
Guns

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I floated down river, washing up onto the shore of Silver Lake Park with the echoes of 'Jerry Bell's' mega-phoned voice in my skull. "I'll send friends just to help you out!" A light drizzle of rain splashed on my face, washing the mud away.

No bastard had the balls to play with me. They were always direct with their vengeance. I was equally direct. Hot slugs slammed through flesh from my 9mm. A cold bored deep into my bones. Memories played cat & mouse.

An hour past. 'Jerry' and his crew hadn't come for me.

I dropped the Kevlar and leather. I was in boxers and tee. A spare set of clothes, my wallet, emergency cell & money was in the trunk of my 3000GT at the bottom of the lake and I had a swim waiting.

Dried off. Changed into a pair of black jeans & a gray cotton turtleneck, and dark brown loafers. The 3000GT sat along with the doors and trunk I moved. Dialed the number to AAA All American cab & limo service in Palatine. It was 11:23 PM by the time I got done with everything. The guy sounded suspicious about picking someone up at a park that was closed but I gave him my Discover card number and said the driver would get a fat tip. That changed his tune. Told him I'd be in front of the Parks & Recreation.

With duffle in hand, waiting, I ran through my head-figuring out who was playing with me. After ten minutes-I was too tired and too wet to think.

I needed sleep, food, & to make a call.

A phone call I didn't want to make.

The stretch white Cadillac pulled up. The guy got out, tipping his hat, saying hello

sir. He sounded-like the guy on the phone.

O_nE

It was 8:13 AM. I had an apartment that connected to my office. It had a dresser, bed, full bath, kitchenette, and frig.

I was staring at the off-white ceiling, thinking about the call I had to make to Upstate New York. The Catskills. It would be 9:13 AM there but he'd be up. I didn't want to call him, and he didn't want to get my call.

I hit the memory button on the portable. He preferred a landline. The phone rang, then connected to another line, connecting to another line, connecting to another line, connecting to another line. After the fifteenth connection, he finally picked up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Lazarus."

"Moses?"

"Yeah, it's me."

Click.

Dammit! I hit redial.

Waited.

He picked up.

"Hello?"

"Lazarus." I was trying to get it out before he asked but-

"Moses?"

"Yeah, but wait a min-"

Click.

Grrrrrrrrr.....

One more time, because I had no choice.

Redial. Wait.

"Hello."

I didn't even bother to wait. "I've got people that are begging for the big kill!"

"....."

"Lazarus? You there?" Knew he was, 'cause there was no 'click'. Had myself upright, bare feet touching the paneled floor. The sun was slightly hidden by a slow moving gray cloud. The sound of traffic started coming from the street. The office was on the 6th floor.

"...where and when," his voice was ice. It wasn't when we were kids.

"I'll send you a ticket, put you up someplace."

"Remember what I said, Moses. As long as he's still alive, and you never cross my sight, you will continue to breath-I'll call you when I get there. If I were you, I'd think about how you got into a situation where you needed to call me. Think real hard on how much you want me around."

Click.

I sat on the line listening. Dial tone. I wasn't afraid of any man. I'd go toe-to-toe lead-to-lead with any bastard wanting to get some! I was good-but Lazarus was better.

He was my brother-he wanted me dead.

I got up off the bed heading for the kitchen. I opened the frig: a few eggs, bacon, corned-beef hash, and turned on the stove. Dropped the whole-wheat bread in the toaster & started scrambling the cracked eggs into a black wok.

I thought about how I just called up my own personal hit, and why.

The Richardson Estate

Five days before:

The home office of Daniel Carl Richardson was made up like you'd think a man in the fortune 500 would look like. A wide brown wooded room with a solid oak wood desk and shear tan drapes. A deep brown soft leather chair sat next to the desk. Another chair sat in front and off to my left. The man himself stood directly in front of his desk, arms held behind him, like a detective grilling a suspect. I'd've gotten to his look-but was distracted. A very fine looking woman, in that same soft leather chair was in denim jeans and black silk elbow-length turtle neck that clung tight enough to make me need to breathe. She was-striking! I've seen gorgeous women, but she was a woman that could stop the earth. She had jet ebony-colored straight hair that sat shoulder-length and covered her ears. Her matching eyes shined like wet marbles. She had full lips that had a natural smile to them. Her legs were crossed and she sat in that chair like she was the queen of the Nile. I didn't like to compare women, but she had the looks of a Zeta Jones, and the figure of a Selma Hayek. Mr. Richardson broke the moment.

"Mr. Gunn?" his voice commanded you to look at him. He was decked in a Cardigan navy blue suit that fit and was cut for his six-foot-frame, with matching tie. He held out his hand, trapped mine in the grip of a man that knew how to make a living from using them. They were hard, strong, & softened by lotions: with ghosts of calluses still remaining. Read his profile before accepting the job of protecting his second son, Marcus Edward. Self-made millionaire started as a Mason; worked his way into importing fine building material.

