



IF YOU COULD ONLY
HEAR YOURSELF...

TWO VOICES IN YOUR HEAD. CAN'T BOTH BE RIGHT.

— **ADRIAN DAWSON** —

IF YOU COULD ONLY HEAR YOURSELF

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— ONE —

Too fucking late now.

Think. For once in your goddamned life, Mikey, think.

Right, deep breath. Yeah, like that helps. Ok, so Jerry's dead. At least, he should be, given that his face is covering a generous portion of the harbour as we speak.

As who speaks?

We do.

Who's the we?

Me and you, guy. Brothers in arms. We're gonna put this right.

Shit. As if my life wasn't complicated enough without some impromptu round of good cop/bad cop going on in my goddamned head. Can't even keep up with the who's who. Hey, talking of who's who...?

Who's the good cop?

Well it ain't you. Work the rest out for yourself.

Can't believe we did this. Can't believe we were so goddamned stupid.

Whoah, hold on there fella. I'm right beside you and all, but I wasn't there when you pulled the trigger, now was I? Did you hear me talking to you... chewing the fat and all... when his face split...? You hear me in any of the seconds leading up...? No, and the reason for that is because I don't create your fuckups, Mikey, I just help you deal with 'em.

Thanks a bundle.

Don't sweat it. You made me bad cop. Live with it. But don't you worry none, 'cos I'm with you on this all the way. I mean... we're buddies, right?

Yeah, we're buddies. Okay,... so why did I pull the trigger?

'Cos you thought you'd get away with it, that's why. At least, that's what I'm guessing. Take the money and run, that's what you said.

I must have been out of my tiny fucking mind.

The other voice in my head paused. I could almost feel it smiling at me before it answered. It wasn't a nice smile either... too many teeth.

I think you are, buddy boy. I really, really think you are.

So what the hell do I do now? Didn't think this through, did I?

Duh? Get rid of the fucking body, jerkoff. Like... quick as well, because that boat's gonna be sliding into view in less than ten and if they find you gone, no fucking money and what's left of Jerry leaking into the stones, it ain't gonna make for much of a jigsaw, is it? You get me?

Yeah.

Good, so do me a favour, will ya? Help me find something heavy.

Never killed a guy before. Come close, sure. That's pretty much the territory in this game, but never actually had to do it. Knew it was coming, though. One day. Today.

I looked around the docks. Looked at my watch. Ten to fucking six. Boat due at six, like he said. Think. Gotta get rid of Jerry and not somewhere where they'll find him in a hurry either 'cos Lucius has enough do-nuts on his payroll to get a full ballistics and when he finds out the bullet came from mine I am so... fucking... dead. Got the money now I need the time. Time to get the fuck out of Miami. They'll find Jerry eventually, 'course they will, but they'll not find me. No way. Not if I can just fucking think.

The yards are all locked up and most of 'em will be empty. No time to be bustin' doors down just to find jack shit. Christ, I hope Marianne's with me on this. I hope she sees that I'm doin' this for her and Jamie. For all of us.

Hang on, what the fuck's that?

What?

That, stoo-pid!

Where?

Over there.

Concrete fucking bollard, is what it is. Still planted into the harbourside, too, like some quick-set tree stump. But hey, I got the truck, haven't I? Jerry's truck. So what I do is what I'm doin'. I run to the truck, get in and fire her up. Turn her to face the bollard, full revs, eyes straight, ready to go.

Whoah, whoah, whoah. Wait a fucking minute there, buddy boy. What the hell do you think you're doing?

I'm gonna ram the bollard, aren't I? Snap it like a twig, see? 'Cos it's, like, cylindrical so even though it'll weigh more than I can handle, I can still roll it over to Jerry, strap it to his ass with rope from the truck then roll it in.

Bollard sinks, Jerry sinks. Yeah?

Yeah, it seems like a good idea, doesn't it....? Except you're talking about facing the bollard, dipshit!

And?

And... when you hit that thing at whatever speed you seem to have in that crazy mind of yours, the one that thinks it's actually having this conversation, then you'll fuck the engine good and proper. Then, you'll not just be leaving the truck with your fucking prints all over the wheel, you'll be leaving it walloped into a bollard that seems to have vanished from the harbour at about the same time as Jerry did, and it won't take 'em long to work that one out. Plus you'll have to get your ass out of here on foot. Think you'll get to Marianne and the little fella before Lucius finds out you fucked him over if you're taking the bus? You might, but do you really wanna chance it?

