

Sink or Swim

John Boston

Matt McTavish was a police officer with the city of Newark New Jersey for 18 years. It was the best and worst decision he ever made in his life. Being a cop is a lifestyle choice, not a job. You have a badge 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, whether you want one or not. There's no such thing as off duty. The pay and benefits were ok, but given the stress that one puts themselves through on an almost daily basis, it hardly seemed worth it. There was his retirement that he could start collecting in just sixteen months. That was it, he wouldn't even be fifty years old and he was looking at almost 45,000 dollars a year for the rest of his life for doing nothing. The first thing he would do with his pension is buy a new car. Well, maybe the second thing. The first thing would be getting the hell out of New Jersey.

His father had been a cop. 26 years as a beat cop with the city of Hoboken, New Jersey. From the time he could walk and shit, he wanted to be a cop, just like his father. His father never told him the darker side of the job. Dealing with dirty officers and corruption. Incompetent elected officials. Worthless judges and lawyers that were really better off dead. In the end, Matt had concluded that everyone around him was dirty and if they weren't they were just looking the other way, which was almost just as bad. Matt had testified against two of his co-workers in a massive police corruption scandal a few years ago. They were both sentenced to 3-5 years in federal prison. He didn't give them any juicy details, but he certainly wasn't going to lie for them either, which is what they wanted.

After the trial, none of the other officers would even look at him in the department. People he had known for decades suddenly acted as if he was just another person on the street. He may as well have been dead to them.

When he told his Captain he had put in for a transfer to Ocean City, his only response was:

"I think that's a good idea."

He left without saying goodbye to anyone. 18 years of his life had been spent in this place, trying to make it a better place. In the end, he became a pariah for doing the right thing. He told the prosecutor and the judge that it didn't matter if they were cops or not. They knew what they were doing was wrong and they did it anyway. Matt didn't understand how a cop could arrest someone for a crime and then go out and commit the same crime themselves. It was like being born with a conscience was a birth defect these days.

Matt was offered a lieutenant spot in exchange for his testimony. The DA seemed almost shocked when he told them he didn't need to be bribed for doing the right thing. Besides, that would mean he'd be in charge of these other scumbags with badges and would go down when they do. No thanks. He could read the writing on the wall. He knew it was time to move on.

Ocean City was only thirty miles away, but in all reality, it may as well have been thirty thousand miles away. He was going from being a detective in one of the worst inner-city shit holes in the country to essentially being a babysitter for rich people.

Truth is, the job had begun to take its toll on him. He was no longer the carefree, idealist he was when he entered the police academy at age 25. He had seen things. Nasty things. Things no one else should ever have to see. It's bound to change your perception of people of life in general. He was seeing a psychologist at the recommendation of his department and the police union.

"Most people hate cops. I guess I can't say I blame them. Most of them aren't worth a shit anyway, but those same people never for a second could imagine going through what we do on an almost daily basis. You can serve in the military and get PTSD. It's real, it's no joke. But that's for what six months to a year at the most? Imagine being in combat every day for 18 years of your life? Imagine how that would screw somebody up."

"Do you think you have PTSD?" asked the counselor?

"I'm sure to some extent, every cop does. It's a free benefit that comes with the badge. All these cops doing these shootings. The beatings, the assaults we see on TV. The cops are suffering from PTSD. I'm not trying to make excuses for them, but that's the truth." he said sitting on the sofa in the office of the psychologist.

"The worst part about being a cop as long as I have been is that you can't even see the good in people. You can't imagine someone doing a selfless act out of kindness. You just think this person is very good at hiding their true selves, never realizing that this is really who they are, there are people out there who really do try and do the right thing all the time, even when no one is looking."

"There's a lot more of them out there than you think Matt. You're one of them."

"Well, I might have been, before I became a cop."

Mat's new job was to be a detective for the Ocean City P.D. The Police chief was Ronald Carson. Nice guy, but kind of a putz. He got the job a political favor, which is how most police chiefs get their jobs in New Jersey. During the summer months, the department ranks swelled to over fifty officers. Most were laid off in the fall, when tourist season died down, only to be rehired in the late spring, once beach weather arrived. As relaxed as the beach was, he was amazed to discover that he was almost just as busy as he was in Newark, only now instead of responding to a shooting, he was responding to lost children or lost pets. Why these idiots felt it necessary to take their dogs with them on a sweltering hot day, he had no idea, but the town board had approved pets on the beach as long as they were leashed and their owners cleaned up after them. He wrote citations for all kinds of stupid infractions, arrested several people for drunk and disorderly conduct. He chased down several shoplifters and broke up several fights. He was more of a referee than a cop. This was not Newark. These people had money. In some cases, they had a lot of money. Carson had made this perfectly clear to him on the first day when they introduced themselves in his office.

"Look Matt, this is a family town. We make our living off tourists. We don't want to piss off the tourists. I'm sure this will be a big change for you, but I don't want to see any cowboy shit out there. We want to keep the restaurants and bars full. We're clear on this, right?"

"No problem chief. Look, I'm not here to make waves. I'm just here to ride out the next sixteen months until I can retire."

"Fair enough, but don't go sleep on me. I've got a bunch of rookies on the payroll that come from important families here in town. I hired you because of your experience. I'm sure you're not thrilled about working with rookies, but these kids need your experience. Some of them have never even made an arrest."

"It's your department chief, I'm just here to help."

"Good, we've got a few sharks in the tank here too, as I'm sure you'll learn soon enough. Not everyone around here plays nice."

"Right.....well, where do you want me?"

"I'm going to pair you up with Officer Marquez. Chris Marquez. Good kid. Right out of the Marines. He's green, but he's eager. I was hoping you could take him under your wing."

"Sure."

"Look, Matt. I know about what happened in Newark with the feds and the other cops. You did the right thing. We need more guys like you. Doing the right thing should matter, no matter what the cost."

"I think we're going to get along just fine Chief," said Matt as he shook his hand.

Officer Chris Marquez was a ball of fire. He was small, only about five foot eight, but built like a rugby player. He had left the Marines six months ago. He ran up to Matt and shook his hand.

"Sergeant McTavish, It's an honor to be working with you. I hope I don't let you down."

"Well, for starters, you can call me Matt. I'm not going to call you Officer Chris."

"Of course, yes Matt. I'm really looking forward to working with you."

"I see that. Come on, let's get a coffee," said Matt.

In the half-hour it took them to get to the coffee shop and back to the precinct, he learned just about everything there was to know about Chris Marquez.

He was 26 years old, and recently married with a baby on the way. He only joined the Marines because he thought it would help him become a police officer. He had been an embassy guard in Jordan and spent a year in Afghanistan. He was not only the first person in his family to graduate high school, he was the first person in his family not to go to prison.

Matt had to smile. Chris reminded him of himself at that age. Eager and ready to take on whatever life throws at you. He thought he could change the world, only now did he realize the world changes you and not in the ways you want it to.

"Look Chris, this is my semi-retirement. I'm just here to kind of back you up and make sure you don't do anything that will get you or the chief in trouble. Now you did join the law enforcement union, right?"

"No, why?"

"Cause I can guarantee you at some point in your career, you're going to need them. Well worth the money you spend every month in union dues."

"So, you just ride along with me, is that it?"

"Basically, yes. You got to remember, these aren't drug dealers or gang bangers here, these are nice families, just looking to have a good time at the beach. You have to always assume you're being filmed or recorded. You can't lose your shit. You have to be very polite, but very firm. It's a tough line to walk. In Newark, we could get away with a lot, maybe too much, but here, you've got to be professional at all times. Even when people are swearing at you. You have to be the grown-up in the situation."

No sooner had Matt said that than a call came over the radio. Two joggers had found a dead body under one of the piers at Marcy's Beach. One of the many beaches in the town. Marcy's Beach was the only private beach in town, the rest were open to the public. They did a 180 and headed right for the beach.

"I don't even know where the hell Marcy's Beach is?" said Chris as he hit the button for the siren.

"Just follow the rest of the lights Chris," said Matt.

It didn't take too long to find the beach and even less time to find the body. There were over a dozen officers and EMTs in the area. Carson was there, along with two other people, whom he assumed were big wigs in the local government. Matt figured they were only there for damage control.

"Guys, this is Sergeant Matt McTavish. He'll be handling the investigation." said the chief.

Matt didn't even have time to react.

"Hi Matt, I'm Janine Dorsier, my family owns most of the real estate along the boardwalk area. I'm also the town's Mayor. Look, I'd appreciate it if you could tell the press as little as possible until we can better assess the situation." she said with nervousness in her voice.

"No problem Ma'am. This isn't my first rodeo with the media."

Matt left her and headed over to the area where the body was found. Matt made a mental note that this was the 33rd homicide he had investigated. Not that it mattered, it wouldn't be any different than the last one, at least that's what he thought.

"Chris, you got your notebook handy. This is the big leagues here."

"Yes sir, I'm ready," he said with his notepad in his hand.

"Oh shit, it's Sad Eddy," said Chris as he stepped over the body.

"You know this guy?"

"Yeah, I arrested him last month for shoplifting. He's a local. Probably got drunk and fell off the pier or something."

"Take a bunch of photos of him and his surroundings. Make sure you note what's in his pockets. Look him over, check to see if there's anything in his mouth. Look for any signs of foul play, stab marks, bullet wounds. We assume he drowned, but that's just an assumption at this point. I'm going to talk to the couple that found him."

Matt directed two uniformed officers to canvass the area and look for anything out of the ordinary. They quickly did as they were instructed. Two local EMTs loaded Sad Eddy into a zipper bag and moved him into the ambulance.

"Why do they call him Sad Eddy?" he asked Chris

"Beats me. I guess he was bipolar or something."

Matt spent twenty minutes getting the names of the couple that found the body. They were visibly shaken. Matt got their names and numbers and told them to come down to the precinct tomorrow when they had calmed down.

"Hell of a first day huh?" said Carson. We haven't had a dead body in this town in a few years, not like this I mean. You got any ideas?"

"Well, from what Chris tells me, he was a local barfly. If the drowning didn't kill him, sounds like the booze would have."

"Well, we're going to release a statement saying that he drowned. Shit happens, you know? That's what Janine wants."

