

A DUCK SOUP SITUATION

It only took a matter of seconds for Matt Hamby to decide his wife's fate. He pushed her over the ravine without any hesitation. She screamed all the way down. Her body hit the rocks below with such force he heard it from several hundred feet above. He assumed there were other hikers in the woods. This was a popular spot, that was easily hidden by the dense brush surrounding it. He never imagined his wife would have gotten that close to the edge without a tow line. In a span of only ten seconds, his life had become drastically different.

Matt Hamby was officially a widower. Just like that, there wasn't even a registration fee to join the club. He was a free man at last.

He knew what he did next was critical. He made certain there was no cell service in the forest. He remembers seeing some old landline phones on the walking path a few miles back. He figured it would look best if he came off as naturally distraught. A man overcome with grief. He ran back to the area where he thought he saw the phones. As soon as he came out of the woods, he saw them. An older couple walking their dog on the trail. He knew his performance had to be spot on.

"Please.....do you have a cell phone that works? My wife just fell off the cliff," he said sobbing.

"No, they don't work this far in the woods. Even 911 doesn't work out here." I think there are some call boxes back on the trail." said the old man.

The couple decided that the wife would go back to their jeep and try and make a call if she couldn't find the call box. Her husband had decided to go with Matt to the area where his wife was now lying dead.

Of course, if she weren't dead, then he had a giant problem on his hands. She had to be dead. No one could fall that far, that fast, and survive. Still, it was a risk he would have to take at this point.

They moved as quickly as he could down to the ravine where his wife was. It took almost forty-five minutes of slow going and crawling over the boulders. They crossed a small stream and it was the old man who first saw her. He stopped in his tracks and grabbed Matt by the arm.

"Son.....you don't want to see this. She's gone, I'm sorry," he said very softly.

"I have to see her, she's my wife."

"Ain't gonna make her any less dead. Please, stay here. I don't think you'd want to see this." he said and climbed over the rocks, over to his wife Jenna's corpse.

Matt sat there on the rocks for nearly an hour until he saw the helicopter in the air, hovering over their position. He saw the man wave at them and two medics rappelled out of the helicopter onto the rocks below. Matt knew he had to play his part carefully. There was bound to be suspicion, every death was suspicious. You never who you could trust and who was going to burn you. He made sure he looked like a wreck and then climbed over the rocks to meet the paramedics.

Jenna Hamby was deader than a door nail. Pronounced dead at the scene by the EMTs working for the Park Service. Her neck and back were both broken. She had died as a result of her injuries. Her body was airlifted to a nearby hospital and Matt was driven back to the park service base camp at the foot of the mountains. The park service rangers took his statements. He could tell they were suspicious, but nothing more. He had rehearsed what he was going to say a hundred times and made certain it was perfect. It was windy that day, very windy. He told them they chose today because it was the only day they were going to have off together for the next few weeks and it had finally stopped raining.

"I told her to be careful.....dammit, I told her, but she just had to take that stupid selfie on the edge of the cliff. It's my fault, I should never have let her do it. I think the wind just blew her over."

"You guys certainly aren't rookies, you didn't stop to think maybe this wasn't such a good idea?" said one of the rangers.

"Jenna and her damn selfies. Never imagined it would lead to something like this. She's dead, isn't she? I mean I know the EMTs told me she was but is it at all possible she's alive?"

"No Matt, she's gone. Look, I know this is very difficult, but I need you to tell me exactly what happened, while it's still fresh in your mind." said another ranger.

Matt told them the story he had rehearsed until he could say it backward. He made certain everything matched up exactly to his timeline. When he was finished, the rangers turned off the tape recorder and offered him something to drink.

"Matt, we don't investigate homicides, that's the domain of the Sheriff's Department. I'm sure someone will be contacting you very shortly wanting to interview you."

"Okay.....guys, I really can't be here right now, I have to go and see my parents and Jenna's. I have to tell them in person. I don't want them to hear it from someone else."

The rangers couldn't legally hold him and he was free to go. Matt wasn't worried about the rangers, they weren't real cops, as much as they thought they were. Any real crime was handled by the sheriff's department. That was going to be his real test. They would be much tougher on him than this bunch. He drove home and called her parents on his house line. It was easily the most difficult phone call he has ever had to make. At one point, his mother was screaming hysterically and had to be calmed down by Jenna's father.

"Jesus fucking Christ Matt! You let her go out on those rocks? The hell were you thinking?" he screamed

"It all happened so fast. I turned away from her for a second and then I heard her screaming. God, I'm so sorry guys."

There was an uncomfortable silence for a second. He knew her parents thought he was garbage, but none of that mattered right now. If they thought he murdered her or was lying to them, they certainly didn't show it. That was the genius of this crime. Even if everyone thought he killed her, there wasn't a shred of evidence to prove it. Even if someone did see them on the ledge, he could always say, he was trying to grab her and she slipped. The area was so secluded, so well hidden from the rest of the trail, it would be almost impossible to see unless you were looking right at it.