He released, and I held off the flexing of my right hand. Richardson had an air of strength about him. His hair was platinum; no trace of black was left.

"Moses, please," I said. He pointed me to the second chair. I sat down, still looking at the vision in jet and honey-colored skin. Richardson noticed.

"You must be wondering who this may be. This is, um-" he was saying as she cut in, tilting her head to the left, setting those wet marbles on me.

"My name is Llama Dominguez." She had an accent that touched me somewhere deep. The look on Richardson's face was of confusion and shock. He turned to look at her. She responded, waving her hand back and forth.

"It's not a problem Daniel. I've heard of Moses Gunn, heard of his reputation. His ability to keep the discretion of his client's borders on legendary. I, Mr. Gunn, am an associate of Daniel's that handles certain freelance jobs that his normal business staff cannot be associated with."

"An industrial spy?" I said.

"If you must place a label on it, that one works as much as any other."

Mr. Richardson cleared his voice, "To get back to why you are here Mr. Gunn." I corrected him.

"Moses. Mr. Richardson. I'm usually not causal with my clients, but I respect how you came up. How you made your way from nothing. A man that pulled himself up from taking orders to giving them is the type I'd like to call friend. My father taught us-always know a self-made man. 'The calluses on his hands are a testament of the cut of his cloth'."

Mr. Richardson smirked, looking down at his hands & laughed a little at himself, shaking his head. He looked back up at me.

"Very well, Moses. Your father sounds like a wise man. Call me Daniel." He looked over his shoulder at Llama, "I think I hired a man who's going to live up to his reputation. What do you think, Ms. Dominguez?"

She had a smile on those lips and those marble eyes had a glint in them, or so my mind was telling me. "Mm, you may have found an interesting man after all, yes, someone of a certain quality. He's very interesting. I like how he carries himself. However, you two have business to discuss, and I've-my job. If you will excuse me," She floated out of her chair, the leather underneath not making a noise. "Please, please," I didn't realize I was out of my seat, blocking her exit. Standing close enough to smell her perfume: a mixture of peaches and sandalwood and vanilla. You had to be close to her to smell it. It hovered around her body like an aura, inches from her skin. "Don't leave on my account. (-whispering to her-) *I was hoping to make your acquaintance sometime.*" Part of the quality of a woman to me has always been how she carries herself. Llama Dominguez was high quality. And I was not myself because of it. She pulled me down to whisper into my ear cause she stood about 5'6' to my 5'9'; her lips were close enough that her breath was warm-her words-soft,

"You have business to attend also, Mr. Gunn & I've mine. Maybe we'll meet again under-less business like conditions. I'll let you buy me a drink at some secluded nightclub somewhere. Goodbye-Moses."

And like that, she was gone. The door was closed without any noise. Daniel was a man's man. He clasped my shoulder, "There Moses, goes a very beautiful woman and if I were any younger-ah, but I don't have the energy and-she runs in a different crowd than I. Maybe you'd be up to her speed, but I doubt that."

Daniel didn't know me well, didn't know how much my game was on point, "I think you may be wrong, Daniel." He released my shoulder, moving around and sitting down behind his desk.

"Hopefully I'm not, Moses. For your sake."

I turned toward him, "Hmm?"

"Nothing, nothing. Back to business. After this whole thing is over, we'll tie one on at some dive away from this rich man's paradise. Like my old days in construction."

"I'd like that, Daniel. So, when do you need me to protect Marcus Edward?"

Breakfast sat on the round table, and was waiting for me as I finished my shower and dressing. I had a tan short-sleeved shirt and chocolate brown jeans on with a pair of brown & white cross-country sneakers. I had twin 9mm GLOCKS holstered and a .38 at my ankle. I had the portable next to my plate. I had to get my 3000GT out of Silver Lake and have it flat-bedded to my mechanic. ABC Auto body Center & Towing off State Route 160 was the closest so I dialed them up. Told them what the deal was. They said I was crazy and to let the thing stay. I told them I'd call the park; get them to give permission to remove the car. The guy on the other end still thought I was crazy. I offered him double. He stopped asking questions. Took down my info and my Discover card. I gave him the address to my mechanic and told him to drop it there. He took it all down and was very gracious. I hung up and dialed my parks connection. Wasn't the first time I'd taken a dip into Silver Lake. Damn sure not the last. After the pleasantries I told her, I needed that favor again. She drew out her eventual yes, making me promise to take her out to wine and dinner. She was fine, so it wasn't going to be a bad thing. Hung up, called back ABC & told them everything was copasetic.