"Well then, I guess that's what we'll say. By the looks of him, I don't think it could be anything else."

"I went to high school with that poor bastard. Not a bad guy. Lost everything when hurricane Sandy hit us a few years back. I guess it was just more than he could take." said Carson.

"Did he have a family?"

"Wife left him about two years ago. I thought he had a daughter. I'll break the news to the family. I heard his ex is working in Atlantic City."

"Ok chief. We're going to look over the area once more. I'd like to know how he drowned out here. He must have fallen off the pier, but that seems hard to believe. If he fell in the water, he must have jumped."

"The Cape May Coroner is a good friend of mine. I'll call him and let him know what's going on. Hopefully, he can do the autopsy today."

Matt and the chief went their separate ways. Matt was almost certain that he did not just fall into the water and that left a whole host of unpleasant possibilities. He figured he must have fallen off a boat, but no one reported a man overboard yesterday or the day before. He wondered if he had his own boat out there that was just floating adrift, waiting for someone to rescue it. Hopefully, the coroner would provide some more answers. Matt didn't have to wait long. The EMTs took the body right to the county morgue. He was waiting for them.

Julian Fisher was the Chief Medical Examiner for Cape May County NJ. He had almost forty years of medical training and had testified at nearly fifty trials, both criminal and civil. Matt was in the middle of lunch with Chris when his phone rang. It was Carson.

"Jules just finished the autopsy."

"That was quick."

"He didn't drown. Hypothermia killed him. There was hardly any water in his lungs. Makes it tough to establish a time of death. Jules's best guess was a day or so in the open water. Doesn't make any sense. He didn't even own a boat."

Matt knew something was wrong. This guy shouldn't be dead unless he wanted to be.

"The cause of death is still accidental, so I wouldn't worry too much about it. You might want to sniff around the pier and waterfront and see if you can turn anything up. Everybody knew him, maybe someone heard or saw something. Oh, one other thing: Jules tested his blood alcohol level. He was completely sober at the time. Didn't have any booze in his system whatsoever. He was a maintenance drinker, so that seems a little unusual."

"Right chief. I'll keep you posted."

"Please do."

"Well bud, it looks like you got your first homicide case here," he said to Chris as he was finishing his fish taco.

"Really? How do you know it was a homicide?"

"Well, we can pretty much rule out the possibility that he fell into the open water. Way too many people on the pier not to have noticed him at all hours of the night. He could have fallen off a

boat, but the chief says he didn't own a boat. He died of exposure, not drowning. That means he was out in the open water for quite a while. Hard to believe no one saw him or he didn't try to get help. The thing about drunks is that the only way a drunk will kill themselves is with booze. They don't want to die, they just want their pain to go away. Something about this just doesn't add up. Maybe it's nothing, but I think we should ask around."

"Well, the pier was his second home, if he even had a home. I'm sure somebody must have heard something."

"I'll wait until the chief contacts the family before we start asking questions. People just love talking to cops."

"Trust me, everyone in town knows he's dead. I wouldn't bother waiting around for the chief to contact his family," said Chris.

"Okay, let's get started then."

They started with the two bars on the pier. Hurricane Sandy had all but decimated the buildings along the beach, but most had been rebuilt. The pier had to undergo a massive overhaul before the storm hit. Now, the city had federal dollars from disaster relief to rebuild it. They had done an amazing job. There were two bars on the pier. The first one was more of a tourist dive bar with a huge dance floor next door. The other was more of a family restaurant than a bar, they just happened to be lucky enough to have a liquor license, which in Ocean City was more valuable than gold. There were only a few people inside. During the tourist season, this place was standing room only. You could easily be waiting half an hour for your drinks. Matt let Chris run the show, at least he let him think he was running the show. He ordered them two sodas. He watched the bartender at all times. He once caught someone working behind the bar putting ecstasy in his soda. That made him paranoid. Most people know he's a cop as soon as he enters the room. This was no different. Matt introduced himself to the bartender. Chris was doing his best impersonation of Joe Friday. He figured he'd let Chris hang himself, then cut the rope.

"We're investigating the death of Eddy Soames. People called him Sad Eddy."

"I heard this morning. It's all over town. How did he die?"

"We're not sure. We have to wait for the autopsy to come back. We were just wondering if anyone knew anything or could help us figure out how he died?"

"He was eighty-sixed from here about six months ago. Nice guy, just a terrible drunk. He had a rough go of it after Sandy, just like the rest of us. I knew him before the hurricane and he was a much different person. I haven't even seen him in months." said the bartender.

"Well, if you hear anything, give us a call. You don't even have to give your name," said Matt as he handed him his business card.

"Has someone notified his daughter? She used to work here."

"Yes, the family has been notified," said Matt.

He pulled Chris away, who was listening to one of the patrons bitch about a parking ticket he received a few weeks ago.

They hit every business on the pier. Took them four hours. They got nothing. Everyone knew of him, but no one really knew him personally, at least not in the last few years. He just seemed to be hanging on, trying desperately to claw his way back to some kind of normal life. His last stop at the very end of the pier was a souvenir and trinket store that owned by the same family for the last 30 years. The owner was working behind the counter. Matt introduced himself while Chris interviewed another store owner across the pier. Matt explained why he was here and suddenly the guy's face lit up.

"Well, it's probably nothing, but something happened a few days ago that I thought was odd." said the shop owner.

"What's that?"

"Well, I've had numerous run-ins with Mr. Eddy. Nice guy when he's sober, but when he's drunk, his demons come out. Got a real Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type personality. Anyway, I was about to close up and I see him having this heated conversation with a bunch of ritchies right outside my door. It was strange. They almost seemed to try to get him to do something. I just figured it was to buy them booze. I mean that's his bread and butter. He seemed hesitant like he didn't want to do it. I don't know, I didn't really pay much attention to it. I just thought it strange that the ritchies were even talking to someone like him."

"Who are the richies?"

"The rich punks from rich assholes who run this town and pretty much everything else. They think they can do whatever they want and get away with it and they usually can. Makes my blood boil. I so much as fart and I have the town all over me. Just not right."

"So then they're locals?"

"Oh yeah, they're locals alright. I recognize one of them, Amanda Fenn. She used to be friends with my daughter. She was there with them."

"When was this?"

"Three nights ago. I remember it because I had to drive back here cause I left my medication in here. Yeah, it was Sunday night."

"That would be four nights ago?"

"Yeah, that's right. Look, I don't want to start anything and I would greatly appreciate it if you did not mention my name in any of this. These kids come from some very influential families in this town. I'd be careful if I were you."

"Okay, well thank you, sir."

Matt met Chris on the pier. Chris had struck out with the store owner.

"Well, I got something. Might not be much, but it's all we got?" said Matt.

"What's that?"

"Three nights ago, Eddy was seen talking to a group of rich kids in front of that store. The owner said the kids were probably asking him to buy them booze. He gave me the name of one of the kids. I think we should visit her. It's probably a waste of time, but it's our only lead."

"What's the kid's name?"

"Amanda Fenn."

"Oh, great. That's going to be a problem. It's got to be the same family."

"Same family?"

"Fenn Construction. They got all the federal contracts after Sandy to rebuild this place. Big money in that family. Very connected. You might want to run this by the chief first."

"Chris, you have a choice to make here. It's pretty simple, but it will affect your entire career as a cop. It's very important."

"What's that?"

"Are you going to be some higher-up's bitch or you going to be your own man?"

"It's not that simple Matt, I'm just a rookie. I don't have your resume. Hell, I'm on probation. The chief can fire me any time he wants to."

"Well, the job doesn't come with any guarantees kid. If the chief knows you're going to run to him every time you have to make a decision, he's never going to respect you. Nor will any other officer. Sometimes you just have to follow your instincts."

"What do your instincts tell you about Amanda?"

"Where there's smoke, there's fire. Something about this case just isn't right. Somebody out there knows exactly what happened and I think we owe it to that dead bastard and his family to find out."

"I'll get her address."

"Alright. Is there a decent bathroom around here? I hate using public restrooms?" said Matt

Chris got the address for the Fenn residence and half an hour later, they were on their way. The houses got bigger and more expensive the further towards the coast they drove. The Fenn residence was the last house in a cul de sac of giant houses and estates. Chris parked the car and they went up the front steps. Matt rang the doorbell.

"I'm surprised we were able to just drive right up here. A house this nice should have security at the front gate," said Chris

The front door opened and an elderly woman answered the door. She gave the both of them a very cold, business-like glare. It must have occurred to her that they were cops because she instantly changed her demeanor. She even cracked a smile.

"Can I help you?" she asked

"Ma'am, I'm Sergeant McTavish. This is Officer Marquez. We're with the Ocean City Police Department. We'd like to talk to Amanda if she's home?"

"May I ask what this is about?"

"We're investigating the death of a local person who washed up on the beach. Amanda was seen talking to him a few nights ago on the pier. We were hoping he might have said something to her that could help our investigation."

Matt knew the old lady wasn't buying it, but she chose to let them speak to Amanda. She let the officers in but made them stand on a carpet in the waiting room.

"The news said he drowned, is that correct? They said he was a derelict. I fail to see how Amanda could have anything to do with this." the old woman said.

"He did drown. Even derelicts and homeless people have to be investigated. It will only take a minute." said Chris

The old woman went over to the intercom and pressed a button.

"Amanda. Some people from the police department are here to speak with you."

"Ok. I'll be right down," said Amanda over the intercom.

"If you gentlemen will excuse me, I must get back to my duties. Feel free to make yourselves at home." said the old woman as she disappeared down the hallway.

"Twenty bucks says she's going to call the parents," said Chris

"Yup. You ever seen a house like this?" asked Matt

"Just on TV."

Amanda appeared at the top of the stairs. Both of the men were taken aback by her beauty. She had the body and face of a goddess. She walked slowly down the stairs and stopped in front of the men.

"Can I help you?" she asked

"Are you Amanda Fenn?"

"Yes," she said.

"Amanda, I'm Sergeant McTavish. This is Officer Marquez. We're with the Ocean City Police Department investigating the death of Eddy Soames. We got information that three nights ago you and a group of others were seen talking to him on the pier. We were just wondering if he said anything unusual to you? Anything that may be tied to his death?"

