

Act of Recall / *Gerald L. Guy*

ACT of RECALL



By
GERALD L. GUY



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The Guy collection

Gerald L. Guy is the author of ten novels and scores of short stories.
You can snippets of all of them at www.storiesbyguy.com

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

When I contracted Drew Mullener to remodel my master bathroom, I didn't expect to find a World War II buff and kindred spirit. In the early goings of the project, he presented me with a set of WWII field glasses he had purchased at a garage sale and said, "Imagine the things that have been viewed through these."

I examined them closely, and they were authentic 1940-vintage glasses that worked perfectly. They've found a place among some of the WWII memorabilia I inherited from my father and other things I secured during the creation of "SARA: A Hero's Story," my very first novel.

If not for the handyman's kind gesture, "Act of Recall" would not have materialized. But once the seed was planted, it found a home in what I am now calling my Coastal Capers trilogy that includes 'Act of Kindness' and "Act of Mercy."

Thanks, Drew.

PREFACE

It's hard to believe "Act of Kindness" started out as a short story and now has become the foundation on which two other novels, "Act of Mercy" and "Act of Recall," have materialized.

While fiction, each entry in the Coastal Capers trilogy is completely different from its predecessor. "Kindness" was fun and free-spirited, while "Mercy" addressed a serious ecological problem and stepped across into the fantasy genre. "Recall" is more contemporary. Part I is filled with the violent actions of Charles Demott Carmichael IV, while Part II reveals his softer side and his journey to reunite with family he abandoned more than forty years ago.

The irrepressible Jerome Browning is the glue that binds all three novels, even though he plays a lesser role in "Act of Recall."

I hope you enjoy it.

PROLOGUE

The Finisher was walking along the Atlantic shoreline reveling in the fact he had just finished what he hoped was his final assignment for STRIKE BACK. He was getting too old for that kind of stress. It was time for him to settle down and enjoy the finer things in life. After all, he wasn't a spring chicken any longer. Being close to nature always calmed him after an assignment.

He had called his most recent target Seventy-Two. It was the seventy-second termination of his long career. He snickered to himself and thought: *And you thought you were going to retire when you got to Fifty-Two.*

Along with a fake photo ID, The Finisher was supplied a name and photo of each target, a brief bio, details of the transgressions that had caused the individual to fall into the crosshairs of STRIKE BACK and a motus operandi. While the agency oversaw his assignments, The Finisher chose his own course of action and gave each target a numeric moniker; it made his task less personal.

Seventy-Two was a social misfit. He posed as a substitute teacher at the local middle school, chaperoned youth groups at a rural Methodist church and volunteered at a homeless shelter in Flagler County, Florida. Nobody guessed he was a narcissist who preyed on the youth he frequently appeared to help.

The Finisher considered him the worst kind of target, one who would be missed by a community blinded by his personality. Friends, of course, did not know Seventy-Two was a betrayer of trust, pedophile and murderer of a half dozen young people he wooed into his web of debauchery.

Seventy-Two carefully selected his proteges, as he liked to call them. He gained their trust, used them and disposed of them without anyone knowing or wondering what happened. He was never a suspect because he operated in such secrecy his depraved actions were invisible to society and law enforcement.

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He had become sloppy over the last year, though, and drawn the attention of STRIKE BACK, an organization that provided justice for forgotten or helpless victims. STRIKE BACK had deep tentacles that stretched into classified databanks and tapped resources outside of normal law enforcement. It was STRIKE BACK that decided Seventy-Two's time was up. No more children should die at his hand. Disposal was required, and that was The Finisher's specialty.

Because of the despicable nature of Seventy-Two's crimes, The Finisher carefully planned his elimination. He had primed his partners in crime perfectly, tossing rotten chicken into Dead Lake at precisely 3 a.m. every day for two weeks. The hungry carnivores were waiting for him when he tossed the bound body of Seventy-Two into the water. There was a flurry of action. Jaws snapped and tails pounded the water. In seconds, Seventy-Two was gone.

With disposal complete, Charlie decided to relax and walk the shoreline of beautiful Flagler Beach. It was a fall day, cool and breezy. He paid little attention to the lone cloud that marred the azure sky.

He was startled when lightning struck out of nowhere a quarter mile in front of him. The last thing he saw was the sand explode on impact. Instantly he felt the tingle of electricity in his feet and then everything went black.

When he awoke, he was on his back and completely soaked from the gentle ebb and flow of the ocean. He was cold, and had no idea who he was, where he was or why he was on a sandy beach.

As he sat up, he noticed numbness in his fingers and toes. He had no idea what had caused the sensation. Despite a hammering headache, he was clear-headed and knew he was on a beach; the air was warm and the water cool. He needed to find a dry place and discover his whereabouts. So, he walked to the nearest stairway and climbed from the shoreline to higher ground. There, he found a highway with housing and commercial properties on its western edge.

