

This is an
As-Is publication.
as-ispublishing.com

A Single Event (original draft)

by Melvin L. Clermont

Dear Mom,

You're invited to our 10th anniversary celebration. See you there.

Four months ago, limousine driver Michael Rolecks had his identity stolen and his life had steadily declined into shambles. His credit and reputation had been ruined along with his bank accounts. Any money and property he had systematically disappeared. He asked for help from a few select individuals because he helped them in the past when they needed it and he thought they'd return the favor. But that didn't happen. A lifelong Christian, he sought assistance from his church as a last resort but even they shunned him.

The summer sun had set and the twilight began on the cloudless Miami evening as Michael parked a black Cadillac Escalade EXT into the unlit empty two-car garage of his two-story, peach and mint green Art Deco home. He waited for the garage door to close behind him before getting out with a red, one gallon plastic gas can in hand. He then walked into an already open side door that led into the kitchen where his physically fit wife awaited. Only the stove light provided adequate lighting to show off his black tuxedo attire. Unable to afford storage for their material possessions, over the past few days they held a successful everything-must-go yard sale. Like the garage and every other room, the kitchen was empty as the house had been foreclosed on just before the sale. Due to leniency from creditors and the electric company, they had until midnight tonight to be completely moved out.

He briefly looked over the shoulder of his wife, Teresa Bombard, who was wearing a strapless, sky blue evening dress. She was crouched over on the marble countertop typing on a MacBook Pro. She was a career military woman and while off duty in the States, she met Michael and fell in love. Taking advantage of the American military's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy, she was discharged and they got married. In a couple more hours tonight, it would be 10 years since she adopted his Christian beliefs and became a homemaker. But the fallout from Michael's situation trickled down to her and all they had left was each other.

"Got the wheels?" asked Teresa, as she grabbed a T-Mobile Sidekick 3 and started typing as intently on it as her laptop.

"Yep," said Michael in the adjoined living room, emptying the contents of the gas can into the fireplace "We've got exactly 30 minutes before Jorge realizes it's missing."

"I'll be done with it in less than 10. Just gotta put the finishing touches on this and...there. All set." They looked at the webcam on the laptop and their image displayed on the Sidekick. "Audio and video in sync. Fully charged battery. Speakers set to max. Now for the Caddy." She grabbed a large brown tote bag from the floor and went into the garage.

"Where's the letter?" asked Michael.

"Right here." She removed a stamped and addressed white business envelope from the bag and handed it to him.

"What's the potency?"

“As soon as she opens it, she’ll croak faster than Michigan J. Frog in the spotlight. But not too fast. No chance of cross-contamination during delivery either,” she said, taking an item with some tools from the bag and installing it underneath the SUV.

“Ah, the advantages of marrying a comedian of an ex-SEAL,” he said, inspecting the letter while walking back into the house, leaving the door open.

“Off the books. You keep forgetting to mention that part. You think they want people knowing they trained females? I’m all done out here. Less than 10 just like I said. Ready to go to Heaven?” She opened the unlocked trunk and put the bag there as Michael came in, closing the side door behind him, and started up the SUV. Teresa got in and they looked at the display on the Sidekick. It was a direct view of the chimney as large flames emerged from it.

“Looks like this is gonna be the best 10th anniversary ever,” he said.

A few moments later while cruising down the interstate, Teresa witnessed the chimney flames being extinguished by a couple of firefighters. She could see one of them looking at the laptop.

“Hey Mike, check it out. He was drawn to it just like you said.”

“It’s the one he’s been saving up for, the sucker.”

Looking at the laptop was the weathered face of volunteer firefighter James Parrish who also happened to be their minister. Their two-year-old, only-child daughter Kayla got Legionnaire’s disease from the church and in an extremely rare circumstance lost her life to it five months ago. The church was found to not be at fault but they continued supporting their religion there for a short time after, regardless of the loss. But

when Michael and Teresa went to James for financial assistance and guidance, they received none.