"Do you guys always investigate accidental drowning? Seems kind of pointless."

"Well, the problem is Amanda, he didn't die from drowning. He died from hypothermia. He must have been in the water for hours. We're trying to find out why he was in the water for so long." said Chris

"Hypothermia or drowning. Doesn't seem to make much of a difference. He was an old, worthless drunk who was going to die pretty soon anyway from drinking." she said.

Both the men really didn't know how to react to her. It was as if they were questioning a robot. A very, very attractive robot."

"So, why exactly were you talking to him? What were you guys talking about?" asked Chris

"I wasn't talking to him. Dax was."

"Dax?"

"Daxter Doubleday. I'm sure you've heard of him."

"Sorry, I'm new to these parts," said Matt.

"Look, If you're going to question me any further, I'd like to have our family lawyer present," she said coldly.

"Amanda, you're not being questioned about a crime. His death was ruled an accident. We just want to know why he was out in the open water in the middle of October. I don't think he was taking a swim." said Matt.

"Well, I want my lawyer," she said.

"Okay, we'll be in touch, thank you for your time," said Matt.

The two of them left the house and headed back to the car.

"Jesus, was that weird or what," said Chris.

"Yeah. She wasn't nervous. That was something else. I've seen that look a thousand times before." said Matt.

"What look?"

"*The I've been caught look*. Something is going on here Chris. I just hope the chief gives us enough room to investigate. Hard to believe we just found the body this morning." said Matt.

"Are you kidding? Dax Doubleday. If it's the same Doubleday I'm thinking of, we may as well forget about it. That dude is rich even for rich people. He runs this town."

"Great. I just love dealing with rich people."

"Well, then you're really gonna love dealing with this guy," said Chris

Carson was waiting for them when they got back to the station. He didn't look too thrilled to see them.

"Chris, why don't you finish up here, I've got to talk to Matt for a sec."

"Sure chief. See you later Matt," he said and walked out of the office.

The chief looked right at Matt and was trying hard to choose the right words.

"I understand you and the kid paid a visit to the Fenn residence today?" he said sitting down in his chair.

"Yeah, we had to follow up a lead. Was I not supposed to go there or something?"

"Matt, John Fenn is kind of a big deal in this town. I would have thought you would have at least told me you were going to his house to question his daughter."

"She was just being questioned as a witness. We were kind of hoping she might be able to tie up a few loose ends."

"Matt, when the cops show up at the Fenn house, everyone in town is going to know about it. I had to deal with a very pissed-off John on the phone. I assured him it will not happen again."

Matt looked at Carson in almost disbelief. He got a very nasty grumbling in his stomach. This entire situation was beginning to stink.

"Nobody accused her of anything. We just wanted to know if she knew anything about Sad Eddy."

"Why on Earth would a girl like Amanda know anything about some loser like Eddy?" asked Carson.

"We got a report that she was seen talking with a group of kids with him a few days before his death. We figured he might have said something to her. Maybe he told them he bought a new boat or something. I'm just having a hard time believing he chose to go for a swim in water that's barely fifty degrees at two in the morning."

"Matt, the case is closed. Julian ruled the cause of death exposure. It was ruled accidental. You don't need to investigate it any further."

"Fine. It's done. Look, I've interviewed a whole lot of people in my career and I'm sure that girl knows something. Something she doesn't want us to know. I just thought we should try and figure out what really happened out there."

"Matt, I do the thinking around here. You just do what I tell you. That's how this arranged marriage of ours is going to work. Am I clear?"

"Sure, chief. Whatever you want." said Matt

"Good. Look, I know it's been a hell of a day for you."

"Nature of the beast I guess," he replied.

"I've got a whole stack of other cases I need you working on. Come back in the morning and you can get started on them with the kid. How'd he do?"

"He's a little green, but I think he'll be fine. His heart's in the right place."

"Good. I have a good feeling about him. He's a good kid."

"I'll see you later chief," said Matt as he walked out of the boss's office.

Matt quickly realized what he had gotten into. He wasn't a cop, so much as he was a damage control specialist for these rich idiots. He wasn't there to investigate anything. Nobody gave a shit about Sad Eddy or the fact that he was turned into a human popsicle. He hoped the poor guy didn't suffer, that has to be a horrible way to go. The fix was in. Maybe it was all for nothing. He had learned to trust his gut and his gut was saying that something was very wrong. He wouldn't have to wait around very wrong to be proven correct. Two days later another body was found floating in the water by some fishermen. The dead guy was fully clothed.

Matt and Chris raced over to the beach where the boat was docked. They had fished him out of the water. The boat was owned by the Caliperi family from Ocean City. They had been out looking for tuna when his son spotted the body. They were pretty upset but did their best to try and cover it up. Chris took the pictures and began his initial investigation. One of the crew members on board recognized him as the owner of one of the shops near Waterfront Park. The deceased was named Robert Harper. Matt fished his semi-frozen wallet out of his pants and confirmed it. Carson and several town officials arrived shortly thereafter and the circus began. Matt concluded that Carson really had no idea what he was doing. Five years ago he owned a real estate office in town. He had been a reserve officer for the city for the last ten years. Somehow, a man with very little actual law enforcement experience had been promoted to lieutenant and then to the acting police chief when the former chief retired. Carson was a politician, not a cop. Matt had met enough of their type throughout his career and the more he met them, the more he disliked that kind of person.

"What have we got here Sergeant?" asked Cason, trying to sound official in front of his handlers.

"Got a floater chief. He's been positively ID'd as Robert Harper, a local."

"Jesus, my kids go to school with his kids." said one of the women accompanying them on board.

"Sgt. McTavish is a very experienced homicide investigator. We're lucky to have him. I will keep everyone posted as soon as I know anything." said Carson.

"This is the second body in three days, Sergeant. I hope you guys will get to the bottom of it," said Janine.

"Yes ma'am," he replied.

He pulled Chris aside and out of earshot of everyone else.

"Is there anybody in this place you trust? I mean really trust?"

"I trust everyone here Matt," he said somewhat confused. He quickly realized what Matt meant and then shook his head.

"My FTO, Officer Mike Price. I screwed up one night and he saved my ass, big time. I figured I owed him, you know. He just told me that if everyone in the department made a mistake on their probation and got fired over it, then nobody would be working here. He's a real cop. Kind of a hard-ass, but a good guy. He hates Carson."

"Give him a call. Tell him to meet us someplace. I've got to pick his brain. I have to know if we can trust him."

"I think he's the only one in this whole place I would trust."

"What about me?" asked Matt

"Jury is still out on that one Matt."

Matt smiled to himself. The kid was a lot smarter than he looked.

Ocean City now had two unexplained deaths in the last three days. Carson spent his entire day doing damage control and answering phone calls from important players in town. He had written up a press release that sounded great but was complete bullshit. One accidental drowning maybe, but two? These guys were certainly seasoned enough not to go anywhere near open water this time of the year. Hypothermia can set in within minutes. A strong swimmer might last a few hours, the clothes giving them some protection, even though they were soaked. Strangely enough, in both cases, their shoes were missing. And they had no cell phones on them. If they fell in the water, wouldn't they find the victim's cell phone on them? It was beginning to look as if both victims had been forced to swim. They took their shoes off and left their cell phones behind. Why on earth would they go swimming in the open water? Didn't make any sense.

Two separate teams were investigating with Matt leading one and Carson's right-hand man, Officer Dave Fowler, leading the other. Matt knew exactly where to begin looking. Once

Harper's wife was notified, they went to work. About two hours into the investigation, Carson called Matt and told them to head back to the office.

"We found his boat adrift a few miles away. His phone and shoes were on board. Don't know what the hell he was doing, but it looks like it was completely accidental. Fucking idiot should have been more careful." said Carson.

"Ok, chief, we'll head back."

He found Matt and his team left the pier and beach and headed back to the station. Matt was driving and Chris was in the passenger seat when he got a text. Chris read the text and his face went as white as a ghost.

"Everything ok?"

"I just got my bill for the car. We should be arresting the mechanics. Rip off artists." he said jokingly.

He wondered if it was bullshit or not, but there was another officer in the car and perhaps Chris didn't want to say anything until they were alone. Sure enough, when they were alone in the hallway, Chris pulled out his phone and showed Matt what was on it.

One of the fishermen noticed that Harper's boat had the anchor dropped. Even if he fell overboard, it seems highly unlikely that he wouldn't have been able to get back on board. Matt read the text and his stomach became queasy once more.

"Where there's smoke, there's fire, right?" Chris said.

"Yeah, only the chief is pouring gas on it, trying to put it out," said Matt.

"Doesn't make much sense Matt. I've been on lots of boats, even during bad weather. It's pretty hard to fall off a fishing boat."

"I don't think he fell off. I think he was pushed."

Matt got another call from Carson. Harper's wife told him that they were having serious money issues and were going to lose their house next month when the bank foreclosed on it.

"Wife says he was very depressed, borderline suicidal. She was devastated, but not surprised."

"Jesus. That's a hell of a way to go. I would think if someone was going to off themselves, there would have to be an easier way to do it." said Matt.

"Could have just been a spur of the moment type of thing. I'll have Julian run an autopsy on him. I just got back the one on Sad Eddy. Everything kind of fell into place, except for one thing, I don't think it matters, but it was odd."

"What's that?"

"His blood alcohol level was zero point zero. He was completely sober. Probably the only time in the last five years."

"Well, it probably doesn't mean much. I'll have my report on your desk in the morning, we're going to head back to the office."

"Okay, see you then."

Matt realized that this job could be a cakewalk or a nightmare, depending on how well you got along with Carson. Matt didn't want to make waves. He had seen firsthand what happens when you stand up to those in charge. It isn't pretty. If Newark could have fired him, they would have, but he had the police union on his side. They made it clear that he was seen as a whistleblower and if he was terminated, there would be hell to pay. He figured he would just ride out his time, get his pension and move to Florida like every other retired cop he knew. He was done trying to be the hero. Americans just don't like heroes anymore. Being a hero can be expensive.