8: 41 AM. I was dumping catsup and garlic salt on my food, shoving it into the toasted whole wheat. Daniel Richardson hired me to protect his son, Marcus Edward. He'd been receiving threats toward his middle son from some unknown extortionist. He showed me a note that was left spiked to his front door. Daniel knew he needed someone because with the kind of security he had around his home, no way in hell that note

should ever been on his front door. He also needed someone whose credentials were without question, who could not be bought & who'd get the job done-yeah.

It was 9:05 AM. I was the hunter, but now I was the prey. I turned on the TV to the local news,

"On the local front," the female reporter said, "traffic was backed up and delays were many due to an exploded black Escalade that was blocking off half of Rt. 70. Police have no clue as to the reason behind the vehicle's presence. No bodies were found in the burning wreckage that local firefighters had to be called in to put out. Witnesses say that there was apart of the railing missing a few feet down on the bridge leading over Silver Lake. Police are---" Those cops find my car and I'm going to be answering questions under a hot light I don't even have the answers for.

Powered the cell up and spoke into it, "Riggs."

Tramaine Riggs: reporter for the Highland Weekly Sun trying to get big time reporter status on the Chicago Sun Times. Has a knack for gathering information at crime scenes that most reporters couldn't. That made him a good source.

I was on a missing person's case and he became my unwanted sidekick. For all my effort, the five foot five inch bastard would not get himself shot! Little sonofabitch has the survival instincts of a hungry rat.

He picked up on the third ring.

"Tramaine Riggs, talk to me!" Cocky sonofa-

"Riggs, its Moses."

"Hey, Murtaugh, how's it hangin'?" Habit of thinking he was my partner after the missing person's case. He helps a little, and he thinks he's Mel Gibson.

"Cut the chat boy. Where are you?" Sipped some of my O.J.

"You near a Tee-Vee?"

"Yeah."

"Check out the news. Escalade explosions where I'm at. Got to be where the

action's going down my man." Perfect.

"What did you find in the wreckage that the cops haven't seen, Riggs?"

"W-what do you mean, Moses. I-I'm just down here, like every other reporter. Trying to find something for a story."

"Don't jerk me Riggs. What did you find? That truck was there 'cause I shot the hell out of it last night. So, whatever you 'found' I need to keep away from the cops, and you not to try and find out anything on your own. Unless you like armed men coming to your front door. If so-go for it! Better them putting you in the ground than me." His phone went silent-then he came back to the line, whispering, "O-okay, okay. Damn no need to scare me like that all right? Okay, I found a rental receipt & agreement wedged into the crease of the glove compartment. It had a company title, signature, & thumb print smug on the lower right corner." God, if this boy wasn't annoying-. "Keep a lid on that. Swing around my office, ASAP! Don't follow any leads." A knock came to the outer door of my office.

"Yeah, Moses. All right. But you have to give me the story on this after you figure out what's the dealie my man."

"Yeah. I gotta go."

"'Kay man. See ya Murtaugh." Little-.

Put the cell in the charger. At the same time, I had my right hand under my left armpit, GLOCK handle firmly in my grip, dashing across the room, locking the adjoining door behind me so I was in the office across from my desk.

The knocking became more impatient. I pulled out my second GLOCK, & sitting behind my desk, pressed the button underneath the desktop, "Come in, the door's open." Both GLOCKS were chambered-ready to let hell loose!

The waiting room door opened. I could see straight through the fuzzy glass and let thunder fall! The outline of two men came through and opened the door to the main office.

The knob twisted. My heart rate jumped. My teeth clenched, and the blood rushed flush to the tips of my ears and my face was red hot! My hands tightened around the grips.

They came in-saw the GLOCKS leveled at them-they were not impressed.

One of them went for his inner pocket, I flicked the right GLOCK up, "Don't even think about it, friend. I'm two seconds from bringing the pain! Smacking hot lead and gun smoke all up into your bellies, so I wouldn't try anything!"

The guy my left GLOCK aimed at reached for his inner pocket with a smarmy look on his pink-white face. He had dirty brown hair that looked like it was tossed in a blender. He and his black-mousse haired partner looked like something out of Dragnet wearing bland gray and baize sports jackets.

"I wouldn't pull those triggers if I was you until I got a good look at this." He flipped out his wallet. A badge with an eagle at the top. Special Agent was written underneath 'U' & 'S' in bold blue script. ATF was engraved in gold.

Agent Cagney closed his badge, returning it to inner pocket. "My name's Agent Cagney, this is my partner Agent Tarantino. You can put the heat away Mr. Gunn. We're here to ask you a few questions."

Anyone could get a badge made-up. Hell, I've a few in the bottom drawer right now for-situations. I put my right GLOCK into its holster, waving at them, "Throw your ID's here. Anyone could have fake I.D.'s made. You, Tarantino, reach for yours-carefully-now hand it to Cagney and toss them onto my desk." They did as they were told. Under the law, If I'd shot them, I'd be in my rights 'cause how would I know if they were legit or not-they had gun bulges. I'd even let them draw. Would've put my other GLOCK away telling them to go for theirs. My gunplay isn't something to sleep on. I pulled the office portable next to me, "You two can stand there and wait for a few minutes while I check on you."