“Look at this idiot,” she said, “typing away even though I disabled the keyboard. What an idiot. Feeds his ego and pockets by preaching the gospel in the day and saving lives from the flames of hell at night. Gave him god knows how many thousands of dollars throughout the years and we didn’t sue his ass for killing our daughter but he didn’t wanna help save ours. Fucking hypocrite. Couldn’t even leave from your vacation to officiate her funeral, could you?” A couple other firefighters began looking at the laptop in the background from the living room. She pressed the enter button on the phone to speak. “Hey James. James,” She saw him point to himself. “Yeah, you. It’s Teresa. Guess what? You’re invited to our 10th anniversary celebration. See you there.” She released the enter button on the phone and the screen went blank although the phone was still on.

Michael exited the interstate just outside of the downtown area and drove for a few blocks until he saw a cop parked under a street lamp on the side of an empty, littered street watching his laptop monitor attentively. “Just like I told you,” he said to Teresa. He lowered the passenger window, stopped next to the cop car and honked. The cop rolled down his window.

“So how’s that Harry Potter movie?” asked Michael. “That’s the first one, isn’t it?”

“Oh my god. Mike. Teresa. It...it’s been a long time. Kayla’s funeral was the last...How...how’ve you guys been? I stopped by, I called and emailed...” replied Eric Samaritan, Michael’s best friend since elementary school. That would be me, by the

way. I was the only person who reached out to them in their time of need. Only problem was that I lacked focus and direction and, most importantly, money which they needed most. I always wanted to be a writer for some reason but I wasn't disciplined in it so I made the wrong career choice. I settled on a dead-end job as a graveyard shift beat cop in an area where practically nothing happened. I still couldn't give them the right kind of help even though I was a cop, the type of person who's supposed to be able to help in their situation.

"We're fine, Eric. We'll catch up later but right now I need you to follow me to my old job since you have so much time on your hands as usual. I gotta return this vehicle that Jorge let me borrow tonight but I get the feeling he forgot what he said to me and he's gonna think I stole it. He's got a short-term memory problem."

"Sure, sure," I said, turning off the movie. "Just lead the way."

We arrived a few minutes later down the street at Jorge Gordito's Luxury Car and Limo Rental. The large lot, enclosed by a high razor wire fence, was full of stretched Hummers, Escalades, and Lincolns among many other models. The business was closed and the lot dark but the front entrance gate was open for returning vehicles.

"Right on schedule," said Michael to Teresa, lowering his window. "Jorge should be doing his rounds right about...and there he is." I followed Michael into the lot and we were greeted by a balding, overweight goateed man with a gun wearing a guayabera, khakis, and flip flops aiming a flashlight at us.

"What goin' on here? Michael?" said Jorge. "What you doin' here? It been long time, man." I got out of the car with my hand covering my service weapon.

“He’s okay, Eric,” said Michael, getting out of the SUV with Teresa who retrieved her bag from the trunk. “He has a license for that. He’s legit.”

“Wow,” I said, “You guys look great. What’s the occasion?”

“Hey,” said Jorge. “That my SUV. How you get that? You steal from me now ‘cause of what happen? Hey cop...”

“No,” said Michael, “no. You let me borrow it tonight so I could take my wife out to dinner. That’s why we’re dressed up. I got the keys right here, see? If I stole it, how would I have these? You gave them to me, remember?”

“Hmm, I think you right. I got no reason to not trust you. You brought my company outta bankruptcy. You good man. Hey cop, lemme tell you ‘bout this man. Really good guy. Don’t even need watch to know what time it is. He read people like he psychic or some shit, you know? If I could kept him, I would. But whoever stole your identity, man, they crack my system and wipe your 401k clean. I had to let you go, man, for the sake of everybody else. I don’t want no Enron shit goin’ on here, you know? I think this first time I explain it to you like this. You understand, right?”

“Look, there’s no need to explain anything to me at this point, Jorge. What’s done is done. So we’re cool?”

“Yeah, yeah. No problem, man. Just gimme them keys so I can park this baby. Why I give you this one? My only model with bulletproof glass, you know?”