Matt did pretty much nothing for the next three months. He made several arrests for minor crimes, took his turn working at a local animal shelter as part of the chief's public service requirement for his officers. He had pretty much forgotten about the two bodies. Cases were closed as far as he was concerned. Neither of the men was important enough to warrant an investigation. Carson had begun to trust him, filling him in the who and whom he was not allowed to speak with. There was more in-house drama in this department and in the local government than he had ever seen in Newark. Everyone seemed more concerned about keeping their position and advancing than actually catching criminals. He knew this was a gravy train with biscuit wheels. No need to rock the boat.

Chris became the D.A.R.E. Officer for the Ocean City Public Schools. Matt had the same job years ago. Chris was smarter than he was, he milked it for all it was worth. He went to New York for five days of training, all paid for by the department.

One of his cases involved a stolen wallet with credit cards. It was a local businessman who knew Carson personally. Carson dropped the report on his desk first thing in the morning right after he arrived. It was very detailed. He reported his wallet missing and the next day, there were several unauthorized charges in the local area. He was very clear who the suspect was. The name he gave was one "Sarah Smiles". Matt immediately figured she was a hooker who got greedy and stole his wallet. The guy didn't want his wife to find out, but he was more than pissed about the stolen wallet. He knew his wife would probably find out about the charges. Matt called the guy and got the story from him. His hunch was correct, that's exactly what had happened. She went to a motel with him after he met her in a local strip club. It wasn't too hard to piece together what happened next. Matt figured she had to be using, why else would she do something as stupid as stealing a credit card from a rich guy? She probably made more money in one night than he made all month. The chief wanted to make the guy happy, so Matt knew what he had to do. He found out from the internet that her real name was Jessica Bornstein from Passaic, New Jersey. She was a porn star with a career that went back more than a decade. Needless to say, the lady wasn't shy. He also discovered that she would be appearing at a nearby strip club in two days. He just needed the video from the stores where she used the credit card and he could arrest her.

He drove down to two of the places. He showed the picture to several workers. One of them was a head shop, where she had purchased a bong for over three hundred dollars. The old guy who waited on her was certain it was the same lady. They did not have a surveillance system in place, but he certainly remembered her.

"We don't get many customers in here that look like her. She was kind of unforgettable. Nice gal. I figured she made her living on her back." said the store owner.

"You're certain it was her?"

"Definitely. Once you see her, you won't forget her."

Matt took the guy's statement and then went onto the next place she used the card. A liquor store a few miles away. She spent forty-three dollars on some wine and beef jerky. Didn't really make much sense. This was pocket change to someone like her. Why risk getting arrested over less than three hundred and fifty dollars? Stupid is as stupid does, he figured. The owner let Matt watch the video. They knew exactly what time the purchase was made. The camera clearly showed a woman with a strong resemblance to Bornstein. She had a large tattoo on her left arm that extended onto her back. You could clearly see the tattoo in the video. Matt knew he had enough for an arrest.

On his way back to the station, Chris called him. He hadn't seen him in nearly a month.

"Hey kid, what's new?"

"Not much. Trying to keep Carson off my back and milk this gig for all it's worth. Hey, it might not mean much, but I dropped the name Doubleday to my informants here in town after we interview gangbusters there and yesterday, one of them calls me and tells me something."

"What's that?"

"He knew Doubleday personally somehow. Says he saw him recently on the pier with two babes."

"Okay, so what?"

"He recognized the babes also. Porn sluts. He even knew their names. Samantha Sinn and Sarah Smiles. They were walking along the pier with this little shit. He wanted everyone to see him with these girls. Guy said they were all over each other. I don't know, it just seemed kind of odd. I thought maybe you might want to know."

"Sarah Smiles huh? Hey, what are you doing on Saturday night? Wanna go meet some ladies?" asked Matt.

Matt and Chris went to the club around four o'clock Saturday afternoon. They flashed their badges to the two human room dividers working the door. They called the owner over. Matt took one look at this guy and knew he was going to be trouble. A short, stocky, and stupid Italian. They were always fun to deal with. Matt explained to him that they had a warrant for the arrest of Jessica Bornstein, aka Sarah Smiles for petty larceny and theft. The owner was none too happy, which is understandable. He asked if they could arrest her after the show. He was practically begging Matt not to arrest her before the show. He looked at Chris, who just shrugged his shoulders. This is where a cop can either make a friend for life or a bitter enemy. Matt didn't care either way, but he figured this little shit was probably up to his eyeball in all kinds of crap and might prove useful later on.

"Look, I can get into a lot of trouble for this. You better not fuck me, Guido."

"I promise you, she is all yours as soon as we close. My boys will make sure she doesn't leave the club."

"Alright, I'm trusting you," said Matt.

"Are you nuts Matt? You really think that asshole is just going to keep his mouth shut the whole time and not warn her?" asked Chris on their way back out to the car.

"Who cares. I've got her address and her mother's address in Passaic. I build bridges, not barriers. I could have arrested her as soon as she entered the club. But, the club would lose its headliner for the evening and lose a ton of money, not to mention dealing with all of the drunk, pissed-off customers. I just saved the owner from all that. So, when I need information or a favor, I know who to call."

"You really think that guy is going to tell you anything?"

"Chris, most people, even most criminals would much rather cooperate with the police than piss them off. We don't want to arrest them and they don't want to get arrested. Everyone wins that way. The last thing that little turd wants is to piss me off and have cops sniffing around the place. That's bad for business."

"Yeah, you got a point there. I see why the chief had me work with you. I'm learning a lot from you."

"That's not why he paired us up together."

"What? Why else would he have put us together?"

"So you can keep an eye on me, am I right?"

Chris looked away, almost as if he was ashamed.

"Yeah, you're right. He came up to me on your first day and said he had to make sure you understood how things work around here. He wanted to make sure you were on his side. He needed to know he could trust you."

"Yeah, I figured as much. I hope you lied your ass off."

"I sure did Matt. I still don't know if I can trust you, but I like you and that's more than I can say for most of the officers in that place."

"I can't believe I am going to get paid to watch hot girls take their clothes off. That was my dream job when I was younger," said Chris.

"No booze. Just soda. If things go south, I need you at your best." said Matt.

"No problem. What am I going to use for money?"

"You're on your own there. I've got twenty-five dollars in my wallet. That's it. Maybe Smiles can sell you an old tampon." Matt said.

"Don't tell my wife. She'd be pissed if she knew I was here," said Chris.

"I won't say a word. The chief thinks we're going to arrest her in Passaic. Can't wait to see the look on his face when he finds out we're here."

"I can't wait either. You know I only have one week left on my probation. I still have to walk on eggshells in that place." said Chris

"Don't worry, the chief wants this ho arrested. I don't think he's going to care how we do it. She ripped off one of his friends. A rich friend."

"I see. Why would she steal a credit card and then be dumb enough to use it? She can't be hurting for money?"

"Who knows. She's probably not the brightest bulb in the pack."

Chris sat in his chair and ordered several rounds of sprite and coke. By eight o'clock the place was packed. There had to be over three hundred people in attendance. Matt stayed in the back offices and kept an eye on Smiles the whole time. He watched her arrive and got her license plate number. She drove a BMW, a brand new BMW. This was clearly one expensive hooker.

She was drop-dead gorgeous. What in the hell she was doing with some punk like this Doubleday kid was a mystery. She was probably on his payroll as well. When she went on stage, everyone in the club ran up as close as they could. Around ten bouncers were protecting her. Matt watched two of them pick up a loud drunk from his chair and literally throw him outside. Matt made sure they called him a cab. He was glad he had a badge. He wouldn't want to piss these guys off.

Guido, or whatever his name was, Matt didn't care. He called all Italians Guidos. They didn't mind. Most people call cops far worse things.

He and Guido spent almost an hour talking. Guido knew Carson as well. The two of them were paired up in a local golf tournament last year. Small world.

The club served its last drink at one AM. By two o'clock, the place was nearly empty. Matt was told he could do whatever he wanted with Smiles at that point.

"You ever need a favor, you just call me Officer Matt. I'm your guy," he said and shook Matt's hand.

"I hope I never have to, but you never know."

Matt and Chris, along with Guido and one of his bouncers went backstage into the girl's dressing room. The girls were only half-dressed. They all stopped what they were doing and looked right at Matt.

"Jessica Bornstein. I have a warrant for your arrest," said Matt

She looked right at him with tears in her eyes. She sat down in the chair and began to sob.

"Come on get dressed. It's been a long night."

Matt never did say what she was being arrested for. A little trick he had learned as a rookie. Once in a while, he gets them to talk. Tonight, he hit pay dirt.

"You little shit! You knew they were going to arrest me!" she said as Matt put the handcuffs around her.

"Sorry babe, my hands are tied. Come back any time, the guys love you," said Guido.

Matt and Chris walked her outside to their car which parked across the street in a parking lot. They put her in the backseat. Matt uncuffed her so she could put her jacket on. She continued sobbing in the car.

No one said anything for a few minutes. Matt was so tired, he wasn't even paying attention to her. He would drop her off at the jail and let them deal with her paperwork.

"How much trouble am I in, don't lie to me?" she asked.

"That's not up to us Jessica, it's up to the judge. It's her show."

"Jesus that little shit. God, am I an idiot. Look, I know I should have stopped it. I know I'm older and an adult. I know he's going to say it's my fault."

Matt and Chris looked at each other and said nothing, hoping she would just keep talking.

"Are they going to charge me with murder?" she asked nonchalantly.

"I don't know Jessica, why would they?"

"Because I didn't stop him. I mean it's not like he twisted their arm and made them do it. They could easily have said no. That kid is so fucked up. I mean he's smart. He's rich and he thinks he's untouchable. He said his dad runs this state and keeps them afloat."

"How much was he paying you?" asked Chris

"Ten thousand a week. Cash. Hardly seems worth it now."

"You just had to bang him?" asked Chris

"At first yes. I don't know, I got way too attached. It's easy to forget he's just a kid. I couldn't take his money anymore. I'm a whore, but even that was too much for me. He gave me the money to buy that car. He can buy anything he wants. Anything. He thinks he's the king of New Jersey. I know what I did was wrong. I know I should have stopped him, but I didn't. I have to live with that for the rest of my life."

"Jessica, unless you want to go to prison and be a professional carpet muncher, you better tell us everything you know. We might be able to help you."

"Give me a break. You're not going to arrest him. People like him never get arrested." she said.