So what do I do, smartass?

You reverse into it is what you do. See, you can still drive a truck with the back totalled, just not the front. Front's where all the expensive bits are. The bits that make the wheels go round.

Good thinking.

And maybe one day I'm actually gonna work out if that had actually been my idea or not. Come to think of it, was any of this my idea? No time to chew on that one just now. Got a body to sink.

So I spin the truck, back ways on. Slam her into reverse and aim. Christ, you don't get much speed in reverse, do you? Why the fuck would you? People hardly cruise the freeway in reverse, do they? No, I guess not. Engine screaming, keep it straight. Crash. Truck's lifting up. Tilting. Righting itself again, ouch. Thank fuck.

Jee-sus fucking wept.

Tell you something, buddy. He damn well would have if you'd hit him that hard.

Takes a second to look up again. Christ, that thing must have been sunk into the earth's fucking core. I thought it would just, like, fall over.

Damn thing near killed me.

Us.

Yeah, okay, us.

Right, so now.. get out of the truck, go round the back and check the damage. Didn't hit straight on, caught the side but that's no bad thing. Held up well. God bless Detroit.

I'll get one of the canvas bags out the back. Oh yeah, and pick up the bits of truck as well.

Now you're thinking, Mikey. Good man.

Thanks. Okay, stuff in the bag, bag in the truck. Let's roll...

Not funny.

Sorry..

Christ this thing is heavy. Can't you help?

Not really, Mikey. See, I don't really exist, do I? Well, I do, but just not in a format that's any good at rolling bollards, if you know what I mean? You got five minutes to go.

Unless they're late but I ain't got time to bank on that.

Okay, rope. Did you bring the rope?

No, I thought you had it.

Shit. Back to the truck, get the rope.

So Jerry's tied to the bollard and the bollard is, like, really, really heavy.

You should know, buddy boy, you rolled it. I do and trust me, it's heavy.

It'll do the job, then?

It had better.

Right, roll to the edge.

It's stopped.

Push.

I am pushing, but there's some kind of... I dunno... fucking ridge or somethin'.

Calm down, big fella. You want Lucius to come looking for you?

No.

Then push. And push hard.

It's going. Bit more. Gone.

Watch your feet.

Shit.

Christ, I never saw Jerry move that fast when he was alive. Splash and goodbye. He's going down.

That he is, my friend. That he is.

Right, job done.

Not quite.

Why not?

Aren't we forgetting something?

What?

The blood, dipshit. They ain't gutted fish on this dock for over five years and it does look kinda, you know... messy.

We got any buckets in that truck?

How the hell should I know?

You could, y'know... take a look.

This'll do.

You're kidding me, right? It's a fucking sandwich tin.

Okay, so it's a fucking sandwich tin, but Jerry's had the last of the tuna-mayo and it's all we got.

You see anything bigger?

No.

The tin it is then.

Right, lean over, scoop water, lift out, pour. What does it say on shampoo bottles? Rinse and repeat?

Yeah, rinse and repeat. It's only to get you to use more shampoo, you know?

Yeah, I know, I just don't give a monkey's hairy nuts right at this moment. Keep scooping. That look clean to you?

Clean enough. Cleanliness becomes important when Godliness is unlikely.

O'Rourke?

Yeah, I read it in a book.

I think I read the same one.

I think you did. Two minutes to. We're outta here.

Where to?

Marianne, of course. Gotta pack a bag.

Got the case?

Yeah, don't sweat it, I got the case.

— TWO —

Slow down, buddy. Foot off the gas, eye on the dial. There's plenty time yet, but there won't be if some dumb fuck cop does you for driving over the limit, will there?

What time does Lucius expect me and Jerry back with the coke?

Six-forty-five. Seven at the latest.

What time will he start getting twitchy?

Dunno. Seven-thirty if you're forcing a guess.

What time is it now?

Ten past six. Don't worry, we'll be with Marianne before half-past. That's at least a clear half hour to pack a bag and get the fuck out this state.

How much is in the case?

Three hundred.

Thousand?

No, million, you dumb fuck, of course thousand.

Jeez, that's a lot of money. A guy could disappear with that kind of money. Never be seen again.

You see my plan?

Yeah. And I like it.

Since we're talkin', did I tell you about that dream I had last night?

You didn't need to, buddy-boy, I was there.

Weird wasn't it?