“I didn’t know that,” said Michael. “Hey, we’re having a 10th anniversary celebration tomorrow. You’re invited.”

“Congratulations, man, but tomorrow not work for me. Till I hire new security guard, I gotta be here, you know? I’ll be there in spirit like Kayla’s funeral. Now get outta

my driveway. I got a driver droppin' off in about an hour. Don't mean to rush but this a business, man. Gotta make money. Good seein' you again." Jorge got in the SUV, rolled up the windows, and drove off to park it.

"You're right. You will be there in spirit," whispered Michael to himself. "We need a ride to Heaven. Eric?" Teresa pressed a button on the phone as they walked to the patrol car.

They were in my back seat as I drove them down Brickell Avenue to their destination.

"I thought you just told that guy you had dinner already?" I asked.

"Bet you're wondering why we didn't invite you to our anniversary celebration, aren't you?" asked Teresa.

"Uh, yeah, actually, I am. Michael invites that guy that dropped him like a bad habit when his identity got stolen but not me who stuck by you guys no matter what?"

"You'll have bigger things to take care of tomorrow, Eric," said Michael.

"Like what? Cleaning the DVD lens on my laptop to make sure the second Harry Potter movie doesn't skip? Please. This job sucks. We haven't even gotten a lead in your case yet. All this does is pays the bills and it barely does that. Should'a went to college instead of police academy."

"You still wanna be a writer, huh?"

"Hell yeah I do. I just don't have anything to write about. My life is boring. I got no inspiration. You know what? I think that's why you guys shut me out when I tried to help. I got nothin' to offer, do I? No wonder I'm still single at 40."

“Aw, c’mon man. Don’t go beating yourself up now. Here.” He took a smaller sized, heavily taped cardboard box from Teresa’s bag and put it in the front passenger seat.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Your college fund. Plus more.”

“Hmph. What the fuck’ re you talkin’ about, dude? You’re broker than I am. Whoever stole your identity took you to the cleaners till there wasn’t a spot left. Everybody knows that, that’s why people avoid you. They’re scared it could happen to them just by associating with you. And whoever it is...it’s like they knew everything about both of you and didn’t leave a trail to follow. Now you got money to give me after all you’ve been through? C’mon dude, I’m a loser but don’t insult my intelligence. I’m a cop. What’s really in that box?”

“There’s the Santa Maria. Let us out next to that mail drop-off box and we can walk the rest.”

“Okay. But that’s the second time you’ve changed the subject. What are you two up to?”

“Hey, we’ve got 20 minutes to make our reservation at Heaven and she’ll be pretty upset if we don’t make it.”

“I didn’t earn my She-Hulk nickname for nothing,” said Teresa.

“You got that...” I said, just when I got a call over the radio:

“Dispatch to Samaritan. We’ve got a shots fired call over at Jorge Gordito’s Luxury Car and Limo Rental. What’s your ETA?”

“Oh shit! We just came from there. And here I am outta my district. My first real call in forever since I took that beat and I’m all the way out here playing taxi to you guys. Get out. I gotta go. And I gotta lie to dispatch. Go! I’ll stay in touch whether you like it or not,” I told them. I conveniently dropped them off by the blue post office mailbox as people stared at them as they got out. I could imagine why as I’m sure it wasn’t a regular sight to see.

“Write a good story, Eric,” said Michael as he closed the door. I gave them a confused look as I sped off. He took a letter from his tux and inserted it in the drop box. “Plenty of time to spare.”

They looked up at the massive and elegant Santa Maria condo tower, home of Heaven, a new restaurant open by reservation only. What made Heaven unique was that meals were prepared fresh by a personal chef and seating room was limited to two people only, making for a very romantic ambience. Located on the 31st floor overlooking the downtown Miami skyline, guests had the option of eating indoors or on a private balcony. Once done, there was also a private bedroom suite allowing them to end their night perfectly. Reservations were made and paid for in advance as well as choice of meal, giving the chef time to prepare them. Guests had three hours to make the best of the dining and love-making quarters. The chef was the only staff present when guests arrived and departed.