"Well, somebody is going to take the fall for this. They're going to fall hard for it. I'm sure if you cooperate it will go a long way with the DA. You might even get immunity. Your only move at this point is to work with us." said Matt.

"Fine. Can we stop and get something to eat. I'm starving and I need a smoke."

"Sure," said Matt.

He found an all-night diner and took her handcuffs off. The three of them sat in a booth and she told the men everything that had happened. Matt and Chris were riveted. Matt had no idea. Neither did she. He never did tell her why she was being arrested. He had never heard of anything so screwed up in his life. She could break the case wide open. They had three dead bodies and this Dax Doubleday was responsible for all of them, at least indirectly. Her testimony would go a long way. A very long way. Matt wanted this kid in handcuffs badly. He wanted to see the look on his face when he arrested him. When she was finished, none of them said anything. Matt knew the bail on the warrant was only fifteen hundred dollars. She probably had more than that on her right now. Once she bailed, they would probably never hear from her again. There was nothing they could do. It was a risk they would have to take.

"We still have to book you at the county jail, Jessica. We have a warrant that has to be cleared."

"I know. I just don't want to go to prison for this. I guess I never really thought these people would die. I really didn't. It just never occurred to me."

"They did. That's the problem," said Matt.

They took her back to the car and drove her to jail. Two detention officers escorted her into the jail. Matt went with her to intake and dropped off the warrant and filled out the paperwork. It only took ten minutes. Chris was standing outside the patrol car when he came back.

"Well, bud. The hell do we do now? We have to tell Carson." said Chris

"Yes, we do. I'm just wondering if Carson already knew."

"I doubt it. He's pretty clueless."

"Let's go home and get some sleep. We'll be ready for round two after some rest."

"I like that idea," said Chris.

Matt knew they needed a clear head when they filled in Carson. They knew he was going to have a meltdown, so they didn't want their tanks half empty.

"You think Carson will back us?" asked Chris as he yawned.

"I don't know. If Bornstein will take the stand and testify against him, we might get somewhere."

"She'll disappear as soon as she makes bail. Guaranteed when she finds out she was only arrested for the stolen credit card, she'll say she made the whole thing up," said Chris.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that."

"Why do you say that?"

"Remember we asked ourselves why a girl with the money she has would have to resort to stealing someone's credit card? I realized why she did it when she was talking to us at the diner."

"Okay, why did she do it then?"

"She wanted to get caught. She wanted to tell us all about what that little shit did. It was her way of clearing her conscience. She knew she was going to get popped. That's what she wanted." said Matt.

"You really think so?"

"Yeah, bud. I really do," said Matt.

Carson listened to every word Matt told him. He sat back in his chair and took off his wire-rimmed glasses.

"Jesus.....that is quite a story. So, let me get this straight: the kid paid the hooker or porn actress to be his pretend girlfriend?" he asked

"Oh the sex was real, I'm sure. The kid just didn't realize she was only in it for the money. I'm sure Bornstein is a real pro. She had us fooled." said Chris.

"So, in order to impress his harem, he dreams up these crazy stunts and asks desperate people if they will do them? Like swimming five miles in open water to shore?"

"Yup. That kid that was killed in Peterboro, that was Dax's handiwork also. Bet the guy ten grand he couldn't stay on top of the roof of a semi across the New Jersey Turnpike before he got caught."

"So we can definitely tie him to three murders?"

"Three right now. Who knows how many more there were. Jessica told us that one of his bets, he lost and had to payout. Said the kid gave the guy the money and even shook his hand. Ten thousand dollars. Can you imagine that?"

"What did he do?"

"She didn't know. Just that it was very dangerous and Doubleday was amazed he survived."

"Well, we're betting the farm on this hooker testifying against this kid she was screwing only a few weeks ago. I hate hookers. You just can't trust them. My guess is she is going to blackmail the kid to buy her silence." said Carson.

"Probably. Of course, there is someone else who could help us."

"Who's that?"

"Amanda Fenn. She and Doubleday have some kind of relationship. She could break the case wide open. She knows just as much if not more than the whore." said Chris

Matt could see the chief was torn. He wanted to charge the kid just as badly as they did, but he knew he had to have all of his ducks in a row before they pulled the trigger. Taking down this kid was going to be like David and Goliath.

"You think the Fenn girl will talk?"

"I think if this is correctly explained to her and what is at stake, then yes, she will. We still don't know who or who was not involved. We can offer her immunity if she's willing to testify. The publicity alone ought to compel her to do the right thing." said Matt.

"Okay. I'll call her parents and ask them to bring her down to the station. You can assume she'll have a lawyer with her, a very expensive, very obnoxious one at that." said Carson.

"I'm sure she will. I'm going to print some of the photos we took of the bodies at the crime scene. Nothing like a little gentle persuasion." said Matt.

"A girl like that wouldn't last two days in a women's prison," said Carson.

"That's exactly why I think she'll cooperate," said Matt.

"Okay, I'll make the call. I hope you two brought you're a-game. You're going to need it." said Carson.

Amanda Fenn showed up with her father and an attorney three hours later. They were personally greeted at the door by Chief Cason. After the pleasantries were exchanged, they got right down to business. Amanda had no reservations about speaking to the police. She asked her father to leave and that she would call him when she was done. She sat down in the interview room, her attorney looked like Harvard trained twat, who was probably a very good attorney and would make sure Amanda didn't hang herself. Matt and Chris shook her hand and asked her if she wanted anything to drink.

"No, no thank you. Let's just get this over with," she said

"Sure. Amanda, I'm going to record this conversation, if that's ok with you," said Matt and he hit the record button.

"Fine, whatever, let's just get this done," she said.

"Amanda, we were hoping that you could provide some details about the deaths of Eddy Soames and Robert Harper. I trust you know who they are," said Matt.

"Yes. Dax.....Dater Doubleday made a bet with them. He called it a gentlemen's wager. He told them he would give them each ten thousand dollars if they were able to swim from the last buoy in the cove back to shore." she said.

"The two men did this voluntarily?"

"Yes. Dax recorded them on his phone. He knew he might get in trouble, but the men, both of them said they were doing this of their own free will. He wasn't forcing them to do anything. They wanted to do it. They needed the money."

"Do you think Daxter would have paid them if they made it?"

"Yeah, I do. He would never welch on a bet. He hated welchers."

"Amanda, do you know if he made bets with anyone else? Like Joshua McBride?"

"Who's that?"

"Well, his body was found on the New Jersey Turnpike. He was decapitated," said Matt.

"You mean his head was missing?"

"Yes. Rumor is that Dax bet him he couldn't stay on top of a semi undetected for the length of the turnpike. We don't know what happened, but clearly McBride lost the bet."

"Jesus, I don't know anything about it. I just know about the two swimmers on the beach."

"Amanda, are you willing to testify in court and tell the jury what you just told us?" asked Matt.

"No....no I couldn't do that to Daxter. He might be an asshole, but I couldn't do that to him."

"Amanda, I'm sure your attorney will answer all of the questions about the legal implications of what you just told us. If Daxter is charged with their murders, you could be charged as well."

"Oh, please. Charge her with what? She's here as a material witness. Don't threaten my client." said her attorney.

"Amanda, we've got three dead bodies. Somebody is going to be charged. I don't know if you'll be charged in connection with the crime or not, but if you work with us, I'm certain the DA would be willing to negotiate."

"Sergeant, you're not going to charge her with anything. She hasn't done anything wrong. You can slap a charge on her and it won't even make it to trial. The only crime committed here was out of control stupidity by the deceased. Threaten her again and this interview is over." said her lawyer.

"I'm not threatening her, I'm just letting her know the way the law works. You have three dead men. Men with families and children. They are going to demand someone be charged. This isn't just going to go away. There is no point in ruining your life at such a young age." said Matt.

"Look, I'm sure if Dax knew these guys were going to die, he would never have put them up to it. It's not his fault they froze to death."

"So you guys just what, watched them jump in the water and then forgot about them. What if they needed your help?"

We went to the beach and waited for them. Dax gave them a light so they could find their way. You could see the lights onshore. I just didn't realize the water would be so cold. I thought they might drown. I never thought they would just freeze to death." she said.

"Amanda, did it ever occur to you to come and talk to us after the bodies were found on the beach? To tell us what happened? Don't you think the families of these men deserve to know what happened?" asked Chris

"I was scared. I knew we screwed up. I didn't want to get in trouble. That day you came to see me at my house, I almost had a heart attack I was so scared." she said with tears in her eyes.

"I could buy that for the first victim, but surely you knew the risks when you sent Harper into the water. You had to have known about Sad Eddy when he went into the water, am I right?"

"Yeah, I knew it was a mistake. I didn't go with them that night on Dax's boat. I just couldn't. I'm sorry, I know I really screwed up. What's going to happen to me?"

"I don't know Amanda, that's up to the DA. We just gather facts. We don't recommend charges. I can tell you, he will go a whole hell of a lot easier on you if you cooperate."

"Amanda, would you wait outside for a moment, I'd like to have a word with these officers, just us guys," she said smiling.

"Okay, I'm going to have a smoke," she said and wiped the tears from her eyes.

As soon as Amanda left, she sat down in front of them and looked right at them.

"You guys aren't going to charge her with anything. She didn't know the men would die out there. Even if she did, they did all of this of their own free will. I have the recording the Doubleday kid made on his phone. Once the jury sees it, they won't be able to convict him and we both know, he'll never see the inside of a courtroom. He's Dallas Doubleday's kid for Christ's sake. It would be like trying to charge one of Trump's kids. Ain't gonna happen."

"Like we told the girl, that's not up for us to decide. I've seen people go to prison over a whole lot less. You really want to roll the dice in court, be my guest. Something tells me when her father hears about a deal, she'll be signing the paperwork the next day. It's her only smart option at this point. You don't work for the kid, you answer to her father." said Matt.

"It's the Doubleday kid you want anyway. Even if she did testify, I doubt it would really make much of a difference to a jury. At this point, you guys are shooting blanks. When you've got real ammo, then come back to me. Until then, don't waste our time or hurl empty threats at a scared kid." she said looking at them.