When he got to the landing, he noticed a leather duffel and a black case with binoculars inside. There was no other human in sight. So, he assumed they were his, despite the fact neither had any markings

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or identification. He threw them over his shoulder and headed for the busy highway.

A sign proclaimed the route was Scenic A1A. He knew from the insignia he was in Florida. So, he chose to walk south, assuming the farther he walked the warmer the weather would become. He prayed someone along the way would recognize him.

Nobody did.

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*“Memories, pressed between
the pages of my mind.
Memories, sweetened through
the ages just like wine.”*

**Elvis Presley, 1968
(Billy Strange and Mac Davis)**

PART I

John Doe VI

Lightning can strike a sandy beach with an intensity that is hotter than the sun. When a bolt of electricity hits a beach high in silica or quartz, the heat can fuse the particles into silica glass tubes as shown here. Anyone standing on the beach at the time is in danger.



CHAPTER ONE

John Doe VI showed up out of nowhere. He walked through the doors of Crater Lake Retirement Center without identification and with very little money. The Flagler Beach police officer who delivered him said he had committed no crime but seemed lost and in need of mental assessment.

Doe was lucid but had no idea who he was. Besides being nameless, officials considered him indigent but not a danger to society. He seemed gentle and genuinely concerned about his loss of memory. He was brought to Crater Lake because he needed help.

The medical staff liked him instantly and refused to turn him away. He carried with him only a tattered leather duffle and a pair of field glasses that were old enough to be displayed in any World War II museum along the Florida coastline.

Six, as he was fondly referred to by the staff, was far from antique. The staff assumed he was younger than the binoculars he carried, somewhere between sixty and sixty-five years of age. He stood six-foot-two and was as lean as a professional athlete in the prime of his career. He offered a firm handshake, a warm smile and his easy-going personality appealed to everyone he met.

He was handsome, with graying temples, a straight nose and solid jawline. There were no physical anomalies or tattoos that might help in his identification. The facility's medical chief suggested the Flagler Police Department run his fingerprints through the national database but then discovered Six had no fingerprints. They had been chemically or surgically removed.

The patient's lone distinguishing attribute was his unusual eyes. His pupils were a soft green with a golden halo around the outer edge. The female staff called them "mesmerizing" and wondered how many females he had disrobed with his alluring gaze.

A physical exam and blood tests revealed he was in excellent health, and no injuries were discovered that might have led to his

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sudden loss of memory. Psychiatric examinations verified he was of sound mind but simply unable or unwilling to recall anything of his past. He was the most intriguing mystery to walk into Crater Lake in some time.

Crater Lake was a place that catered to people who were down on their luck, as well as patients in need of rehabilitation or end-of-life care. Six was healthy, conversive and in need of specialized care. The psychiatric staff thought they could easily unravel the mystery. So, he was given a wrist band and a room.

Crater Lake became his home and the staff his family.

* * *

JEROME BROWNING, THE center's unofficial social director, heard about the strange newcomer and had been among the first visitors to his room in the medical wing. Browning was one of several aging residents who had come to the center after losing his life savings to a computer hacker. A former newspaper editor, Browning was living in a tent along a wooded section of South Ninth Street when the FBPD discovered his hideaway and brought him to Crater Lake in 1990. Since then, he had become a beaming light of hope and a friend to everyone who passed through the hallways of the county-owned facility.

Now, at age seventy-seven, Jerome Browning had more energy than that bunny who hawked batteries on the late-night TV commercials. He was popular with residents and staff because of his willingness to lend a helping hand and the unbridled joy he spread wherever he went.

He and Six hit it off immediately. At the urging of staff, the two spent long hours together. Six listened intently as Browning recounted his years as a newspaper editor and the events that helped shape the news and his own personal life. Everyone hoped the mention of a significant event might spark a reaction or trigger the restoration of the patient's memory.

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Nothing did, though. Whatever led John Doe VI to the doors of Crater Lake remained entrapped inside an intelligent mind that was engaging and creative but oh so mysterious.

* * *

THE WEEKS SLIPPED by as friendship grew between Browning and Six. They became inseparable. They roamed the halls of the retirement center side by side, ate meals together in the community dining room, laughed at TV sitcoms and played cards or Checkers every Friday night.

Several months later, everything changed. The two had been strolling around Crater Lake, enjoying the sights and sounds of nature, when Browning spotted what he thought was a pair of eagles building a nest in a distant tree.

“What do you think, John?” he said, pointing to the north. “Do you think those are eagles trying to make a home in that tall pine?”

“It could be,” he replied. “It’s too far off to tell for sure, though.”

“Wish we could get a closer look, but the land yonder is part of the preserve and public access is prohibited. If we had a spy glass, we could get a better look. I used to have one when I first moved to Florida. Me and Rita used to love to watch the birds from afar.”