Teresa and Michael looked at the phone display on their way up in the elevator. On it was a street map with two blinking red lights, one closely approaching the other stationary one.

“Now?” asked Teresa.

“Now,” said Michael, exiting the elevator. The stationary red light disappeared from the display. Directly across the hall were the pearl-white gates of Heaven’s entrance which opened as they approached.

“Welcome to Heaven...I...Oh my.” said the chef, who greeted them at the door.

“Hi, sis. We’re the McDonalds,” said Teresa, acknowledging the bloodline she shared with the chef. Her half-sister Nancy Sousa owned and operated Heaven. But it wouldn’t have been possible without Teresa giving her the money to open it in the first place.

“Oh hi, uh, where’d you get money for uh...and you used a fake name? Nevermind, nevermind. It’s been a while. Since...since before Kayla...have a seat. C’mon in.”

“Private balcony please,” said Michael.

“Sure. Can I take your bag?”

“Absolutely,” said Teresa, as they were escorted through the opulent restaurant and outside through glass doors to a round table with a mirrored tabletop on the balcony.

“Listen, I know I haven’t contacted you since before Kayla...you know. I’ve been really busy. And then that whole identity theft thing, I...I just didn’t want whoever did it coming after me if they found my name in your phone or in an email and got something on me. They’re pretty efficient...”

“You know, it’s midnight in a few minutes,” said Michael, sitting and enjoying the view. “It’ll be our 10th anniversary. Glad you could make it.”

“Oh, uh, congratulations. I...”

“Appetizers please?” asked Teresa.

“Oh yeah, yeah. I’ll get right to it. This bag is heavy.”

“I don’t have this bod for nothing, sis. Appetizers?” said Teresa.

“Yeah, yeah, sure. Coming right up.”

Nancy went inside with confusion and surprise crippling her facial muscles. Most patrons would look across at the breathtaking view of the city while basking in the warm breeze. But Teresa, Sidekick in hand, and Michael stood up and looked down.

“He should be here within two minutes,” said Michael. “What’s the tracer show?”

“He’s on his way,” said Teresa, looking at the street map on the phone display with a rapidly moving blinking red light. “Look. There they are.” She pointed down at three cop cars speeding down Brickell, sirens flashing and blaring.

“Right on time,” said Michael. “Our 10th anniversary and everyone we invited is gonna be there.”

“Let’s go get Kayla and wait for our other guests then, shall we?” said Teresa.

They jumped from the balcony and Teresa pressed the enter button on the phone.

Behind them, Heaven exploded, leaving a massive fireball rising from the Santa Maria.

They held hands and spread their arms as they fell to the earth from the flames.

They looked like a pair of fallen angels from my vantage point on the street. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing when I saw the explosion and then the bodies falling. Looked like something out of a movie. Almost caused an accident how fast I stopped to look. I knew it was them. The outer lighting from the condo lit up their black and blue

clothes. I didn't know what to think at first. I knew times were tough for them but why would they do that? And how?

It was two weeks later when I finished my final report and the case was closed. All the clues were in and it was sad yet thought-provoking as far as how they pulled everything off to a tee. I didn't know either of them were capable of such heinous acts. And I certainly didn't realize how hard they'd taken Kayla's death. I know now that she meant the world to them. Everything really. To them, since everything was taken away from them and they thought they had nothing without her, they decided to join her in elaborate, symbolic fashion. They went after the people who didn't attend her funeral who they thought should have and made damn sure they attended the anniversary celebration which was also all of their own funerals.

To throw people off from their true motives, Michael had Teresa steal his identity since she was trained to be so proficient at such things. The severity of it would surely drive anyone down that path, they thought. Then they asked those same people for help knowing that they wouldn't because they knew their true colors: Too busy for anyone other than themselves. People they helped in the past but knew full well wouldn't help them back mainly due to the fact that they didn't care enough to attend their daughter's funeral for selfish reasons. To them, that was the ultimate disrespect by people they had respect for and who they thought had it for them.