"Lady if you think she's scared now, wait until she steps into the fish tank at Edna Mahan Woman's Prison. Then she'll really know what it's like to be scared," said Chris.

"I don't expect to hear from you again. If you are going to charge the Doubleday boy, you're going to have to do it without her help."

"Well, we'll see about that," said Matt.

Amanda and her attorney left. Carson and the local DA, Dave Goldman were watching the entire interview through the two-way mirror. He just looked out the window and shook her head.

"I don't know guys. Even if this Fenn kid does testify and the hooker testifies also. I'm still not sure we could hang anything more on the Doubleday kid than negligent homicide. Maybe second-degree manslaughter, but if these men are being recorded saying they are doing this of their own free will, I just don't know. No jury likes a mega-rich, cocky asshole. But, even at that, I'm just not sure we could hang a conviction on him.

"Dave, his actions directly led to the deaths of three people, how in the hell can he not be held accountable?" asked Matt.

"Well, you could also say that the dead men were responsible for their deaths. I'd love to charge this kid too, just to see the little shit squirm in court, but I'm not sure my boss would go for it.

"Come on man, you can't just let this kid get away with this? You've got to charge him with something!" said an exasperated Matt.

"Let me make some phone calls and I'll get back to you guys. You have my complete blessing to haul in the Doubleday kid for questioning. If he's dumb enough to talk." said Goldman.

"Not dumb. Cocky. Big difference. He'll know when it's time to talk and when it's time to clam up. He must know we'll be coming. I'm sure Amanda let him know. Well, how bout it boss, you want us to bring him in?" asked Matt.

"Let me call Janine. Give me a few minutes guys," said Carson as he sat down at his desk and picked up the phone.

"You know guys, you can't force him to talk. Even if we do arrest him, he's not required to say a word. He could refuse to talk to you and there's really not much you can do." added Goldman.

"True, but does a cocky 18-year-old kid know that?" replied Matt.

"Give me a few days. As I said, we can't just bully this kid or try to intimidate him. I'll get back to you guys as soon as I have an answer.

Said Goldman.

"Well, you heard the man. Hands off the kid until he gives us the thumbs up. I hope we are clear on that." said Carson.

"Yeah Chief," said Matt with a sigh. He knew then that the kid was never going to be charged with anything, let alone with the word homicide in it. Laws were just for poor slobs like he and Chris. The rich and powerful had their own set of rules to live by, which pretty much consisted of "do whatever the hell you want, just don't get caught". He knew it would be pointless, but he had his marching orders. The DA had people he had to answer to, just like everyone else. He read a newspaper article about Dallas Doubleday. His state taxes last year totaled over sixty-two million dollars. He paid almost three hundred and thirty thousand dollars a year in property taxes to Ocean City. He kept Mercy General Hospital in nearby Garden Grove afloat last year with a personal interest-free loan of almost twenty million dollars. A guy like that can pretty much write his own ticket in this state. He is what the state government referred to as a "whale", a very rich person whose taxes and money kept a fiscal disaster zone like the state of New Jersey from going under. It would be very easy for him to simply move his home to a state like Nevada or Florida and pay no income tax. If just a few of these whales were to leave the state, they'd be screwed. Doubleday probably had the governor's cell phone number and the senator's as well. He was pretty much untouchable.

Five days passed before Goldman got back to the chief. It was pretty much as Matt figured it would be. The DA's office had decided not to charge Dexter Doubleday. Matt knew it was coming, but he couldn't contain his anger.

"You've got to be kidding me! You at least owe us an explanation. You've got to at least give us that much." he told Goldman in Carson's office.

"We don't have a case against the kid. No one will testify against him. We don't even have enough evidence right now to arrest him."

"No one will testify, no one?"

"We contacted the Bornstein girl. Her agent told us she is on vacation to Israel and isn't sure when she'll be back if she is coming back. Amanda Fenn refuses to testify against Dexter. No one else in the group will either. At this point, what the hell would we use to charge him?"

"You've got the Fenn girl's testimony, that ought to be enough. You've got three dead bodies. That should be more than enough."

"Unless she is willing to take the stand, her testimony isn't worth shit. The recordings that Dexter supposedly made before their deaths? Well, Fenn's attorney says she just made it up. There are no recordings. We don't have shit at this point. That's not all. Two of the victim's families don't want us to press charges against the kid either. They claim it was all a terrible tragedy and they don't want this fine young man's life ruined as a result of such a youthful, discretionary, mistake".

"You've got to be kidding me! How much did Doubleday pay them?"

"I don't know, but it must have been a pretty good chunk of change. Mrs. Harper went from a screaming, furious widow, hell-bent on revenge to a kitten in just a few days. Use your imagination."

"I don't believe this!" said matt.

"I'm sorry Sergeant. I wish we could charge him as well, but my hands are tied. At this point we are going to have to close the investigation." said Goldman.

Matt slumped back in his chair. Carson walked behind him and put his hand on Matt's shoulder.

"I'm sorry Matt. This is fucked up. I know you're pissed. Look, we aren't going to win all of them. Most days we're just lucky enough to win a few. The cards just weren't with us on this one." he said.

"Chief, when did you know. Don't bullshit me. Did Doubleday pay you off as well?"

"Matt as God as my witness, I didn't know anything until you told me. Doubleday doesn't have to pay me off. All Janine has to do is dangle that damn pension in front of me. It's all I have. I can't afford to lose it and they know it."

"Right. Look, I'm going to take the rest of the day off. I don't think I'd be much good to you anyway."

"Come back tomorrow. We have plenty of other cases to work on," he said.

Matt came back the next day and tried to forget about it. The harder he tried, the more it bothered him. He had seen a few people get off in his career. He had seen guilty people walk free. He had seen innocent people go to prison. He had seen all kinds of people that should have gone to prison, cut deals, and walk away a free man. He had never seen someone not get charged with a crime simply because of who their father was. It just didn't make any sense. He thought about

telling his story, but who would listen. Who would even care? Clearly not the victim's families. They were too busy spending their blood money.

Six months went by, then a year. He eventually did put it on the backburner. He did solve a murder and arrested quite a few criminals in that time. He had pretty much forgotten about Dexter Doubleday until one night when he got a call about a disturbance at a local residence. He recognized the name. It was Amanda Fenn's residence.

He met two other officers at the scene. Amanda was in handcuffs in the squad car. He looked at her and barely recognized her.

"This is Amanda Fenn, are you sure?" he asked the officer.

"Yup. We arrested her last month for possession."

"The hell happened?"

"Her parents kicked her out. I guess she didn't take it well. She hit her mother and pushed her father down the stairs."

"Jesus. Is he alright?"

"He'll live. He might not be a hundred percent for a while. Broke his leg on the way down the stairs."

"I'm going to take her to the station before you guys book her. I've got to find out what the hell is going on with this kid."

"She's all yours. I've met rattlesnakes that were nicer than her." said one of the officers.

Matt opened the car door and looked right at Amanda. She was a hot mess. Tears and meth. Quite a combination. She had gone from being a beauty queen to a whore. Matt looked right at her. She just smiled at him.

"Sergeant Matt. Nice to see you again," she said between the sobs.

"Let's go down to the station. You can clean up and fill me in on what the hell is going on. Is that alright?"

She nodded. Matt grabbed her arm and led her into the backseat of his car. He was back at the station in ten minutes. He uncuffed her and she wiped away her tears and mascara. Amanda cleaned herself up in the lady's room.

Matt was waiting for her in the hallway. He gave her a cigarette.

"I thought you didn't smoke," she said

"I don't," he replied.

They sat down on a wooden bench. Amanda took a deep drag and blew out a puff of smoke.

"I should have listened to you and testified against him, Matt. I really fucked up. I hope you can forgive me." she said starting to cry again.

"We'll get him. People like him always get caught eventually."

"This time I'm going to help you. I won't let him hurt anyone else," she said.

"How long have you been using?"

"About a year. I started right after you came to see me. Look at me, I'm disgusting. I could get any guy I wanted. Now guys just look at me like I'm a hooker."

"Why did you start?"

"Daxter did it. He said his fantasy was to screw a junkie. I thought he was just kidding, you know, just like a game or something. I thought I loved him. God, am I stupid. I had an abortion last month. I told him about it and you know what he did? He just high-fived his friends. Said he could cross that off his bucket list. Told me to get an abortion and to never speak to him again. I thought about having the kid and milking him for child support, but I just couldn't imagine what kind of damage I was going to do to the baby. I figured it would be better if the baby was never born. I'm in no condition to raise a baby. I never even told my family."

"This kid is a real piece of work, isn't he?"

"He's the devil Matt, he really is. He's the most horrible person I have ever met and I was in love with him. The worse he treated me, the harder I fell. I thought it was my fault. I thought I was doing something wrong. We both went to the same boarding school in Connecticut. He ran the place like his own personal playground. He had sex with teachers, sold drugs, you name it. He knew he would never be caught. He was the only boy at school I could never be with. I can't believe all the disgusting things I did. I used to have sex with his whores Sarah and Samantha right in front of him. He would film it and then say if I didn't do what he wanted, he would mail copies of the film to everyone in my family. That's why I said I wouldn't testify. I was afraid of what he would do. I hope you understand."

"Oh, I do Amanda. I understand completely."

"Look, tomorrow night he is going to pick up a shipment of drugs on a yacht at the marina. The name of the ship is the Elsinore. It's in slip 22Q. I read his text when he wasn't looking. Arrest him. Let him know what it feels like to have handcuffs on him. Beat his ass. Do whatever you have to."

"A drug shipment huh? You don't say?" said Matt

"He's going to know it was me who sold him out. I don't care. I'm done with him. I think the only way you're going to stop him is if you kill him. I know that sounds horrible, but it's true."

"Amanda, you once told me that Dexter would never welch on a bet, is that true?"

"Definitely true. He said anyone who welched on a bet is better off dead. It is the only mortal sin to him."

"Yeah, I guess every superman has to have his kryptonite. Okay, I've got to take you to county. I know it's going to suck, but they have a lot of good treatment programs there. If you really want to get clean, they can help you."

"I know. I can't believe the mess I made. How did I screw up this bad?" she asked.

"We all make mistakes. Your biggest mistake was hooking up with Dexter. The rest is just the fallout. I've got a plan, I just need you to help me do it. Can you do that?"