Matt hung up the phone and cracked open a beer. He knew he had to call his own parents and her friends. He hated social media. Never used it. He had to make it look like he was trying to inform everyone, but not go too overboard. He knew there was bound to be whispers. Their marriage had its rough spots. He knew Jenna had confided in some of her friends, but that's where it stops. When the cops investigated, they weren't going to find the other woman, he didn't have one. He had never even cheated on her. The insurance payout was modest, nothing extraordinary and it had been done at her insistence, not his. She had bought life insurance through her company. It was perfect really. Just a tragic accident. Could have happened to anybody. The worst anyone could say is that Matt never should have let go out on that ledge by herself. That was stupid, but not something he could be charged with. Jenna loved the outdoors. No one would ever suspect a thing.

He called his own parents. His parents had split up when he was ten and had little contact with his father, so it was just he and his mother. Naturally, she was devastated. She cried right alongside him.

"I'm so sorry honey. You just have to tell yourself it was her time to go. We don't have any say in these things." she said between sobs.

Matt felt terrible about lying to his mother, but it had to be done. He called her best friend Michaela who lived downstate. He knew she was going to be a tough nut to crack. Maybe it was the sudden loss of her best friend or Matt's Oscar-caliber performance, but she was nothing but sympathetic. She cried right alongside him. He didn't stay on the line too long with any of them, telling them that he had to keep it short before it hit social media. He wanted to tell all their loved ones in person. He had to be well-rested for what was going to be a very long day tomorrow, he had to be ready.

He fell asleep that night feeling almost giddy. He didn't want to kill his wife, there was just no other way around it. He wondered where she was right now if she was just looking down at him. Probably really pissed off.

He didn't kill her for money. He didn't kill her because he wanted to marry someone else. He killed her because, over the last five years, he had simply grown to despise her.

He didn't just dislike her, he hated her.

They had met in college. She was in a sorority and he was pledging a frat. She was hot and trashy and he was young and horny. A match made in heaven. He had no idea why they got married instead of just splitting up. It seemed like a good idea at the time. Over the next few

years though, it quickly became apparent that marrying Jenna was the worst mistake he had ever made.

She was jealous, petty, rude, and had horrible manners. It was glossed over by the fact that was hot. Not pretty, like from a fairy tale, but hot. You just wanted to bang her and forget about her. She was not the take-home-to-mom type of girl. She wasn't even the *take-home to your roommate* type of girl. Matt loved her, he just couldn't stand her. He knew she had cheated on him with a co-worker a few years back. She told him about it and begged him to take her back. That's when the idea first pooped into his head. He wasn't going to divorce her and give her half of what he had worked for, no, he was simply going to make her disappear forever. Matt was not experienced enough to make the distinction between girls you fuck and girls you marry. Jenna was definitely not in the latter category, even though her parents thought she was the greatest thing on Earth. She had a killer body and just enough bitch in her to keep the boys interested. He knew she had cheated on him once, he suspected there were others. He also knew he had to put his plan into gear before she served him with divorce papers. Take away any real motive and you have a very hard time convincing a jury of your guilt. There was literally nothing the cops could use against him. When they investigated, they would find him to be a loving husband, who just wanted to make his marriage work. His phone was getting blown up by messages and calls. He went onto their social media account and posted that Jenna was gone and asked everyone to please respect his privacy at this very difficult time. He said he will post more in the next few days when he is in better shape.

He didn't even have trouble falling asleep that night. He woke up the next morning and made himself a cup of coffee. He checked his phone and saw that he had sixteen missed calls and almost forty text messages. He knew he couldn't do anything until he talked to the cops. He got dressed and drove down to the nearest sheriff's station half an hour from his house. Five minutes later, he was in an interview room with detectives Ramirez and Detective Jantzen. They were both polite. They offered their condolences and told him he was more than welcome to have an attorney with him during the interview. Matt declined. He knew that bringing an attorney for a simple hiking accident was bound to raise all kinds of red flags. They offered him a coffee and then got started.

Matt told them the same story he had given to the park service last night. He made certain to imply that he was at fault in her death, at least partially.

"I never should have let her go out there. I feel almost like I got her killed," he said.

"If you knew it was dangerous, why did you let her do it?" asked Jantzen.

"She is the selfie queen. Every where we go, even to dinner, she just has to take a damn selfie. Drove me up the wall. I told her to stay away from the ledge. I turned to take a pee on this old tree. I only had my eyes off her for a second. Then I hear her screaming. I ran over to the edge just in time to see her get smashed on the rocks below. I saw her brains explode." he said and started sobbing.