Knowing their reaction was all Michael's part. Just like Jorge said, he was psychic or something. Execution was all Teresa. They knew exactly what they were doing. The whole 10th anniversary thing ...these guys are martyrs now. If they invited

you, you were gonna die with them. The media sensationalized the hell out of it calling them The Anniversary Killers. Cheesy. Seems like they chose the happiest day to go to the happiest place and that was with Kayla.

Parrish died from the exploding laptop in their home. Jorge was locked inside the Caddy that Michael actually did steal. Must've been something they did to the vehicle for that to happen but no evidence was found in all the wreckage to figure out what. I assume he shot through the roof to get someone's attention since the windows weren't gonna break. And Michael's timekeeping precision was immaculate. Working there so long, he knew no one would gravitate towards a gunshot and no drivers were gonna show up anytime soon. And he knew that was my beat. He suckered me into a ride and was able to plant that tracer box in my car to keep track of me and made sure I was there to see Jorge die. It wasn't pretty.

They knew I'd go looking for them as prime suspects and he timed it so well to make sure that I would see them jumping to their deaths, taking Nancy with them I found out later. So much for Heaven. Looked more like pure hell. There was a postal scare with the anthrax-laced letter he sent to his mom. She was old and already knocking on death's door anyway. Michael blamed her for Kayla's death more than anyone else because she raised him Christian. Where was God to save his daughter, he thought. He had a lot of resentment but still expected her to attend the funeral. She didn't because she thought the bad blood between them would take away from what was important. So he and Teresa decided to play God by taking her and all the others they blamed and deemed unworthy to the celebration. Wanted them all to be held

accountable for what they were about to do. That's what they said in the confession video that was in that tracer box.

Surprisingly, only the people they wanted to kill got killed. There were minor injuries but no other deaths. I should be appalled by what they did but as gruesome as everything was, it wasn't all bad as there was a light at the end of that dark, bloody tunnel. I never believed in karma until now. Of course I lied about how I got the video and didn't tell anyone about the box. Especially since it had every cent Mike and Teresa ever had in it. I'd never seen so many hundred dollar bills in my life. That's what they did with all the money that disappeared from their names. They gave it to me. Now I know why he told me to write a good story. Now I have one to tell and I can afford the classes I need to learn how to tell it. Still, I can't help but feel sometimes like they're using me, even from the grave. Like it was all part of their plan, too. Martyrs indeed.

A single event. That's all it took to drive them over the edge. When you think about it, that's really all it takes to change people's lives forever.

The End

A Single Event (revision)

by Melvin L. Clermont

My name is Michael Rolecks. My two-year-old daughter Kayla died about four months ago and life hasn't been the same since. Most people would go into a deep depression after the loss of an only child. But I'm not most people. Along with my wife, I had a different reaction. We were never a rich family so funeral expenses and such took its toll. We expected some financial assistance from those that we helped throughout the years. People we thought we could depend on. We were wrong.

It was just past 8:00 and getting dark here in Miami as I parked a black Cadillac Escalade into my garage. I got out carrying a full one-gallon gas can. I walked into the kitchen where my wife was busy. Since all of our money was exhausted to pay for the funeral, we couldn't afford the mortgage or to keep the electricity on so it was almost pitch black inside. To make what was left of our ends meet, over the past few days we held an everything-must-go yard sale. Like the garage and every other room, the kitchen was completely empty as the house had been foreclosed on just before the sale. People thought we were moving but that wasn't the case.

I glanced over my wife's shoulder as she was crouched over the countertop typing on a laptop. Her name is Teresa Bombard and we love each other to death. She was a career military woman and while off duty, we met and fell in love. Taking advantage of the American military's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy, she was discharged and we got married. She's a great homemaker and even better with electronics. Her military training will definitely come in handy tonight.

“Got the wheels?” she asked, punching numbers into her cell phone and laptop simultaneously.