"Anything sergeant. Anything you want that will put him away. Just tell me what you want me to do."

"Simple. Just refuse to see him. Return his mail if he sends any. Drop him completely. I want him to start wondering why you're not talking to him. Let him wonder. I'm going to tell the jail staff to put you into protective custody. I don't know if his reach extends into the jail or not. I don't want to find out. You'll be stuck in a cell for most of the day, but you'll be safe."

He brought Amanda backed to the jail and booked her for the assault on her parents. She hugged him and told him she would do what he asked. He told the booking sergeant that under no circumstances was she to go into general population. He would kill that kid if anything ever happened to her.

As soon as he left the jail, he called Chris on his cell. It had been months since they last spoke.

"Hey bud, whatcha doing tomorrow night?" he asked.

The yacht was docked exactly where Amanda said it would be with some rather salty-looking men hanging around the boat. Chris immediately made one of them.

"That's Josh Knight. Local shit bag. I arrested him a few months ago. If he's around, so are the drugs." said Chris over the radio. Six officers from the Ocean City P.D. were standing by, along with the county's drug task force. Matt was the senior officer and the one in charge. He gave very clear instructions as to what he wanted. The entire operation leading up to the arrest was to be recorded, along with the weighting of the drugs seized. He wanted to scare the shit out of this Pablo guy. He needed him to get to Dexter.

"I don't want any John Wayne shit out there tonight boys. I need this guy alive and in one piece, with no bullet holes in him, got it?"

Everyone in the group nodded and knew what to do. The drug task force was armed to the teeth with Mini-14s and AR-15s. They weren't taking any chances. Matt was covered head to toe in body armor. He was even wearing a Kevlar helmet. He wasn't taking any chances either.

"This guy knows what's at stake if he gets caught. He might be tempted to shoot his way out if he's cornered. I doubt he'll be expecting us.

Matt and his team waited until they saw Pablo walking down the dock with two other men. They pounced. Within a minute it was all over. The men were completely surprised. They were quickly thrown to the ground and arrested. All three of them were armed. Matt opened the briefcase and a big smile appeared on his face.

"Uh oh Pablo, you in trouble," he said as he held up one of the keys of coke.

Pablo said nothing as Matt and Chris led him back to the car. They had a makeshift staging area set up with the scales. They threw him in the back. Pablo was ice cold and said nothing. He would just wait until the bail hearing in the morning and Dax would make sure he'd have the money for bail. This dumb cop really thought he had something. Probably his first big drug bust. Pablo didn't know who ratted him out, but he would find them, and then they and all of their family members would be silenced. Just like in Mexico.

"You want a smoke Pablo?" asked Matt.

"I do not smoke," he said with a heavy accent. "What are we doing here? Why are we waiting? Why don't you just take me to jail?" he asked.

"Oh, in time. I'm just waiting for the other officers to weigh the drugs. I've got to know for sure how much you had on you when we arrested you."

"Why?"

"I just want to see if you hit the magic number."

A few minutes later two of the county deputies came over to the car and gave Matt the papers.

"Ten pounds, six ounces Sergeant. He hit it. Good work." said the officer.

"Thanks, guys. I owe you all breakfast. I'm going to take him to the station and book him."

"Ten pounds, six ounces.....hey Sergeant, doesn't that mean that he will be sentenced under the federal sentencing guidelines?" asked Chris with a smile on his face.

"As a matter of fact Officer Marquez, it does. This is a federal case now Pablo. I'm going to have to call the DEA and bring the Feds in on this. My hands are tied, it's the law."

"Matt, doesn't that mean that Pablo is also ineligible for bail?"

"Why yes, Officer Marquez, it does. A little-known provision in the US Code. Passed by Congress in 1985. See Pablo, they figured if you are caught with that much drugs, you must be well connected, and well-connected people usually have a lot of money to bail out their friends and associates, so they decided to make sure you don't bail and just run away back to whatever crap hole you're from. You don't get to make bail."

"What are you talking about?" asked Pablo.

"I'm sure your lawyer will tell you all about it. You're really screwed here Pablo, you're going to be hit with the big bitch come sentencing time. Caught with drugs and guns. That means additional jail time under the same guidelines. I know. I've read all of them. This is my three hundredth and fiftieth drug bust. I'm kind of an expert on the subject.

"You lie to Pablo! I don't believe a word of this. You must think I am stupid. I am not stupid, gringo. In my country, I am a very important person."

"Like I said, your lawyer will fill you in. Have fun in prison. You weigh what, about a hundred and sixty pounds?" asked Matt.

"Why?"

"Pablo, you're going to be wearing lipstick and a dress within a week of hitting the yard. I hope you don't mind rough sex with other men," said Matt.

"I am not stupid. I know I get to have a lawyer and make a phone call. I will be out of that jail within a few hours."

"Sorry, Pablo. A representative from the DEA will already be waiting at the station to talk to you. You ain't going anywhere." said Chris.

Pablo said nothing more and just continued to fume in the backseat of the patrol car. The nerve of these gringos. They must think all brown people are stupid. He would get the last laugh. Dexter would have him out of that jail within a few hours. Morning at the latest. Pablo Ruiz was not a man to be tested. Not at all.

Matt and Chris parked the car. Chris had already texted Officer Price and asked him if he was ready. He was about to give the performance of a lifetime.

They hauled Pablo into the small cell downstairs at the station. He was strip-searched and given orange clothing to wear, along with orange shower shoes.

"I want my phone call!" he demanded

"Are you going to call Dexter? Cause that might kind of look a little suspicious. He's already being watched by the DEA. Oh, hello sir. You must be from the DEA." he said and winked at Price.

"Pablo, I'm Agent Price with the DEA. I understand you had kind of a bad night."

"That would be an understatement."

"Right, well because you were caught with so much drugs, you can't bail. You can call a lawyer if you want, but it won't do much good. Federal law is very clear. I'll be back in the morning, we can talk then." said Price.

Matt smiled. If this cop thing didn't work out he could always try acting.

Pablo was now beginning to get very nervous. This was not going down liked he had hoped. This was not Mexico. This was: *ESTADOS UNIDOS DE AMERICA*. This was a whole other ball of wax. He thought very carefully about his next move.

They let him out of the cell to make his call. Problem is, if Dexter was being watched, he would probably refuse to take his call. It then occurred to him that there weren't very many people who knew about tonight's shipment. Very few. What if Dexter set him up to take the heat off of himself? It was a possibility. He could only make one call tonight. Surely the gringos would take him to a real jail where things would be easier for him. He had to take a step back and think carefully about his next move. He had plenty of friends and family in Mexico who could bail him out. Surely, there has to be bail. This was America after all.

"I am tired. I will make the call tomorrow. Why am I not being taken to a real jail."

Matt walked over to the bars and stood right in front of Pablo.

"You're not going to get much sleep tonight. So, when you're lying awake in that bunk, just don't forget to ask yourself: who set you up? Then you'll know why we can't take you to a real jail. Sweet dreams Pablo."

Matt and Chris handed control over to the officer assigned to watch Pablo overnight. This was not going according to plan. This was becoming a nightmare. He had been set up, that much was for certain and he was beginning to think Dexter was the one who did it. Who else could it have been? No one else in this country knew him. No one else knew about the shipment. These cops were just playing with him. That was fine. He could play their game. He had spent time in a federal prison in Mexico before escaping. He was no stranger to hard time. That was the price you had to pay sometimes. This would be no different. They will see. Nobody treats Pablo Ruiz like this and gets away with it.....nobody.

Matt returned that afternoon to the station and went downstairs to meet Pablo. He checked in with the officer assigned to watch him.

"He called a lawyer, then he called his brother. Talked to him for almost twenty minutes. The lawyer should be here shortly." said the officer.

"Interesting, he didn't call anyone else?" asked Matt, a little surprised.

"No, that's all. Hasn't said a word since then. I'd be willing to bet this guy has done time before."

"I'm sure he has. Did you call ICE?"

"Yes, they say once everyone else is finished, if he's not in prison, they will come and pick him up. Oh, when he called the lawyer, he got angry, real angry. I'm guessing he got some bad news."

"Okay, go home and get some rest, I'll take it from here. Pablo and I have some business to discuss."

The officer left the holding area. Matt walked over to Pablo's cell and pulled up a chair as he sat next to him.

"Morning sunshine, I brought you a coffee," said Matt as he handed it to Pablo through the bars. Pablo seemed caught off guard by Matt's gesture.

"So, did your lawyer give you some bad news? I think he did. Pablo, you might be a scumbag, but you're not stupid. You know you're looking at decades behind bars. You can take your chances with the feds, but then you'll be in their pocket for the rest of your life and I think that would just kill a guy like you, to know you're owned by us gringos. Of course, there is another option, one that could get you out of here with no jail time at all."

"What is that?" he asked, sipping his coffee.

"I hate drug dealers, but I've got bigger fish to fry than you. I know you work for Dexter Doubleday. All I need from you is to do nothing. Don't call him, talk to him, drop him completely. Let him think you sold him out for a deal, which is exactly what is going to happen. You play ball with me and I can make that little slip of paper that recorded the weight of the drugs disappear forever."

Pablo's eyes lit up. He could not believe what he was hearing.

"I have been in this business too long to trust gringos, especially gringo cops," he said.

"It's your only real option. You know you will never be allowed to bail. You're going to die in prison. Is that really what you want?"

Pablo sat back in his cell. He was beaten. His lawyer had confirmed what the cop had told him about the bail. He had no choice. He had to cooperate.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked quietly.

Once he had Pablo in his pocket. He knew he could make his move. He had gotten Dexter's cell phone number from Amanda. He decided to give him a call. He made sure Chris could hear the call as well.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Dexter. This is Sergeant McTavish with the Ocean City Police Department, how are you?"

"Fine," said Dexter

"Hey, I just met a really nice guy named Pablo Ruiz. I'm sure you have no idea who he is, but he certainly seems to know who you are. We busted him the other night with over ten pounds of coke and meth. Didn't take him too long to roll over on you. You're in a whole shit ton of trouble kid."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," he said meekly.