Matt filled them in one rest, right up to the point where the EMTs arrived. The detectives didn't say anything, they just let him talk and tell his story. They didn't say very much when he was finished, Ramirez just had one question.

"Matt, just so we're clear, you didn't push her or anything like that?" he asked

"What? No, I didn't push her, she fell."

"I just have to ask. Okay, I have no more questions, you are free to go. I'll call you and let you know what the coroner says, but I don't think it's going to be too shocking."

Matt left the station an hour later. If they suspected anything, they never let on. There wouldn't be much for him to find. He knew they had other cases to work on with better evidence and stronger suspects. He hoped his case would just be open and shut.

He figured his next best bet would be to go to her workplace and break the news to her co-workers. Jenna had a part-time job as a trainer at the local gym. She was also working on starting her own business. The owner saw Matt and threw her arms around him. Two other ladies stopped their workout and joined them as well. Matt hugged them all as hard as he could. He asked if there was anything of hers he could take with him. She had her own locker, but no one had the key for it. He told them he'd be back for it as soon as he found her key.

"Take your time Matt. We'll be here when you're ready."

Matt thanked her and went on his way. He was getting away with it. No one suspected anything. Why would they? He was a good husband to a hot mess of a wife. Everyone he saw that day hugged him and offered their support.

Jesus Matty, this was almost too easy. he thought to himself on the way home. As soon as he cleared the cops, he knew he was home free. He wasn't like the rest of those idiot killers on TV. No sir.....*Matt Hamby was just a little smarter than the average bear. He had played poker games that were more difficult than this. He could see the finish line from here.*

The next few days came and went. He was grieving, that's what you're supposed to do. He was hurting, but not from the guilt about what he had done, more from the fact that nothing was known at this point. He didn't know if he was going to be arrested, or just given a hug. He talked to a few people on the phone, being very careful about what he said. He knew some people might suspect he killed her. One of his friends came right out and said:

"So, you finally got rid of her, huh?"

Matt hung up on him and never spoke to him again. He never really like him anyway, he more or less just tolerated him, like he did so many other people in his life. He had no real friends because deep down inside, he just wasn't friendly. He was very good at tolerating people and fooling them into thinking he valued their friendship.

Everyone today is just a pawn on a chessboard. Most think they're kings or queens, too stupid to know the difference.

Matt knew he was a pawn and he was ok with that because even a pawn has a shot of becoming something better, you just have to play your hand right.

A week later, Matt got the big call. The coroner's office had declared his wife's death accidental, which was good enough for the investigators. Detective Jantzen told him he was not a suspect at this point, but he may be called back to give further statements.

Matt had a hard time containing his excitement. He had done it. He had killed somebody and gotten away with it. Not just anybody, he had killed *her* and gotten away with it.

His last headache would be with the insurance investigator. Since the cause of death had been ruled accidental, there wasn't much they could do. The life insurance policy was only for sixty thousand dollars. Most insurance investigators wouldn't waste their time with a policy that small. Wasn't worth the time or money. Matt did exactly what he was supposed to do. That's what grieving husbands do. He made sure social security got a copy of her death certificate a week later, as did the county clerk's office. Matt knew he was not out of the woods yet, he still had to do the wake and funeral. Turns out, it would be the easiest part of all of this.

For all of Jenna's social media bullshit, it turns out that she had very few if any real friends. Nearly everyone at her funeral was from her immediate family. The owner of the gym, who she despised, came to pay her respects, but almost no one else. Michaela said it was too much to see her best friend filled with embalming fluid. She just couldn't do it. The wake and funeral were over before he knew it. Everyone offered their support. Matt said he couldn't stand to look at everyone in the church and say anything about his wife. He was afraid he would break down. No one else volunteered, so it fell onto her parents, who were extremely upset. Matt felt bad about the pain he had caused them. He liked them, even though they had raised and nourished a delusional, self-absorbed, narcissist of a daughter.

He remembers the first time they ever did it in her dorm room. The other sorority sisters watched them have sex and rated their performance. They gave them high marks. He had to wonder if that influenced her decision to marry him.

Cause Jenna was always worried about what her sorority sisters thought, even though she hadn't seen any of them in years.

He knew he just had to get over this last little hurdle and he was home free.or so he thought.

There was a brief, 30-second clip on the news about Jenna's *unfortunate accident*. An article in a local newspaper tucked away in section c of the paper. That was all. A month later, Matt was free and clear. He knew if he was a suspect, he would have been called back for more interviews. He was never called back. The cops figured it was just an accident. Matt had planned all of this out, down to the very last little detail. There was no evidence to be used against him. Zero, as in nothing. No blood spray patterns or DNA evidence or conflicting statements were given to the police. Matt was home free. The insurance company had sent him a certified letter stating that his

insurance check was to be delivered by a courier next week. Not only had he offed his wife, he actually got paid for it!