“Yep,” I said from the adjoined living room, emptying the contents of the gas can into the fireplace. “We’ve got exactly 30 minutes before Jorge realizes it’s missing.”

“I’ll be done with it in less than 10. Just gotta put the finishing touches on this and...there. All set.” I walked back into the kitchen in front of the laptop webcam and she showed me footage of myself on the phone that matched what was on the laptop monitor. “Audio and video in sync. Fully charged battery. Speakers set to max. Now for the Caddy.” She grabbed a large brown tote bag from the floor and went into the garage where I followed her. Then she took a small item with some tools from the bag and installed it underneath the SUV. “I’m all done out here. Less than 10 just like I said. Ready to go to Heaven?” She put the bag in the trunk and we drove off. Looking at the display on the phone, it was a direct view of the fireplace as large flames emerged from it.

A few moments later while cruising down the interstate, we knew it wouldn’t be long before the fire department showed up. Teresa witnessed the chimney flames being extinguished by a couple of firefighters. She could see one of them looking at the laptop.

“Hey Mike, check it out. He was drawn to it just like you said.”

“It’s the one he’s been saving up for, the sucker.”

Looking at the laptop was the weathered face of volunteer firefighter James Parrish who also happened to be our minister. Kayla got Legionnaire’s disease from his church that we attended for years and in an extremely rare circumstance lost her life to

it. We made a mistake by hiring a high-priced lawyer who determined the church wasn't at fault. An even bigger mistake was us continuing to support our religion there for a short time after, regardless of the loss. It was almost like us saying it was okay. The Christian brainwashing wore off over time though. When we had money problems, Parrish didn't want to help. That helped the crying turn into anger.

"Look at this idiot," she said, "typing away even though I disabled the keyboard. What an idiot. Feeds his ego and pockets by preaching the gospel in the day and saving lives from the flames of hell at night. Gave him god knows how many thousands of dollars throughout the years and we didn't sue his ass for killing our daughter. Fucking hypocrite. Couldn't even leave from your vacation to officiate her funeral, could you?" A couple other firefighters began looking at the laptop in the background from the living room. She pressed the enter button on the phone to speak. "Hey James. Come closer," She saw him point to himself, moving closer to the webcam. "Closer. Perfect." She pressed the enter button on the phone and the screen went blank although the phone was still on. She told me she rigged the battery cells to explode unidirectionally all at once on command or something, I don't know. She's the expert on those things.

I exited the interstate just outside of the downtown area and drove for a few blocks until I saw a cop parked under a street lamp on the side of an empty, littered street watching his own laptop monitor attentively. "Just like I told you," I said to Teresa. I lowered the passenger window, stopped next to the cop car and honked. The cop rolled down his window.

"So how's that Harry Potter movie?" I asked. "That's the first one, isn't it?"

“Oh my god. Mike. Teresa. It...it’s been a long time. Kayla’s funeral was the last...How...how’ve you guys been? I stopped by, I called and emailed...” replied Eric Samaritan, my best friend since elementary school. He was the only person who reached out to us in our time of need. Only problem was that he lacked focus and direction, and most importantly money which we needed most. He always wanted to be a writer for some reason but wasn’t disciplined in it so he made the wrong career choice. He settled on a dead-end job as a graveyard shift beat cop in an area where practically nothing happened.

“We’re fine, Eric. We’ll catch up later but right now I need you to follow me to my old job since you have so much time on your hands as usual. I gotta return this vehicle that Jorge let me borrow tonight but I get the feeling he forgot what he said to me and he’s gonna think I stole it. He’s got a short-term memory problem.”

“Sure, sure,” said Eric, turning off the movie. “Just lead the way.”

We arrived a few minutes later down the street at Jorge Gordito’s Luxury Car and Limo Rental, my former place of employment for 21 years. The large lot, enclosed by a high razor wire fence, was full of stretched Hummers, Escalades, and Lincolns among many other models. I helped this place get off the ground but old Jorge wouldn’t help me do the same after expenses from Kayla’s death piled up. He fired me of all people when I took more bereavement days off for Kayla’s funeral than allowed. Used up all my vacation and sick time too. Policy is policy but it wasn’t expected. The business was closed and the lot dark but the front entrance gate was open for returning vehicles.