Weirdest you've ever had, my friend, and that's the truth. I mean, I've seen you fill the both of us up with coke and not have dreams like that.

You ever take acid?

No.

Dream was real then.

Nah, real fucked up is what it was. You don't think she'd have left you, do you? I mean... she loves you.

Yeah, I know she does, but love ain't always enough, is it? I mean, shit, I love her, more than you'll ever know...

...Trust me, buddy, I know...

...but it ain't enough, is it? Women need things. Kids need things. Marianne, see, she just don't like the way I go about gettin' 'em.

But you do get 'em, right? I mean, they don't do without?

No, never, but it's no way to live, is it? I mean, she never knows if I'm coming home or not, you know? Kid's got a father, sure... but for how long? She's never liked what I do.

But you were doing it long before she met you.

Yeah, I know, but we didn't have no kid then, did we? Kids change things.

Yep, that's what kids do. Still I don't think she'd have left you.

Think all you like, but in the dream she was gone. Way past gone.

Why would she do that? Why would she up the kid and go?

Because of that extra job. You know? The one Lucius set me on because this one went so well.

Not going so well now, though, is it?

We're still breathing, aren't we...?

Yeah, rapidly.

Lucius is an asshole.

You gotta be to climb the tree.

How'd he get so damn big, anyway? Christ, one minute he ain't there, I sure as hell ain't heard his name, then bam... he's sitting on top and pissing on all takers. That kinda rise is, like, y'know, meteoric.

Dunno. He's just one of those guys that grabs people into his way of thinkin', y'know? Reels 'em in. I bet at least ten of his top twelve would die for him, and I ain't talking metaphorically, neither. I mean they really would die, if it was him or them.

That's fucking crazy.

Damn right it is.

Watch the turn!

I see it.

Thought you would.

So... would you?

Would I what?

Die for Lucius? I mean, if you'd done this job like he asked and become one of the top guys, would you die for him?

Like fuck I would. Ain't no guy worth leaving a widow and a fatherless kid behind for, is there?

But if he catches you now, it's gonna be that same deal looking back at you from every mirror?

Yeah, but like I say, this ain't for Lucius is it? This is for us. For Marianne and Jamie and me. This is for the money so that I can make her happy. Move to fucking Ohio or somewhere. Open a bar.

So why would they die for him?

Who?

These other guys, the top flights.

Who knows? I mean, yeah, he's a charismatic fucker, I ain't doubting that - real slick - but he just seems to get a hold on some people. Me? I reckon they're weak.

And you're strong?

Yeah.

Are you sure?

Look, I just fucked Lucius over, iced Jerry (and let's not forget that he's one of Lucius' top guys), ditched the body and high-tailed it with the money, didn't I? How much stronger do I gotta be?

Yeah, but you're scared, Mikey. Aren't you? That's why you need me here. To keep you company.

'Course I'm fucking scared, who wouldn't be? But scared's good.

How so?

You know.. like a racing driver. Stop getting scared, start losing your edge. Nothing keeps you more focused than shitting bricks, that's what I say.

Yeah, okay, I'll buy that, but you're shitting a house if I'm honest. Giving me a semi...

Haha, like it.

Thanks, it's one of yours.

That's where I've heard it before.

You don't like Lucius, much, do you buddy?

What's to like?

Well, he looks after his top guys, that's what I hear. Looks after them real good too. And their families. He might have looked after you, Marianne and the kid if you'd done the deal like he asked.

Maybe so, but then he'd have sent me out on another deal, wouldn't he? And another and another. Ad infinitum.

Infinitum?

It's Latin.

Like... Latino.

Which loops to my point, see? Latinos. One of these days I'll get sent on a job and some spick Latino'll blow my fucking head off. All the Luciuses in the world ain't gonna get my kid his father back then, are they?

They might.

What do you mean they might?

I mean they might.

Silence.

Long silence.

What the fuck are you talking about now? Lucius is a big guy an all, but he ain't no fucking magician. I mean he can't bring the dead back to life. Can he?

No, 'course not, but if he could it would explain why them other guys'd be so happy to die for him. Wouldn't it? I mean, they could just come back. Christ, they'd owe him big style then, though, wouldn't they?

Talk sense or piss off outta my head. They're hooked 'cos they're fucking weak. End of.

Yeah, suppose so. So... where's he from, this Lucius guy?

Who knows, but he's got an accent.

Spick?

Nah, European I reckon.

Any rumours?

Plenty.