Anyone who says crime doesn't pay has never actually tried it.

He still couldn't be too careful. He made sure he looked like he was playing the part of a grieving widow. He didn't know if the cops or the insurance company was following him, so he had to act as if they were. He would go out to dinner and eat alone, spending hours at the place, striking up conversations with the waitresses. Never getting too personal, just being friendly. He didn't want to look *too eager* to be moving on. He wanted to look like a sad, pathetic mess and he was doing it very well.

Jenna's parents would occasionally stop by to check up on him. He hated seeing them, they almost made him regret his decision. How two of the nicest people on Earth could have produced a daughter as screwed up as Jenna was beyond his understanding. Jenna was everything her parents were not. They never stayed too long. He wasn't sure if it was really to check up on him or get him to talk about the accident. He was always one step ahead of them.

"It's just so hard to get out of bed every morning. I blame myself for the accident," he said wiping away his tears.

He knew then that her parents didn't just come to lift his spirits, they had doubts. Maybe not with any degree of certainty, but they weren't completely 100 percent sold on the whole thing. Seeing Matt sobbing in her arms, kind of melted away any doubts they would have. By the time they left, they were crying as well. Matt's performance had been spot on. He gave just enough convincing, without being too convincing. He poured himself a drink to celebrate. The phone rang, Matt didn't recognize the number and against his better judgment, he picked up the phone. He thought it might be from the insurance company.

"Hello?"

"Bet you think you got away with it?" said the voice on the other end.

"Excuse me?" said Matt, who nearly had a heart attack.

"You killed your wife. I saw the whole thing, chiefy"

"Go to hell."

"So then hang up. Just hang up if I'm wrong. I'll go to the cops with what I have and you will spend the rest of your life in prison. Go ahead, I dare you."

Matt went from scared shitless to red hot angry. Who the hell was this stranger? He had to stay on the line. He might be recorded.

"I did not kill my wife. She fell. If you really were there, you would know that." said Matt shaking

The stranger said nothing. Matt could hear him eating potato chips or something crunchy.

"Matt, let's cut the bullshit. You and I both know you killed her. I was there, only about fifty feet from you guys in the woods. You ran right past me and never even saw me. Guess you weren't looking for anybody. No, I saw the whole thing."

"I don't know what you saw, or what you think you saw, but it was not me killing my wife."

"Matt, I'm a photographer. I was photographing birds and shit like that when I see this little hottie walk right by me on the hiking trail. Jesus, your wife was hot. Anyway, I decided to follow her. I don't know why I guess I was bored. So, I'm on trailhead 2A, I'm sure you know the one I'm referring to?"

"Yes."

"Good, well, I see her going out on that rocky ledge. She turns her back on you and you push her over the edge. I couldn't believe it. I just saw a murder. It was cool, but kind of fucked up at the same time. I hung around that day, just to see how it all played out. It was a hell of a plan, I've got to give you that. You almost got away with it. You just never counted on me. It's not just my word, I actually have a photo of you pushing her. Guess a picture in this case is worth a lot more than a thousand words. More like life in prison without the possibility of parole."

"For the last time, I did not kill Jenna. Go to the damn cops with your photo. It's not going to change anything."

"Uh, maybe....maybe not. Cops are very unpredictable. They might think they have all the evidence they need to charge you. Who knows? Maybe the jury won't buy it. If I were a betting man, I'd put your chances at around fifty-fifty. I mean, if I were you, I'd say it's not worth the risk. Even if you are found not guilty, there's always going to be the haze and mystery surrounding you, wherever you go. You can't escape your past, not like back in the day when a fellow could just disappear."

"What do you want? Do you want money?"

"Yeah, everybody wants money. I guess I do, but I'm more interested to know what could possess somebody to kill his own wife? Especially one that looked like her."

"I don't know. I didn't kill my wife, so I really couldn't answer the question," said Matt trying to calm himself.

"Was she screwing around on you? I guess that might do it for me. Why not just divorce her? Why did you have to kill her?" said the mystery caller.

Matt knew he had to play this very carefully here. It could just be one of the cops, hoping to trick him into confessing. It could be someone from the insurance company. He had to see what cards this asshole held. He had to see just what he was holding.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Why did you kill your wife?"

"I didn't kill my wife."

"Matt, you know how I know you're guilty?"

"No, how?"

"Anybody who isn't guilty would have hung up by now and told me to fuck off."

"I see. Well, I guess that's one way of looking at this. Maybe I just want to really know why you're calling."

"I want to know what could possess somebody to just kill their wife. I was married too, years ago. It got to the point where I couldn't stand the very sight of her. Like I was allergic to her or something. I'm sure she felt the same way about me. Now, as bad as things got between us, I never, not once, ever thought of killing her. The thought never even entered my mind."