“Right on schedule,” I said to Teresa, lowering the window. “Jorge should be doing his rounds right about...and there he is.” Eric followed me into the lot and we

were greeted by a balding, overweight goateed man with a gun wearing a guayabera, khakis, and flip flops aiming a flashlight at us. That's Jorge for you.

"What goin' on here? Michael?" said Jorge. "What you doin' here? It been long time, man." I saw Eric get out of his squad car with his hand covering his service weapon.

"He's okay, Eric," I said, getting out of the SUV with Teresa who retrieved her bag from the trunk. "He has a license for that. He's legit."

"Wow," said Eric, "You guys look great. What's the occasion?" He was referring to the fact that I was dressed in a tux and Teresa in an evening gown. We had dinner plans for later.

"Hey," said Jorge. "That my SUV. How you get that? You steal from me now 'cause of what happen? Hey cop..."

"No," I said, "no. You let me borrow it tonight so I could take my wife out to dinner. That's why we're dressed up. I got the keys right here, see? If I stole it, how would I have these? You gave them to me, remember?"

"Hmm, I think you right. I got no reason to not trust you. You brought my company outta bankruptcy. You good man. Hey cop, lemme tell you 'bout this man. Really good guy. Don't even need watch to know what time it is. He read people like he psychic or some shit, you know? If I could kept him, I would. But I bend rules for him, everybody want me to do same for them..."

"I know how the story goes," interrupted Eric.

"Listen," I said. "Take the keys. We're done for the night." I tried to give him back the keys but he was being inquisitive.

“Done? How you get back...”

“Just take the keys. Here. And thanks.”

“Yeah, yeah. No problem, man. Why I give you this one? My only model with bulletproof glass, you know?”

“We didn’t know that,” whispered Teresa. Jorge got in the SUV, rolled up the windows, and drove off to park it.

“We need a ride to Heaven,” I said. “Eric?” Teresa pressed a button on the phone as we walked to the patrol car.

We were in the back seat as he drove us down Brickell Avenue to our destination.

“I thought you just told that guy you had dinner already?” asked Eric.

“Don’t worry about that. You’ll have bigger things to take care of tomorrow,” I said.

“Like what? Cleaning the DVD lens on my laptop to make sure the second Harry Potter movie doesn’t skip? Please. This job sucks. All this does is pays the bills and it barely does that. Should’a went to college instead of police academy.”

“You still wanna be a writer, huh?”

“Hell yeah I do. I just don’t have anything to write about. My life is boring. I got no inspiration. You know what? I think that’s why you guys shut me out when I tried to help. I got nothin’ to offer, do I? No wonder I’m still single at 40.”

“Aw, c’mon man. Don’t go beating yourself up now. Here.” I took a smaller sized, heavily taped cardboard box from Teresa’s bag and put it in the front passenger seat.

“What’s that?”

“Your college fund. Plus more.”

“Hmph. What the fuck’re you talkin’ about, dude? You’re broker than I am thanks to that lawsuit that went nowhere. Now you got money to give me after all you’ve been through? C’mon dude, I’m a loser but don’t insult my intelligence. I’m a cop. What’s really in that box?”

“There’s the Santa Maria. Drop us off in the front.”

“Okay. But that’s the second time you’ve changed the subject. What are you two up to?”

“Hey, we’ve got 20 minutes to make our reservation at Heaven and she’ll be pretty upset if we don’t make it.”

“I didn’t earn my She-Hulk nickname for nothing,” said Teresa who’s always been in great physical shape. One of the reasons I married her.

“You got that...” said Eric, just when he got a call over the radio:

“Dispatch to Samaritan. We’ve got a shots fired call over at Jorge Gordito’s Luxury Car and Limo Rental. What’s your ETA?”