Best I heard: Chechnya. You know, former Soviet place. Georgia.

Catching the midnight train back someday?

Very droll.

Thanks.

It's a bad neighbourhood.

How bad?

Worse than the South Side?

Multiply by a hundred, add a phone number and you're still not fucking close. Stepping over bodies in that place. Fuckers rot in the streets. I heard he was responsible for more than his share of the killing.

Serious? He shot 'em all?

Nah, stupid, but he ran the guns for a while. Rumour has it he bought them off the soldiers and sold 'em on.

From the soldiers?

Yeah. Country's so fucked money-wise...

...economically...

yeah, economically that they can't even afford to pay their own fucking army most of the time, and they got wives and kids too. When they get real hard up, there's nothing to sell but the guns. Week or two later they're getting shot with them.

With their own fucking guns? That's fucked up.

World is, my friend, world is.

I heard talk that Lucius bought a fucking tank off one of 'em. A fucking tank, do you believe that shit?

So then he gets into the drugs?

Guess so. Where there's pain there's a pharmaceutical gain, am I right?

You ain't wrong.

'Course, a fucked up economy ain't where the real money is, so he checks the map, studies the markets so to speak and sticks his pin in Miami. More money, bigger deals and shit... better weather to boot.

Yeah, much better weather.

Turn right here.

Yeah, I know.

He ain't to be fucked with, though. I know that. I'm crazy but I ain't fucking stupid. I heard that he cut off a guy's balls for squealing and stuck 'em in his mouth.

Hell, I've seen that done.

What? Whilst the guy was breathing? Shit no, not while he was breathing.

That's gotta sting. So hang on, if Lucius is this big fucked up loon, how come we're here with three hundred-k of his money and a dead guy on our hands? One of his top boys? One who was very kindly offering us a bite of his tuna-mayo not half an hour ago?

I told you, it's for Marianne and the kid. It's what I gotta do. No other way forward.

Not that you can see.

You got my eyes... you see anything better heading our way?

They must be worth it. I mean, you must really love 'em both.

Yeah I do. They're the only two people in this world I would die for. I mean, if it came down to them or me.

But they left you in the dream?

True enough, but you gotta see Marianne's point. Face it, what kind of life does a woman have, sitting waiting for the day her husband's gonna end up dead or in prison? Her head was in bits. She was doing what she felt was right, that was all.

So go on, spill the dream.

I thought you were there...?

I was, but.... well, I just wanna get your perspective, that's all.

Well, Jerry and me did the deal this morning, just like Lucius wanted, and it all went down real smooth. Silky. The Colombians arrived in the boat, well-tooled, of course.

Of course.

Jerry and me handed over the cash and they handed over the coke. Clockwork. There was a kinda sticky moment when Jerry asks, joking mind, whether it's been cut with talc or shit and they don't like that. Don't like that one little bit. Latinos, you see, proud people.

Right.

So they get a bit funny over the comment, but it's me that settles 'em down. I say something real clever like 'Hey, chill you guys. Fresh outta school this guy, still learnin'. Still thinks bein' careful's same as bein' rude. We know you guys don't cut your shit.'

And they bought that?

Yeah. I said they're proud, never said they were fucking clever, did I?

Jerry must've been pissed, though, him being top guy on the deal and you showing him up like that. Treating him like a kid and all.

At first. Says I made him look like a prick, but I told him that there ain't nothin' more important than the deal. We fuck up the deal and we fuck up Lucius and we don't wanna go doing that now, do we? Egos are out the fucking window when it comes to closing a deal and keeping all parties breathing. See what I was doing there?

Yeah, playing it back to his loyalty for the big guy. I like your thinking. Good move, buddy-boy.

Thankyou.

So you and Jerry get back to Lucius with the coke, what then?

Well then I'm the dogs bollocks, aren't I? Even Jerry's swallowed that fucking pride of his and is raving to Lucius about me. Says I'm worthy.

So everything's gone your way then?

Yeah, you'd think so. I mean, I spend the rest of the morning with Lucius. Scary looking fuck. And he tells me that he's got big plans for me. Gonna lift me high up his tree, if know what I mean?

So where was this?

His office.

The one with that big fuck-off desk?

Yeah, what is it with that desk anyway? I bet God himself don't have a desk that fucking big.

Maybe Lucius thinks he's bigger than God?

Bigger than the Beatles.

No-one's bigger than the Beatles.