Rita was Jerome’s third wife and the reason he relocated to the warmer climes. The plan was to semi-retire as editor of a small, twice-weekly newspaper and enjoy their golden years in the Sunshine State. Those plans never materialized.

Memories of his late wife gave Jerome reason for pause. He wiped moisture from his right eye and asked his friend if he recalled being in love with a woman.

“I don’t think I ever found one that would put up with me,” he replied. “At least I have no recollection of a wife. Wish I did. It doesn’t seem right a person should spend his life alone like this. I’m thankful to have a friend like you, helping me navigate these past few months I don’t know what might have happened to me if not for the you and the staff at Crater Lake.”

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“Life lacks substance if one can’t help a fellow man,” Jerome replied. “I asked because you never know what might trigger a memory to flood that mind of yours, old friend.

“You know, eagles are a little like humans; they’re pretty loyal partners. Males and females build a nest together for two or three months before mating. Then they’ll remain together until the hatchlings mature.

“I’ll have to see if I can procure a telescope so we can get a better look at what’s going on over there. It’s very interesting to watch eagles nurture a nest.”

“I’ve got field glasses tucked away in the closet of my room,” Six recalled. “At least, I think they are mine. They have been with me ever since I can remember. Want me to go get them?”

“That’s right!” Browning replied. “I remember someone saying you arrived here with only an old duffel and a pair of field glasses. Do they still work?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never taken them out of the case.”

“Well, I’d say it’s time you did. Go get ’em. We’ll see what these majestic birds are up to.”

Five minutes later, Six returned with the field glasses in hand and passed them to Jerome.

“Here you go,” he said. “It was your idea; so, you get the first peek. Let me know what you see.”

Jerome brought the glasses to his eyes and said, “Sure as shootin’, it’s a pair of eagles making a nest for their young’uns.”

“Can you see if there are eggs in the nest yet?” Six asked.

“I don’t think so. It’s a bit early for that. I think sometime around November we should see the mother warming her eggs. Here, you look!”

Six took the glasses. Before raising them to his eyes, he said, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a spectacle quite like this in nature. Eagles are pretty rare, aren’t they?”

“They are making a comeback,” Jerome explained. “I read more than a dozen pairs had been spotted in Flagler County last year.”

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Jerome's likeable friend watched the eagles at work for a few minutes. Then, he gasped and let the field glasses fall against his chest. They dangled by the chord he had wrapped round his neck.

"What's wrong?" Jerome asked.

"I'm not sure," Six said.

"What did you see?"

"Not sure."

John Doe fell to his knees and hung his head. His shoulders trembled ever so slightly but it didn't escape Jerome's scrutiny.

"Tell me. Was it something from your past? Maybe I can help," his friend insisted.

"I hope it wasn't from my past," Six replied.

The answer was troubling. Jerome continued to probe. He knelt next to his friend, draped an arm over his shoulders and said, "Take a deep breath and relax. The doctors warned you this might happen. Don't fight it; let your mind go wherever it wants."

"That's the problem; I don't want to recall that image again."

"Why?"

"It was horrible! I was horrible!"

"Well, you darn well better unburden yourself of whatever it is you saw, or it will haunt you for days," Browning said. "Tell me. Tell me now, dadgum it!"

CHAPTER TWO

Back in the privacy of the retirement center, John Doe's memory -- or pieces of it -- began flooding back, and they were not pleasant. They were initiated by his first peek through the binoculars. He saw himself carrying a struggling young man to a lake and tossing his body into scum-covered water. He had blond hair and was bound and gagged.

"His struggles were pointless," Six labored to explain as he pieced together the vision his mind suddenly produced.

"I said he was young because he looked to be half my age, in his thirties maybe. I can't believe I did what I saw myself do."

"What did you do?"

"I tossed him in the water and smiled about it."

"Did he drown?"

"Oh no! His fate was much worse. The minute his body hit the murky surface, the water turned turbulent. The lake was infested with alligators. The water instantly turned crimson as the beasts tore his body apart. It was a feeding frenzy."

"Oh my god!" Jerome responded.

"I was smiling when I walked away. I was pleased with what I had done," Six said, covering his face with his hands to hide his grief. "I can't believe I would do something so horrific. It can't possibly be my memory returning. It must be my imagination running amuck."

"You should talk to the psychiatrist about it tomorrow," Jerome said calmly. "Whatever it was, whether a memory or recurring nightmare, it means something. It's important because this is the first recollection of anything you have had since you walked into this place. Let the doctors help you figure out what's going on."

"I'm not so sure I want to know," his nameless friend admitted.

"But you must," Jerome explained.

"Why must I?"