"Congratulations, that's probably your biggest achievement in life."

"No Matt, my biggest achievement is going to watch the look on your face when that jury comes back with a guilty verdict."

Matt never fancied himself as a murderer, but he could easily see himself killing this person with his bare hands if needed. He had to remain calm and not lose his cool.

"Do you know how I know you're full of shit?"

"How?"

"Because I would be in handcuffs right now if you had this mystery evidence which doesn't exist. If you had anything you would have gone right to the cops by now."

"Why would I do that? Ain't going to make Jenna any less dead."

"Then why are you calling me?"

"Well, rumor has it that you and the wifey had a life insurance policy of around sixty thousand dollars. I'm not greedy, but I think that given my position here, I'm certainly entitled to a share of that money. Maybe fifty percent? How does that sound?"

"It sounds like blackmail. You really are a piece of garbage," said Matt.

"Whoa, easy there Matt. You're the guy who just killed his wife. That's kind of like the pot calling the kettle black. Don't you think? You're in no position to be calling me a piece of garbage."

"Oh, I guess you're one of those polite extortioners, then."

"I just want to make a living."

"With my money."

"Which you got from killing your wife. See, we've kind of got ourselves a duck soup situation here, now don't we?"

"A what?"

"Duck Soup. You know, the Marx Brothers movie."

"Who?"

"The Marx Brothers. Grouch, Chico, Zeppo and the other one."

"Never heard of them."

"Really? Jesus, you millennials are pretty worthless."

"So, I just give you thirty thousand dollars and you just vanish with your nonexistent evidence forever?"

"Well no. Thirty thousand is kind of like a down payment. I'm having a little cash flow problem here. You could really help me out from time to time. I won't ask for too much, just enough to cover my bills."

"How do I refuse an offer like that?"

"It's up to you. You might want to think about it."

"The answer is no. You are going to have to find somebody else to fund your pathetic life."

"Matt. You might want to check out some of the documentaries on the prisons in this state. San Quentin, Chico, Soledad. How long would some dip shit like you last in a place that?"

"I'll take that under advisement."

"I'll call back in a few days when you've had time to think things over. Seriously, watch those videos. Some poor guy got stabbed right when they were filming. You wouldn't have much of a life left."

Matt hung up the phone and collapsed back in his chair. He couldn't believe this was happening. All his planning and hard work, flushed down the toilet by one teeny, tiny little mistake. No way was he out there filming birds. He was following them. He had to be. There weren't any birds out there. None of this made any sense. He couldn't believe this was happening. He couldn't tell the guy to go to hell, he didn't know what evidence he had. Matt had told the cops twice that he never even saw Jenna fall, he just heard her screaming. That photo could sink him. That might be enough to convict him. He could always say he was trying to catch her, but he had told the same story three times, once to the rangers, then twice to the detectives. The chances of someone being

out there at the exact moment he pushed her to have to be astronomical. There had to be more to this than just money. The guy didn't go to the police. He knew he could bleed Matt dry if he needed to. Matt couldn't do much but wait for him to call. Those were going to be a very long couple of days.

He paced back and forth in his living room for hours on end, trying to think of a way out of this. He had planned for almost every contingency, except for a witness. It wouldn't just be the photo, he could testify as well. This guy could ruin everything.

Matt ate and slept very little over the next three days. He thought the man might never call back, but that was unlikely. With this much money at stake, he wasn't going to just disappear. He could do nothing except sit and wait.....and Matt hated waiting.

He searched the number on his phone. It was from Wyoming. Most likely a disposable. Not going to be easy to trace. He would have given up the whole sixty thousand dollars just to get the name of the person doing this. The little piece of shit responsible for screwing up his entire plan. Matt was not going to go to prison. That simply was not an option.

"Hey, Matt. Remember me?" said the caller. He had waited five days to call back and called at seven in the morning. Matt was barely awake. He needed coffee if he was going to make it through this.

"Yes, I remember you. How could I forget?"

"Good. Have you thought things over?"

"My answer hasn't changed. You aren't going to get one cent from me."

"I see. I was kind of expecting you to say something to that effect. Well, okay. I guess the next time I see you it will be on TV being led away in handcuffs."

"One question, if I may?"

"Ask away?"

"What were you really doing out in the forest that day? Don't give me some line about bird watching. I'm not buying that. Wrong time of the year to be bird watching."

"Yeah, you got me there. No, I was not bird watching. I was following you."

"Why would you follow me?"

"Well, that's interesting. Remember how I told you I was having a serious cash-flow problem? Well, Jenna offered to help me out."

"What are you talking about?"

"Remember those robberies that happened in the park?"

"Yes, I heard all about them. We didn't go hiking there for months because of it."