True enough. So anyway, he's sitting behind that big fucking desk, and he's rolling though all the moves he's making. He wants to go after the Padre upstate, but he needs to get rid of Tortelli first.

The fat guy?

Yeah, fat as you like. If he were a bitch there'd be a hell of a lot of operas not finished 'til he waddled his ass on stage and belted a tune.

You got that right.

So anyway, Lucius tells me Tortelli's having lunch at Marco's.

On third?

Of course on third... you know any other 'Marco's'?

Sorry, just checkin'.

So anyway, Lucius says Tortelli's gonna be in there about noon and he wants me to go in about quarter past and waste him.

Tortelli?

Yeah. Jee-sus, that's a big fish to be netting on your first day captaining your own boat.

Yeah, but if I do this, I'm instantly top drawer. No slow rise, just one big leap, see?

But you'd already done the harbour deal, how come you're not top drawer for that?

'Cos I ain't killed no-one, dipshit. I ain't gonna make top drawer without a notch on my gun, am I? Anyway, I'm hyped from the deal so I'm gonna say yes, aren't I?

This is Lucius asking, Mikey, you're gonna say yes whatever. So what then?

Jerry drives me downtown, parks up by the fountain. You know the one?

Yeah, I know it.

So I've got my gun tucked above my ass.

Your ass?

What the fuck happened to your shoulder holster?

Are you crazy? They'd see the bulge a fucking mile off. I'd be dead before I crossed the street.

Okay, fair point.

So I goes in and orders a table for two, see. Says my wife's gonna join me.

Why?

'Cos you don't order a table for two with your wife if you're gonna do a hit, do you? You walk in, do the hit and walk out. Thing is, from the minute they clock you coming in the door, don't matter who you are, they've got their hands under the table and Marco's got his under the counter. Just in case. I mean, you make the slightest move and it turns into the kind of gunfight you don't come out of breathing.

High noon?

High quarter-past.

Nice one.

So I order the table, take a seat, casual like and just glance at the menu. Order a bottle of red, that kind of thing. Then, a couple of minutes later I'm at the counter asking Marco where the men's room is. And he still ain't suspicious? Course not, 'cos I've asked him that if a young lady comes in while I'm gone, long brown hair, nice eyes and shit, would he be so kind as to show her to my table?

Would he be so kind?

Yeah, 'cos I'm trying not to look like a thug, aren't I? I'm trying to look like your average guy meeting his girl for a bite.

Getcha. Smart thinking.

So I go to the men's room and there's only one other guy in there, real geeky type. Big thick specs.

Cola bottles?

Yeah, that's the sort. He ain't no concern to me and besides, I'm gonna pop Tortelli the minute I walk back out anyway.

So what then? Then I'm gonna run like a bastard, aren't I? Shit, I'll dive through the friggin' glass if I have to. Worry about sewing myself back up later.

This is a real vivid dream. I mean, if you remember all this shit.

Ain't it just. Most vivid I've ever had.

Anyway, go on.

So I pretend like I'm taking a piss or something. Not that I needed to go. Bet you needed to take a dump, though?

You got that straight. Like I say, fear and focus make real good bed-buddies. So I zip myself up, still dry as a bone.

As a boner?

Nah, I'm limp for this, trust me. And then, as I'm walking back to the door, dork-boy is drying his hands, he ain't watching me. So what if he is anyhow? I lift the back of my jacket and start pulling the gun.

Which one did you take?

The Heckler. Nine in the magazine, one in the chamber and I figure I might just end up needin' 'em all. Don't get me wrong, I like the Wesson, immense stopping power that baby, but I ain't limiting myself to six on a job like this. They're all close quarter anyway so firepower ain't the be all. Anything I picked was gonna split heads.

Good point.

So what next?

So I open the men's room door, and stride out - gun raised at Tortelli's table, but guess what? He ain't there.

What do you mean he ain't there?

I mean what I say... the guy ain't there.

So where is he?

Safe, that's where he is. And there's two of his buddies, the big type, one either side of the door, both with guns at me. I mean, I'm glancing, you understand, 'cos I don't feel like making any sudden moves or nothing. Not just yet.

So they'd clocked you?

Yeah.

How?

Dunno. Either they saw me packing on the way into the men's room or Dork-Boy has seen that I ain't taken a piss and got some message out to them.

Yeah, but how?

Mobile, radio, magic fucking button. I don't know, but they're waiting for me is all I know.

What did they say?

