decompress. We spent days talking about the whole ordeal. Luckily, they did not treat her too bad. The guy was sure I was going to come through and get him what he wanted and it would all be over. He didn't want to make an enemy of me by causing her any harm. He sure misread that situation.

She told me she spent the majority of her time locked in the bedroom watching television under guard. I was so thankful to hear that she went unhurt. For one thing, I don't want any harm to come to her ever. More selfishly, I don't think she could have ever forgiven me if something terrible had happened. I don't think I could have forgiven myself. I couldn't have handled losing her forever.

One of the stipulations of her sticking by my side was obvious. I was out of the drug business immediately and would refrain from doing anything illegal. Except of course for the money laundering. We had to do something about that. The money had nothing to do with her staying, but it definitely didn't hurt.

The first couple weeks afterward were a little rocky. She definitely had me under her thumb. Life eventually started to settle back into their old routines. With time I was able to win her over again. Our relationship was going great so I convinced my mother to come back home for Christmas so she could meet Aida. It upset me that it had taken this long already. They hit it off. My mom wouldn't stop commenting on how beautiful she was and hinting at me to not let this one go. I took her advice and didn't waste any time as I proposed a few weeks later.



By February we finally got to take that trip to Hawaii. My mom and her husband, G and his then girlfriend and even Dubs and Daisy made it down. They all witnessed as Aida and I got married on the beach in a small but beautiful ceremony. I never thought it would happen to me. My peach had now become my wife. We moved out into the suburbs and we even have a rescue dog, Boom Boom, who turned out to be a great loving pet.

I learned a lot about life, love and myself. It turns out I might not be the smartest, toughest person around. I was lucky enough to learn this lesson and come out of it okay. Even more than okay. I have the girl, and enough cash to spoil her and keep us comfortable. My life is super. I couldn't be happier.

So fuck you Pauline.

Thanks for reading my first attempt at a novel. It was a fun thing for me to do and I hope you enjoyed it. If you did, please share it with a friend. Seriously, I have no method of marketing this besides maybe word of mouth. Make a game of it. See how many you can sell. Outsell a friend of yours.

Whether you liked it or not, feel free to contact me and tell me why. I would like to hear your feedback.

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