"Right. Well, I did rob those people, but my purpose wasn't robbery. No, I had to make the cops think the reason I killed you and shot Jenna was to rob you. I had to kind of establish the precedent first."

"Shoot me?"

"Yeah, Matt. Jenna gave me ten thousand dollars to kill you that day in the park. Five thousand down and another five thousand after it was done. Hell, you walked right by me on the trail."

"My wife hired you to kill me?"

"Yup. Oh, I got to confess to you. I screwed her brains out twice. Once in her car, the other time at my place. I told her I wanted to back out and she provided a little *gentle persuasion* if you catch my drift. She can be very persuasive."

"I'm sorry, my wife hired a hitman to kill me?"

"I know it's a bitter pill to swallow, but it's the truth. I was to follow you guys and ambush you in the forest. I kill you, take your wallet, then shoot her in the shoulder. She was to jump off another cliff and use her little activator beacon to call for help. Pretty good setup. Then, out of nowhere, I see you push her off that cliff. You can see the problem I have here."

"What problem?"

"Well duh. If Jenna is dead and I kill you, how do I get the rest of my money?"

"I don't believe this. My wife hired you to kill me?"

"Matt, I know this sucks man, but I'm telling you the truth. Why else would I be there at that exact spot? I got to tell you, man, she hated your guts. You got a real firecracker there....or had, I should say."

"I don't believe any of this."

"You can believe what you want. I just figure I am out five thousand dollars, not to mention some great lays down the road. I figured she either kill me or screw me to keep me silent."

"You're lying."

"Matt, I'm not. I was fully prepared to blow your brains out that day. I've only killed one other person in my life, but that's another story. Look, it's nothing personal, I mean it could have been anybody. So, I guess I'm just looking for what I think is rightfully mine. Nothing more, nothing less. I guess I could settle for five thousand, plus interest, so say six thousand now and more to follow?"

"I'm not going to give my killer anything. You're the one who should be paying me."

"Paying you, for what? I didn't kill you, you should be thankful for that."

"How do people like you exist? How the hell does someone become like you? Are they born into it, or is it molded and shaped?"

"Now Matt, let's not go getting personal here."

"You took money from my wife to kill me and had sex with her and you say it's nothing personal?"

"It was just money. I don't know you. It's not like I hate you or something."

"No, you were just going to kill me for ten thousand dollars."

"You killed your wife for sixty. Does that make you any better?"

"Back to that again."

"Well, you did, whether you admit to it or not."

"So, where do we go from here?" asked Matt

"I would like six thousand dollars. That's all and I go away, for a while."

"A while? How bout for the rest of my life?"

"That might be asking for too much. I can appreciate the situation you're in, why can't you do the same for me?"

"BECAUSE I AM NOT A HIRED KILLER!" he screamed into his phone.

There was an awkward silence for a second. The man on the other end didn't speak, but when he did, his tone had clearly changed.

"You killed your wife. You and I aren't much different."

"I just want you out of my life."

"Sure, just give me the money and I'm gone."

"How do you want to do it?"

"Put the money in an envelope. I'll call you and tell you where to drop it off. Don't try to follow me, Matt. It won't end well for you."

"I need a few days to raise the money."

"What? You can't get five thousand dollars right now?"

"Well, neither can you."

"I'll call you Friday morning at nine. Have the cash by then. Man, I can't believe a woman like Jenna was married to some loser like you. Just blows my mind. You aren't even rich."

"Like you said. No reason to go and get personal now is it?" said Matt. He hung up the phone and finished his coffee. He hadn't smoked in years, but right now was craving a cigarette. He went into his closet and pulled out his gun. He knew if he had to shoot someone, his gun would be taken in for evidence. He couldn't risk it. He had to come up with an untraceable gun by Friday morning. That was going to be tough. He still had not received a dime from the insurance company yet. He was burning through his savings and would have to beg, borrow and steal to come up with six thousand dollars.

He still had no idea who this guy was. He must have met her in the gym. He couldn't go asking around, that might begin to look suspicious. He had to catch the guy taking the money and just follow him. He put a thousand dollars in an envelope. That was all he had. He would stuff it with paper to make it look like there was more. All he could do now was sit back and wait.

The waiting was a slow form of torture. He was at the mercy of this guy and had no control over the situation whatsoever. That was the worst part. Matt wasn't a control freak, more like a *control enthusiast*. He was always the one in the driver's seat, or the man behind the curtain, making sure things were done his way. Now, he was just another idiot, sitting by his phone, hoping to avoid going to prison for the rest of his life. He wasn't scared, he was angry. He wanted this guy dead and he didn't care how it was done.

Nobody and I mean nobody, is going to rain Matt Hamby's parade. This poor bastard has no idea what he just walked into.

The call came two days later. He instructed Matt where to leave the money. It was to be placed in a trash can at the local park.