"Of course you don't. I was thinking of driving to your father's corporate office in Connecticut to talk to him about helping the police union with their pension. While I'm there, I just might happen to mention all of this business to him. You wouldn't want that, now would you?"

"What do you want? You want money, how much?"

"I don't want money Dexter. I want you. I want us to play a little game. The winner takes all. You like making bets and playing games, now don't you?"

"The hell are you talking about?"

"The whole case against Pablo hinges on this little slip of paper I have that recorded the weight of the drugs. Without it, the feds don't have a case against him. Pablo walks. You win, I give you the piece of paper. I win, you walk into the DA's office in town and confess to everything and I do mean everything. That's my offer."

"Fuck you."

"Dexter, I've got a search warrant for your house and I'm working on one with the Connecticut State Police to search your father's office as well. How do you think that's going to make him look? How much money do you think he will lose? He's going to be very upset. You don't want to make the old guy upset now do you?"

"Do you know who the hell I am? I buy cops all the time. That's how this works. Just tell me how much and I'll give it to you."

"I can't be bought Dexter."

"Bullshit, everybody can be bought. Some people just know how much they're worth."

"Meet me underneath the pier at midnight tonight. Right under the emergency call box near the Mexican restaurant. I'll be waiting for you."

"You really think I'm going to show up?"

"Would you rather have to explain all of this to your father?"

Dexter paused for a moment. He was furious, but he knew he had to play this carefully. He had no idea what he was walking into. In this business that could be deadly.

"Midnight huh?"

"Come alone. I'll be waiting," said Matt and hung up the phone.

"So what are you going to do if he shows?" asked Chris.

"He'll show. He has no choice. He's been shitting diamonds ever since Pablo got popped. When he doesn't call him from jail, Dexter is going to lose it. He'll know he has to come."

"Okay, so what then?" asked Chris.

Matt told him about his plan. Chris couldn't believe it. It was the craziest thing he ever heard. Matt must be out of his mind. He sat back in the seat and just shook his head.

"Matt, you are officially the craziest white boy I have ever met." he said in disbelief.

"Doing something crazy is the only way you're going to beat this kid," said Matt.

It was cold for this time of the year. Matt was trying not to shiver under the pier. Chris was watching through a scope on the other side of the pier. Matt was nervous, but it was more excitement than nervousness. This was his only shot. If he screwed up, he wouldn't get another chance.

"He's here Matt. He's alone. I don't see anyone else with him."

"Copy, you know what to do," he said.

Matt walked underneath the pier, over to the call box. He looked up at Dexter who was nervously looking around.

"Down here Dexter. I see you pull out that piece you're carrying and I'll drop you right where you're standing," said Matt.

"You the guy that called me?" he asked

"Yup. Come on down here. I've got something I'd like to show you. I think you're going to like it." said Matt as he motioned underneath the pier.

"Dexter climbed down underneath the pier. He looked around before proceeding.

"Come on, don't be a pussy!"

"Easy for you to say."

He saw Matt sitting down at a large wooden table under the pier. He had no idea what this guy was up to, but he didn't like it. He had no choice. He didn't want to shoot him, not yet, not till he was certain he was alone.

"Why am I here?" he asked

"You like making bets, don't you?" asked Matt as he poured himself a drink.

"Sure, who doesn't."

"Good. I was thinking you and I can make a little wager. I win, you confess to everything. You win, you get that magic piece of paper. Of course, there's a strong possibility that one of us might die before the game is over.

"What are you talking about?"

"Oldest game there is. It's a classic. My favorite. Russian roulette. Kinda separates the men from the boys." said Matt as he pulled out a revolver. He turned on the lantern on the table. He opened the revolver and put in a single bullet. Dexter was blown away. This guy was really nuts, like off the charts nuts.

"You want to play? It's kind of a winner takes all situation."

"Fuck you man, I'm out of here," he said and turned to leave.

"What do you think your old man is going to do when he finds out the feds have arrested you? How do you think he's going to look? How is he going to look to all of his rich asshole clients?"

"You got nothing on me. I'd be in jail right now if you had anything on me."

He said defiantly.

"Dax, you're not dealing with Carson and his flunkies here. You're dealing with the feds. They're slower but more careful. Once they have you in their sights, it's game over. Amanda took a photo of the text you sent Pablo from your phone. You're finished. Pablo won't be allowed to bail. He's already cutting a deal right now as we speak. Your only prayer is to get that weight slip. Without it, the feds don't have a case. Pablo walks and you get to go on living your life and doing whatever the hell it is you do."

"And you're just going to give me that little slip? You must think I'm really stupid."

"If you've got the balls to play Russian roulette. You deserve to have that slip of paper. I'm no welcher and neither are you. We gonna play or not?"

He could see Dexter was tempted just to shoot him and run, but he knew he had no choice. He needed that piece of paper. He hadn't heard from Pablo in days and he wouldn't even see his lawyer Dexter hired for him. Things were going from bad to worse. He took off his jacket and sat down at the table. He looked at the gun that was just laying on the table.

"You first old man."

Matt looked at the gun and in one swift motion, he put the gun up to his temple and squeezed the trigger. He didn't even flinch as he heard the firing pin drop and hit an empty cylinder. He put the gun back down on the table. He then picked it up and just for a second waved it in front of Dexter's face.

"This is right where we found Sad Eddy. You know Sad Eddy, don't you?"

"Yeah, he played sink or swim and he lost."

"Would you really have paid him if he made it?"

"Damn right I would have. I always payout on my bets.....always."

Daxt took his eyes off the gun just for a second and Matt looked right into his eyes.

"Good. Your turn," he said and put the revolver on the table.

Daxter nervously picked up the gun and slowly put it up next to his head. He closed his eyes and squeezed the trigger. He opened his eyes when he heard it just click. He put the gun back down on the table. He was shaking now. He even cracked a smile.

"Told you I got the balls."

"Four more rounds to go. Guess I'm up," said Matt.

He put the trigger to his head and closed his eyes. He was trembling as he slowly squeezed the trigger and heard it click. He put the gun back on the table.

"You got balls, dude. I'll give you that. I could use a real man like you. Whatever you make as a cop, I'll double it. We should be working together, instead of against each other."

"Your turn," said Mat looking right at him.

Daxter nervously picked up the gun. He was shaking so bad, he could barely hold onto it. He started to cry as he squeezed the trigger. As soon as he heard it click, his eyes popped open and he threw it on the table.

"Fuck you," he screamed with excitement.

Matt picked up the gun.

"Remember what I said. If I blow my brains out, you walk away from here with that sheet. It's in my pocket. If I don't, you made a bet and I expect you to follow up on it.

"Squeeze the trigger dude. Let's see how big your balls really are," said Daxter wiping away the tears.

Matt picked up the gun and put it to his temple. He winked at Daxter and then squeezed the trigger. He heard it click and smiled. He put the gun down on the table and looked right at Daxter.

"Your turn," he said with a grin on his face.

Daxter just looked at him with the coldest vilest eyes Matt had ever seen. He had been shot at, beaten, even stabbed. He had faced death numerous times in his career. None of that scared him the way the kid looked at him. Matt was looking into the face of pure evil.

"Go head Daxter. Let's see what you're made of."

Daxter looked at the gun and then suddenly jumped up and tried to pull out his gun. Matt grabbed the gun off the table, pulled back the hammer, and pressed it against Daxter's face before he could even pull his gun out of his back pocket.

"I expect to see you in the DA's office first thing tomorrow morning. Cause if you don't, well, I guess we'll both know what kind of a man you really are," said Matt into his ear. He grabbed Dexter's gun and dropped the clip into the sand.

"See you around kid," said Matt as he disappeared into the darkness under the pier. Dexter kicked the table and smashed it into pieces. He had never been so angry in his life. He was going to kill that damn guy if it was the last thing he ever did.

"I'll be waiting," said Matt as he turned and waved goodbye.

Dexter Doubleday had never been humiliated like this in his life. He had been bested by a commoner. A lousy cop. He was angrier with himself than Matt. Right now he needed to go home and get high. Maybe screw a slut or two. Forget about this horrible night, if just for a little while.

"Matt, you're crazy. Did you really play Russian Roulette with that kid?" asked Chris.

"Sort of. When I squeezed the trigger the first time, that was real. There was a bullet in the cylinder. See I own two exact copies of the same Smith and Wesson revolver. They're identical. I sat down at the table and had the other gun in my lap with an empty cylinder. While Dax was busy looking at me, I switched guns. He played Russian Roulette with an empty gun."

"So there was never a bullet in the gun?"

"Nope. I hate that kid, but even I couldn't be responsible for his death. He thinks there was a bullet in there, that's all that matters."

Chris stopped in his tracks and began to laugh. The longer he hung around Matt, the more he liked him. He might even say he was one of the few people on this planet he really trusted.

"You think that kid is going to show up at the DA's office in the morning?" he asked.

"No, but it doesn't matter. I've beaten him. For the rest of his miserable life, he's going to know what it feels like to have played and lost. That's something most rich people never experience. What's done is done. Even if he went to prison, it's not like it would bring any of those people back."

"Yeah, but what if he just kills more people?"

"I'm sure he will, but this time, everyone and their mother will be looking right at him. He's being watched now, not just by us, but the feds as well. I called a real DEA Agent yesterday and was amazed to discover that they have been watching him for some time as well. Once he's in handcuffs and has his picture in the paper, all his dirty laundry is going to come out. I bet at that point, we'll have dozens of people willing to testify against him, once they think he can't hurt them."

"So, what do we do till then?"

"We wait and be grateful for the fact that we aren't like him. It's just a matter of time before we put the cuffs on him. That is going to be a great day for us and a great day for the rest of New Jersey.....and maybe even the rest of the planet. Just cause you're rich, doesn't mean you should be able to get away with murder."

"That's kind of how things work in this country. The rich and powerful get away with whatever they want. It's always been that way and probably always will be." said Chris.

"Not with me, it isn't. I'd trade my pension just to see that little turd wearing an orange jumpsuit and leg irons. I might be broke, but at least I'd know he isn't going to hurt anyone else."

"I like you, Matt. You're the first person I've met in years that doesn't suck."

"I'm beginning to like me too. It took a while but, at least I can look at myself in the mirror every morning and not want to puke. That's more than most rich people can do." said Matt.