Bang fucking bang, that's what they say.

They shot you? Damn right they shot me. My views on American foreign policy ain't really what they're after.

This is one bad dream, my friend.

Fucking nightmare.

So you're dead, yeah?

Nah, that's the thing. I mean, I ain't gonna win any beauty awards but I've still got breath going. And they dump me outside Lucius' place. You know, just to let him know they got me? Give him a warning that they know who sent me. They think I'm dead, and I guess I wish am.

'Cos of the pain?

Worst I ever felt.

So where's Jerry in all this?

He thinks I'm dead too, he's long gone. Shit, I'd have done the same.

So you took two bullets and you didn't die?

Hey, this is a dream, it ain't real. Besides, if I'd died in the dream I might not be telling you this tale now.

Why not?

'Cos they reckon if you die in a dream you die in real life.

Do they?

That's what I heard.

Well, Lucius is real pissed that I fucked up, said I opened a hornet's now, but he's happy I'm loyal. So he ships me off to this hospital where he's got a doc who fucks with the paperwork.

Cover your ass?

Cover Lucius' ass, my friend. Mine ain't worth shit.

Ah-ha, this is the bit I remember. That's why you was in the hospital, all wired up and shit. And that's when Marianne came.

Yeah, that's when she came and that's when she went. Couldn't hack it no more, see. Says I could've died. Best she gets out now, she says. While the boy's still young. Says I'll never find her so don't bother tryin'. Tells me I ain't worth shit to her no more.

Ouch.

Hey, like I said, her head was fucked up and it's only a fucking dream anyway. These are my thoughts, not hers.

Once she's gone - not that I can chase after her 'cos I got more tubes feeding me than a fucking V8 - Lucius shows up.

What does he say, now you're compus?

That he's pleased.

That I done good and shit, and that if there's anything he can do for me, anything at all, I just gotta ask.

And what did you say?

That nobody could do nothin'. That Marianne's gone and taken Jamie and she ain't coming back. He asks if I want him to find her for me, bring her home. I said 'what's the point?' She wants to go, she wants to go. Bringin' her back ain't gonna make her happy. I just wished that I'd gone about the job different, you know? Told him I'd do anything to put back the clock, change the way it went down.

And that's when you woke up.

Yeah, right about then.

So what does it all mean?

Well, it don't have to mean anything, does it? But I don't take no chances. I think it's telling me I'm on the wrong path. That maybe I'm heading to lose the only two people in this world that I actually give a fuck about and I take warnings like that real serious.

You think it was all gonna go down like your dream?

Nah, but I'm gonna take a bullet one day, aren't I? Law of... y'know. Averages.

Yeah, averages.

And whatever day that is, that's the one where Marianne takes Jamie and disappears.

So you decided to take the money and run?

Hey, what happened to we? I thought you were in this with me?

I am, buddy boy, I'm just playing Devil's Advocate, that's all.

Yeah, well it suits you.

Thanks.

I just figure that I can take the three hundred. No point waiting for the coke 'cos then I've got a herd... or a band or... what the fuck do you call a group of Colombians?

I think the correct term is 'hard target'.

Yeah, so I'd have all them to pop as well and I don't fancy trying to lay low and shift coke. The money's enough.

Do you think Marianne'll understand what you did, pack a bag and run with you? 'Course she will. She loves me doesn't she?

You're gonna find out soon, buddy boy, 'cos we're home now.

Not for long we ain't.

Draw your gun.

Why?

'Cause you never know, that's why. You just whipped three hundred big ones from the biggest and the baddest, where the hell's your sense of self-preservation?

Okay, okay, safety first.

No, my friend... safety off.

— THREE —

I drew the gun. Just in case. He was right, you never know.

I pushed the door open. The house seemed quiet enough, almost empty. Given the hour I doubted that Marianne was even out of bed yet. When I saw all was clear I just headed straight for the kitchen, placed the gun in my pocket, the case on the side and flicked the kettle. Quick as you like. She might only get a few mouthfuls before we gotta go, but Marianne liked her coffee in the morning and I liked to please her when I could. Then I headed off upstairs to wake them both up.

As I pushed open the bedroom door, my breath caught in my throat. Real sticky, like I was choking on blood.

And I know why now. 'Cos there really was something in my throat, but it wasn't blood. It was puke, and lots of it. I turned to the side and hurled. Someone was screaming 'fuck, fuck, fuck' and I honestly couldn't even tell if it was me. Or if it was, which one of me was it?