I dialed my contact.

"Yeah, it's me. An Agent Cagney & Tarantino. They'd be stationed out of Highland, IL doing surveillance. Yeah, yeah, that's them. All right? Thanks, I owe you a shot. Later." I hung up, throwing them their badges. My left GLOCK disappeared.

"What can I do for you, Agent Cagney?" tilting back in my chair.

They both sat down. Cagney was visually pissed, "Who was that? Surveillance postings and Agent ID's are strictly private. You shouldn't be able to get a hold of them that easily or even at all, Mister!"

"Look, do you have business with me or what? I've my sources. That's that."

Cagney didn't want to let it go, but his partner looked over at him with a shrug.

"Fine. What was your business with the Russians the other day?"

"What's it to you?"

"Not that it's your concern Moses, but, we've been keeping an eye on those Russians for a while now. Someone's been running weapons from Chicago to Bosnian for a Croatian militia group. We believe that they might be the one's supplying the guns. We're watching them, and then you appear in the picture. It piqued our curiosity. You're not known for dealing with the Russian Mafia."

"I needed to know something."

"Did they know?"

"Not that it's your concern Agent Cagney," I spat the words at him. "But no. they didn't. Have to have a chat with my source." The air suddenly got cooler, and the AC wasn't on. A heavy silence sat in the room. A bead of cold sweat fell down my cheek. I turned to look over at my clock. 10:59 AM.

"Do we have a problem here, Moses?"

The two agents jumped in their seats.

"Jesus H. Christ!" said Tarantino.

"Give me a heart attack!" said Cagney.

"Do we have a problem here, Moses?" was the words he kept repeating. He stood 6'3', wearing tattered blue jeans and a heavy army green sweatshirt & matching dew rag. He looked down his nose at the agents. His gray eyes-measuring both of them. He could kill them both within five seconds if he wanted.

I've seen him do it. This was Lazarus. This-was my brother.

"Who the hell are you!?" Agent Cagney said as he was rising out of his seat changing his mind as he took in the full size of my brother and his broad shoulders.

"Lazarus," was all he said.

"Lazarus-Gunn?" said Agent Tarantino.

"Yeah."

The government had a file on him. Lazarus was a Ranger in the military. His platoon was the first ones into the fray. Every conflict/covert since '87. He was discharged because he was getting hard to control. He'd taken out a bunker in Baghdad, fifty men plus a tank, while his platoon was under heavy fire-by himself-with an army knife. His men feared him more than respected. Now he hunted white supremacists groups for sport-this week.

"No. No, Lazarus, there's no problem. These agents were just leaving. When did you get in? I would've sent a car for you." I'm less afraid of what Lazarus would do to me, and more afraid of what he might do if these ATF agents don't take the hint.

Tarantino rose, signaling his partner to rise with him,

"We'll continue this another time. Come on, Cagney. We have another appointment to get to."

Cagney looked irritated, "What do you mean? We're here now, why the hell are we going just because this guy shows up."

"His name, think about it. Remember Wisconsin?" Cagney's face contorted, then the thoughts danced across each crease, then memory. "Wait, he's that Lazarus?!"

Cagney's eyes moved to look at Lazarus. He was still staring at the agents as he said, "Haven't been back to Wisconsin since March. That was a good time." I read about it online. A Supremacists group was found slaughtered in their compound in a little town called Jebediah Springs. Guns, drugs, and dead bodies were found. The count was thirty-five. None was shot. All had their throats slit or were decapitated.

"Yeah, that Lazarus," said Tarantino.

".....we'll come back when we're done with the other business," and like that, they were gone. There's an unofficial order, not written down, that all government agencies aren't ever to interfere where Lazarus is involved. Ever.

He turned his eyes onto me, "Are they apart of the reason you called me, Moses?"

I exhaled heavily. "No, no Lazarus, they aren't. But I should hear about those bastards from a source who'll come around soon."

"Good. I'm staying at the Bracken Arms a few blocks from here. Told them the bill goes to you. You owe me \$750 for the ticket. First class, I hate coach."

"I would have-" he cut me off, "I know, but you said there was killing to be done, and I was impatient. Dad says 'hi' and to call him. Go visit him sometime. I'm going to get something to eat." He turned, strolling out my office door.

The room was silent.

I needed a drink-then the phone rang.

"Moses Gunn Investigations."

"Murtaugh? It's Riggs. I'm in the alleyway across the street from you. Saw all the traffic comin' out and thought I'd wait. I'm comin' up."

I hung up the portable-waiting.

-- To be continued --