"A man without a past is no man at all," Jerome stated. "You're one of the kindest, most gentle people I've met since coming to Crater Lake. Whatever you once were cannot darken what you are now."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"I, for one, would like to know your real name. You answer to John or Six, but I know there is more there. It's tucked away out of everyone's reach. Perhaps this is the beginning of learning who you are. Maybe the good memories will follow the bad."

"If you say so," John Doe VI said.

"I know I'm right. You're among friends who want to help you. Let the doctors complete their work. They've invested long hours in your care. Reward them by discovering your name and where you are from. What if you have family somewhere searching for you? They deserve to know you're alive and well. Hell, it's time you reward yourself, good or bad."

"Okay! Okay! I get your point."

"I'll come with you if you'd like," Jerome offered.

"That would be great."

“And I think we should take the field glasses with us.”

Six lowered his head into his hands once again and sighed deeply before agreeing.

“Whatever you say,” he said softly.

The next few weeks were traumatic for the reluctant patient. He met a couple times each week with the staff psychiatrist, and each day a little more of his life was revealed.

Jerome was right. The field glasses were the link to unlocking his brain’s secrets. Each time he was placed under hypnosis, the specialist asked him to pull the binoculars to his eyes and reveal what he saw. Slowly a sordid past unfolded.

John Dow VI was known as The Finisher because it was his vigilant action that brought an abrupt end to lawlessness or provided a swift solution where justice had failed. STRIKE BACK, a secret agency that supported his activities, provided him with the latest technology and all the information he needed to strike quickly and without detection. For Seventy-Two, he was the Grim Reaper. To the family of his last victim, a 14-year-old runaway from California, he was the right hand of God.

The Finisher came to Flagler County specifically to terminate Joshua Carter, a 32-year-old white male who had had been able to hide his pedophile activities for four years. His abusive and murderous behavior had made him a target and would be the cause of his demise.

Carter, nicknamed Seventy-Two by The Finisher, was surveilled for a week, mostly from afar with the field glasses. The Finisher wanted to make sure no innocent teen would be exposed to what lie ahead for the social outcast who was everybody’s friend.

The Finisher detained Carter as he escorted a young boy to the SUV, parked near a homeless camp in Flagler Beach. A chloroform spray subdued both individuals. The vigilante tucked a twenty-dollar bill in the teen’s hand before departing with his target, bound and gagged.

When the sedative wore off, Seventy-Two found himself naked and shivering in the cool Florida darkness. Water was close by because he could hear the call of wildlife from the nearby wetlands. A tall shadow of a man stood before him and said, “You are going to die tonight, Mr. Carter. You can choose whether it will be quick and easy or long and very painful.”

The man’s eyes widened, and his heart rate doubled. He struggled to free himself. It was hopeless, though. His bindings were too tight. A urine stream revealed his utter fear.

“I want to know where I might find the remains of Lorraine Shimko, your last victim,” his captor said while thumbing the blade of a fileting knife. “You have sixty seconds to agree by shaking your head up and down. If you refuse, the fun begins.”

Seventy-Two’s chest heaved as his struggles for freedom became more intense. Yet, he provided no response, as The Finisher expected. So, his captor calmly placed the edge of the blade just below his belly button and began to shave away pubic hair.

Seventy-Two’s struggles immediately ceased. He gasped and held his breath as the blade approached his privates.

A quick nick of the skin at the base of his manhood brought blood and the response The Finisher demanded. Carter’s head bobbed up and down frantically, indicating he was ready to talk.

“I’m going to remove the tape from your mouth so you can provide the information I requested,” The Finisher said. “You’re going to scream for help, but no one will hear you; we’re too far from civilization. Then, you will tell me what I want to know, or I begin carving.”

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Screams of terror began the minute the tape was ripped from Seventy-Two's mouth. It didn't stop until The Finisher placed the blade against the victim's throat and said, "Enough!"

The Finisher waited until he saw the pedophile begin to tremble, then he returned the blade to its previous location and gently scrapped away the coagulated blood and more pubic hair.

That's when Carter surrendered the information and the torment stopped. Duct tape again was secured across his mouth, and The Finisher carried his naked captive to the edge of a nearby pond.

"The crimes you have committed are reviled and you deserve to suffer as your victims have," The Finisher said. "I promised you a quick death, but I did not promise it would be painless. Give my regards to Satan."

Then, he tossed the body into the water. The reaction was instantaneous as hungry alligators tore at the pedophile's body.

He died quickly and his depravity with him.

John Doe VI was calm as he related his story, almost as if he was reporting it to his superiors. The memory flashed before him in less than a minute, but revealing the details took much longer. When he finished, he was distraught. Clearly, his vigilante past was as shocking for him as it was for the listeners. His actions stood in deep contrast to the individual who had walked into Crater Lake at the end of summer.

More sessions were prescribed, and more assignments were revealed.