“Oh shit! We just came from there. And here I am outta my district. My first real call in forever since I took that beat and I’m all the way out here playing taxi to you guys. Get out. I gotta go. And I gotta lie to dispatch. Go! I’ll stay in touch,” he said as he got out and opened the doors for us in his panic and let us out as people stared. I could imagine why as I’m sure it wasn’t a regular sight to see.

“Write a good story, Eric,” I said to him. He gave me a confused look as he sped off. “Plenty of time to spare.”

Me and Teresa looked up at the massive and elegant Santa Maria condo tower, home of Heaven, a new restaurant open by reservation only. What made Heaven unique was that meals were prepared fresh by a personal chef and seating room was limited to two people only, making for a very romantic ambience. Located on the 31st floor overlooking the downtown Miami skyline, guests had the option of eating indoors or on a private balcony. Once done, there was also a private bedroom suite allowing them to end their night perfectly. Reservations were made and paid for in advance as well as choice of meal, giving the chef time to prepare them. Guests had three hours to make the best of the dining and love-making quarters. The chef was the only staff present when guests arrived and departed.

We looked at the phone display on the way up in the elevator. On it was a street map with two blinking red lights, one closely approaching the other stationary one.

“Now?” asked Teresa.

“Now,” I said, exiting the elevator. The stationary red light disappeared from the display. That would mean Jorge fired through the roof of the Escalade to get attention since the windows were bulletproof. It worked. Just like we knew it would. Eric would be the one dispatched to the location to see Jorge say goodbye as we were about to do shortly. Directly across the hall were the pearl-white gates of Heaven’s entrance which opened as they approached.

“Welcome to Heaven...I...Oh my.” said the chef, who greeted us at the door.

“Hi, sis. We’re the McDonalds,” said Teresa, acknowledging the bloodline she shared with the chef. Her half-sister Nancy Sousa owned and operated Heaven. But it

wouldn't have been possible without Teresa giving her the money to open it in the first place. That's why we knew so much about it even though this would be our first time dining there.

"Oh hi, uh, where'd you get money for uh...and you used a fake name? Nevermind, nevermind. It's been a while. Since...since before Kayla...have a seat. C'mon in."

"Private balcony please," I said.

"Sure. Can I take your bag?"

"Absolutely," said Teresa, as we were escorted through the opulent restaurant and outside through glass doors to a round table with a mirrored tabletop on the balcony.

"Listen, I know I haven't contacted you since Kayla's...you know. I've been really busy..."

"Appetizers please?"

"Oh yeah, yeah. I'll get right to it. This bag is heavy."

"I don't have this bod for nothing, sis. Appetizers?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure. Coming right up."

Nancy went inside with confusion and surprise crippling her facial muscles. Most patrons would look across at the breathtaking view of the city while basking in the warm breeze. But Teresa, Sidekick in hand, and I stood up and looked down. We gave so much to this world and so many people but what did we get in return? The death of our daughter. Financial ruin. And the few people we expected help from turned their backs on us in our time of need. Losing a child is hard for anyone. She was all we lived for. No

more crying. No more guilt. Like I said before, I'm not most people. Neither is Teresa. This is how we show our pain. By sharing it.

"He should be here within two minutes," I said. "What's the tracer show?"

"He's on his way," said Teresa, looking at the street map on the phone display with a rapidly moving blinking red light. "Look. There they are." She pointed down at three cop cars, one of them certain to be Eric, speeding down Brickell, sirens flashing and blaring.

"Right on time. This is for you Kayla."

We jumped from the balcony and Teresa pressed the enter button on the phone. Behind us, Heaven exploded, leaving a massive fireball rising from the Santa Maria. We held hands and spread our arms as we fell to the earth to reunite with Kayla. We aren't bad people. Eric could see us falling from the street. We knew if he saw Jorge's demise we'd be the first suspects. He doesn't know that he has in his passenger seat all the money from our yard sale. Enough to put him through college so he could tell our story.

The End

This has been an

As-Is publication.

as-ispublishing.com