"Now, don't just put it on top, where anyone can see it, you got to stuff it in there. The envelope will be manila. You getting all this?"

"Yes. What trash can, there are tons of them."

"The one by the duck pond, in front of the oak tree with the plaque on it. There's a little metal fence around the tree. It's the only one in the park. Six thousand. It better be in there, or I march my ass right to the nearest police station and tell them what I know."

"Just calm down, the money will be in there. Just don't go and do anything stupid."

"You either, like try and follow me. I even see you anywhere near me and you're done."

"Okay, look....this is all I have. I won't have any more until the insurance company pays out. You understand what I'm telling you?"

"Fine, that should hold me over for a while. As I said, don't fuck this up, Matty. Your future depends on it." he said and hung up.

Matt couldn't believe the balls on this guy.

Your future depends on it.....well, your future isn't looking so hot either my friend.

Matt took his revolver out, then put it away. He knew he couldn't use it. No way he could risk the bullet being traced back to the gun he owns. He took out a switchblade knife he had bought a few years back.

The old pig sticker.....takes a little longer, but the end result is the same as a gun. He thought to himself.

Matt knew this was not going to be easy. He would have to get close enough to stab him, but not alert him he was near. He quickly went into the bathroom and used a pair of electric clippers to cut off all of his hair. He took his glasses off and put in his contact lenses, which he hated wearing. Put on a pair of old cowboy boots he had in his closet and threw on a baseball cap. He looked ridiculous, but this city was full of freaks, so he shouldn't really stand out.

Matt had to be careful. He wasn't sure if he was dealing with just one person or more. He figured there was no reason to bring anyone else in on this, more money for one person than two or three. He might need someone else to grab the money. Matt had to be sure it was him. He was only going to get one chance, he had to make it count. He would use their dog, Herbie as cover. He would put the money in the trash can while he was jogging. He would run back to his car, change and grab Herbie, then sit on the bench across from the pond. It was still risky, but he would be wearing a jacket, along with a cap and glasses. He might even be on the on the grass behind it.

He threw on some shorts and a sweatshirt, along with his running shoes. He figured it would take about five minutes from the time he dropped the package off to when he would be able to stake it out. That five minutes was critical. It was risky. The caller could have a spotter to follow him. He debated putting the money in the envelope. It was very, very risky. There was a good chance that someone besides the caller could see him drop it in the trash and grab it. He put a thousand dollars in it and made certain it was sealed. Once Matt saw him pick up the package he would have to follow him. That was not going to be easy. They would be on opposite sides of the pond. All he had to do was get to the parking lot first and Matt could easily lose him.

He loaded Herbie into his car along with the envelope. As he drove to the park, he was still in shock about what the caller had told him.

Jenna wanted him dead. Gonzo. Permanently removed from society.

She had hired this clown to do it. She was so dumb, she couldn't even hire a competent hit man to do the job. This was his baby. The woman who had taken a vow of death till you part. I guess she figured she would just hurry about the death part as best she could.

True, Matt had done exactly the same thing, but he would never have hired anyone to do the job. If you don't have the balls to do it yourself, then it shouldn't be done at all.

Matt was under no illusions about what he had to do. This guy was a major lose end. If he didn't kill him, he may as well walk into the nearest police station and confess the whole crime. This guy was a dead man walking.

He parked his car and sat inside for a minute. He looked around and saw no one else in the parking lot. It had started to drizzle. He didn't think the park would be too busy on a day like today. He was starting to get nervous.

It wasn't much of a plan. This guy probably had the drop staked out. The chances of Matt pulling this off were slim, but it was all he had. The caller held all the cards up to this point. Matt just wanted to level the playing field.

He would only have one chance. It had to work.

Herbie didn't want to stay in the car, but Matt closed the door on him and started jogging with the envelope in hand. It took him two minutes and five seconds to reach the trash can at the pond. He stopped and stuffed it inside, then kept on running. He ran into the brush and sprinted back to his car where he quickly put on his disguise and started walking Herbie. He was practically running with him. He couldn't believe his luck. He saw a man wearing a football jersey walk right past the trash can and reach inside for the envelope. He ripped it open and began counting the money. Matt had his man. He knew to keep his distance. He pulled out his cell and pretended to be talking on it, while walking Herbie. The man looked around. He looked right at Matt, but the disguise must have worked because he quickly turned back around and kept walking. He left the park and was now walking into a wooded area that was supposed to be developed years back, but never was. It was about forty acres that connected the two busy streets around the park. Matt had been on the trail before and knew it snaked around the trees. He started running with Herbie who was clearly not up to the task at hand. He was almost dragging him along.

Matt knew there was a cleared area with gravel that was used as parking during the warmer months. Just as the guy was about to get into his truck, Matt flung open his door and dragged him out.