Marianne.

She was fucking dead.

I looked to the crib and saw Jamie's head. It wasn't nowhere near his body. They'd fucking killed him too.

Worst of it was, I could see that Marianne had suffered. It wasn't just a killing, they'd fucking tortured her first. I could see the cuts all over her face and when they'd taken her eyes, enough blood had run down her cheeks to suggest that her heart was still pumping. I don't know if she was alive when they took her arms and legs, too much blood on the bed to see, but they took them all the same. Jesus, I ain't never seen anything as bad as that.

Then I'm puking again.

Who the fuck did this? I don't know which of me was asking the question, but I figured there was only one answer. The Colombians. Fuck knows how they found me, or found me so quick, but find me they did. Then I realise that it ain't the friggin' Colombians, that's fucking crazy talk, because they don't know me from shit. Only one person knows me and that's...

And then, just as I realised who it really was, I knew I was right 'cos there was another voice
This one didn't sound like me at all. In fact, it sounded just like fucking...

Lucius.

'Some people never learn, do they Mikey?'

I turned around and there he was, large as life. And next to him... was... even though it couldn't be... it was fucking Jerry. Face is all mangled and shit, but it was Jerry alright. But he was at the bottom of docks. Wasn't he? He looked well and truly pissed. Considering the last time he saw me I was shooting him in the fucking face, I wasn't that surprised.

Short of the fact that he wasn't dead, of course.

One glance up from my feet showed me that Lucius is real calm looking. I mean, my fucking wife and kid are in pieces not four feet away and he was looking like he's shooting the fucking breeze or something.

'You... you did this?' It wasn't the cleverest thing I ever said or nothing, but I couldn't think straight no more. Head was buzzing. I know he did it, so I ask him, 'Why?' What I meant was, why not come for me? Why come after Marianne and Jamie? They ain't done nothing. They don't even know nothing. I wonder what he told them before he cut them up. Wonder if they hated me when they died.

Lucius didn't give a fuck about the bits on the beds. He was just standing there, motionless, in his designer suit. You know? All suave and shit. Then he just shook his head - real gentle - and said, 'Because you betrayed me, Mikey. That's why.'

How the fuck he'd known so quick I really didn't know. How the fuck he'd beaten me home I'll probably never know. As for Jerry... well, I just ain't got a fucking clue on that one. My other self seemed to be shitting as many bricks as I was. Thing was, he'd had the good sense to fuck off somewhere else. Head was empty. But I couldn't go. I was trapped like a buck in a cave. And I was crying. Like, really crying; hungry baby style.

'I'm real sorry, Lucius,' I said. Maybe I would find out what the fuck was going on in time, but for the moment it didn't matter. Saving my scrawny fucking ass was all that mattered. 'I did it for Marianne. For the boy.'

Lucius held out the back of his hand, slid it down the tears on my cheek. Then he put it to his lips and sucked it, like he was getting off on tasting my pain or something.

'I know you did, Mikey. You just wanted what was best for your family. I can understand that.'

I was, like, hysterical now. No other self to calm me down, you see? No-one to help me stop and think. 'I fucked up, Lucius. I fucked up real bad and I'm sorry. Honest I am. I'd do anything to put it right. Anything at all. If I could turn back the clock I'd change it all, really I would.'

Kinda like that dream I had.

Lucius smiled, but there wasn't any warmth in it. 'Would you?' he asked, leaning close. 'Would you really?'

'Yeah,' I said. I dropped to my knees, kinda sobbing and kinda begging.

Lucius shook his head in dismay. 'If you could only hear yourself, Mikey...'

Any other time I might have seen some irony in that.

Then he looked at me puzzled. Narrowed his eyes. Black eyes. When he talked to me now he did it real slow, like he was emphasising a point I'd do real well to take heed of. 'So what is it you want from me, Mikey? A third chance?'

I didn't have a clue what he meant by that, and I guess it was showing all over my face. He crouched down in front of me. I could smell Marianne's warm blood on his breath.

'You don't remember...?' I shook my head and he shook his... disappointed. 'Oh, come on now. Mikey. I think you do.'

'Tortelli?' I said. That couldn't be. Any more than Jerry could be ali...

He nodded. He didn't look happy or sad or even pissed. He just looked... evil. Evil like I ain't never seen. 'Tortelli,' he said softly. 'You fucked up, remember? Hey, don't sweat it none, these things happen. And she left you; took the boy. But let's face it, Mikey, you fucked up. Got yourself shot. Who wouldn't?'