"Hey chiefy." said the man

The man was older than Matt figured he would be. Older and more pathetic looking. The thought of Jenna humping his brains out was more than he could stand. He pulled out his knife and plunged it into his chest several times. The man collapsed on the ground. Matt then sliced his carotid artery on his neck and just kept stabbing. The man was dead a minute later. Matt had to calm himself and try to regain composure. He was covered in blood and it wasn't even his blood. He dragged the man's body off into the brush nearby and tried to cover it. The blood had stained the gravel somewhat, but that was easily fixable. He looked around and saw there was no one

nearby. The old bastard never made a sound. He didn't scream or anything. It had started raining harder and Matt walked through the forest with Herbie unseen back to his car. He hadn't seen another person in ten minutes. He was beginning to think he might have gotten away with it. Someone could get his license plate. That was always a risk. He drove around the park for two hours. No cops or sirens were seen. He had been lucky, very lucky. Matt was breathing very heavily. He almost wanted to throw up. He was getting good at this whole murder thing. It wasn't as difficult as it looked on TV. Cops only catch people that want to be caught in the first place, or too stupid not to get caught. Matt was none of those things. Still, he had to be careful. He couldn't count his chickens before they're hatched. This murder was necessary but very sloppy. He might not have been seen, but that doesn't mean he won't be caught. Getting away with murder is like gambling. The house usually wins and when they don't, everyone in the casino starts to look at you differently. Matt had won but was still stuck in the casino, trying desperately to make his way outside.

He went home and tried to forget about the fact that he had just taken a human life. He did grab the man's wallet. His name was Gerald Coombs. It had his address on it. Not sure if it was his current, or former address. Still, way too many loose ends for his liking. Matt didn't know who else was involved in this. He had killed Mr. Coombs, so he was already up to his eyeballs in this. Anyone else involved was going to have to be eliminated as well.

Matt stayed at his house and just waited for the cops to show up, but they never did. Not the next day or the day after, or the day after that. They never came, at all. The body was found in the woods three days later and it was all over the news. Police had no suspects. Coombs was a drifter from Florida with an extensive criminal record. Not exactly a high priority for the police.

Matt's mood began to lift over the next few weeks. He knew he still could not let his guard down, but he could see the finish line. He was almost there. He was planning on moving to Brazil or Belize, a country with no extradition treaty with the United States. He just needed some cover. He was trying to get a job teaching English in Brazil. It looked promising. Within a few months, he would be gone and have the perfect excuse for it.

He wasn't leaving to avoid prosecution, he was leaving to start over. The job would be the perfect cover.

A month had gone by and still no word for the police. The insurance company had sent him some forms about where he wanted his insurance payout to be sent. He heard nothing back for a few weeks and then one morning, there it was 53,000 dollars in his bank account. Matt almost dropped his coffee mug when he saw it. He felt better than he had since the day this all started. The day he pushed Jenna off the cliff.

He could finally start over. Brazil was a big country with lots of beautiful women. A guy like Matt could do very well there. He was making himself lunch when the phone rang. It was an unlisted number. Matt decided to answer it. It was probably a telemarketer.

"Hello?" he said.

"Hi, is this Matt.....Matt Hamby?"

"Yes."

"Matt.....I'm going to cut right to the chase. I saw you murder that guy in the park a few months ago."

"I'm sorry?" he said

"Yeah, I was on the park bench on the other side of the parking lot. I guess you never saw me. I hid when I saw you stab that guy. I followed you back to your car and got your license plate. I mean, I wasn't going to get involved, I figured it wasn't any of my business, but when I finally got your name and started doing some research, I found out that your wife had recently died." said the man on the other end.

"So?"

"So it's just odd that your wife dies suddenly on a rock climbing accident and then your brutally murder this guy at the park that day. What was in the envelope you took from him? I'm guessing it was money or evidence. Maybe both. I got to thinking that maybe, I should go to the cops. You know, I don't mind most crimes, but murder is another thing entirely. Of course, I suppose we could come to some kind of arrangement, financially, I mean, if you would agree to it. Not that you would have much choice. It's either pay me or go to the gas chamber.....do we still use the gas chamber, I don't even know."

Matt sat down in his chair. He listened to the man ramble on for what seemed like an eternity. He reached into the drawer and pulled out his pistol. He was trying to decide between suicide, or life in prison, which is pretty much the same thing. He could almost see Jenna standing right in front of him, with that stupid grin of hers, just laughing at him.

"Jesus, Matty.....only you.....only you. Too bad there's no online course for getting away with murder, of course, you wouldn't even pass that either."

Matt sat back in his chair and began to rock back and forth. He wasn't even listening to the man on the other end of the line. He closed his eyes and wondered what duck soup taste like. It was probably an acquired taste. Things had just gotten a whole lot more complicated for Mr. Matty.....a whole lot more complicated.