And I remembered. In the hospital. The dream. Only it wasn't a dream, was it? Lucius was shaking his head 'No' even though I hadn't said a word just yet. Like he could read my thoughts or something. It actually fucking happened. All of it. Right up to when I told Lucius that I'd give anything to change the way it went down.

'So I did it for you... I turned back the clock; gave you another chance. And guess what... you fucked up again. Only this time you didn't just fuck up, you actually fucking betrayed me. Me, Mikey? The man who gave you your family back.'

He was swearing, sure, but shaking his head real casual. Not angry. Disappointed. 'No, Mikey, I'm afraid your chances are all gone. I can stand stupidity, I deal with that every day, but not betrayal. I just wanted you to see what happens when someone betrays me. I don't take the people who betray me, because there really isn't as much fun in that as you'd think.' He turned and looked at the blood red mess that was the bed I once shared with my wife, pieces of her still disjointed amongst the sheets. 'No, Mikey, someone betrays me, I take the things they really love. That's what I do.'

I looked up at him, through tears like an opaque window. 'So what happens now?'

'Now you have to do what's right, Mikey. Nothing more, nothing less.'

He reached down and pulled my gun from my jacket pocket. Then he handed it over to me, still casual. Neither he or Jerry are packing, I could see that much and I could have shot the pair of them there and then, but somehow I got the feeling there'd be no point. I mean fuck, I'd shot Jerry twice already, both in the face. Shot him and drowned him and he was still walking round on two legs.

But then, Jerry was one of Lucius' top guys, wasn't he? He would die for Lucius... if it came to that.

Then Lucius offered me a smile. A warm smile like I was suddenly a part of some team he'd always hoped I'd join. Slowly, he placed his hand on my head and I could feel something. Don't know what it was; some kind of strange shit. Warm, sticky in my head. Then he turned and left the room. Didn't look at me again. Jerry cast me a glance, but there was nothing in it.

I guess there comes a point when you're so well protected it isn't even fun being arrogant about it any more.

What was it my other self had been asking in the truck on the way over here? Did I love Marianne and the boy? Would I die to make them happy? And I'd said 'Yeah', hadn't I? Yet, when it came down to it, I couldn't even let her leave and take Jamie without begging someone to change it all around. So that's what Lucius had done. He'd changed it around for me. Offered me a different way to play it. And I'd taken that chance and fucked it up like nobody in this world had ever fucked up a chance before. I should have let Marianne go, let her take the kid. At least then she'd have been safe somewhere. Maybe even happy one day - without me, sure - but happy. Alive. Too damn selfish, wasn't I? I wanted it all.

I'd still got my other self's words ringing through my head, jangling like loose nails. 'I'm just playing Devil's Advocate, that's all.' and, like I said, it was a role that suited him too. It was the role he was born to play. All the time pretending to be my 'buddy-boy' whilst arguing against anything I tried to do. Always offering a different way. Telling me to lose Jerry's body. Getting me to reverse the truck. Asking me to tell him all about the dream, even though he'd seen it all for himself. Fact, he'd probably known all along the truth into which its roots had been sunk. Getting me to draw the gun before I went into my own fucking house.

Where the hell was he when I chose to put it back in my fucking pocket, that's what I wanna know...?

He'd gone. Job done.

Devil's fucking Advocate. Ain't that the best?

Lucius, it seems, is one of those guys who - like it or not - makes sure that once you've signed up you're damned if you don't and you're even more fucking damned if you do. I'd just never realised what it was I was signing up for, that was all. No wonder his top people are so fucking loyal. They've sold themselves to him; lock, stock.... probably at a knockdown price. I guess they know only too well what happens if they don't do what's right.

I sure as hell did. Took me two attempts, mind.

One too many, you might say.

I also knew what Lucius wanted me to do now, to close it all off. He wanted me to do what was right. I knew he did 'cos I'd felt it, see? Felt it in his hand when he touched me. He told me clear and simple what I gotta do. Where I gotta go.

I placed the gun in my mouth and didn't spare the world another thought before I pulled the trigger. It launched my brains against a wall already stained with my family and sent me straight down to the hell in which I'm pretty damn sure I belong. The place that Lucius knew I'd be going.

One day. Today.

I'm guessing that the sound of the gunshot raised another one of his nice warm smiles.