

THE SNIPER

John Boston

I'm standing over the body of Trooper Kevin Watkins. He's dead, as in ain't coming back to life. I'm the Chief of Police in this town. I'm supposed to know what to say. What the hell is anyone supposed to say in this situation?

I'm glad it's not me lying in a pool of my own blood.

"What the hell happened?" I ask, trying to sound like I'm in charge.

"Watkins pulls over a car right here for speeding. There was a trucker parked behind him. He recorded the whole thing on his dashcam. He's talking to the guy and then he gets his head blown off," said Sgt Matt Greely, my number two.

"Where is he?"

"He pulled into the truck stop and called us. We've got him. He's not going anywhere." said Matt.

I take a look at the dashcam video the trucker recorded. Watkins is just leaning into the window of the car, talking to him, then flies backward. It was pretty clear the shot must have come from somewhere else, not from the car.....at least that's what it looked like.

I drive over to the gas station. Two Arkansas Troopers meet me at the door. One of them is Lt. Vanessa Hart. She's clearly been crying, there's mascara running down her cheeks. I give her a hug. She's too nice to be a state trooper. It's moments like these when being a cop just plain sucks. I don't know what the hell to do. I've got to find out why this asshole just shot a state trooper. He's shaking so bad, that he can barely sit still. He looks like a five-year-old kid that just watched his first "R" rated movie. His name is Matt Martinson.

"Jesus Christ John, they blew his goddamn head off," she said sobbing.

"Mr. Martinson, I'm Chief John Golden. Can you tell me what happened?"

"Sir, I swear to Christ, I did not shoot that officer.....or trooper, whatever he was, I did not shoot him. I was speeding. My son is in the Navy. This is the first time he's been home in five years. I was late on my way to the airport to pick him up. The trooper just gave me a warning. His son is in the navy too. We were just talking and the next thing I know, he flies backward, like he was hit with something. It took me a few seconds to realize what happened. When I realized he'd been shot, I raced over here and called 911."

"Why didn't you stay and try to help him?" asked one of the troopers.

"I didn't want to get shot too. Whoever shot him, they had to be up above on that hill next to the road. That's the only thing I can figure." he said shaking.

"So, you were just talking to him and someone in the woods shot him in the head? That seems pretty hard to believe Mr. Martinson." I say

"Well, that's what happened. Go up on that hill and look around. You might find something up there." he said almost hysterical.

I have two troopers keep an eye on him. Matt and two other of my men follow me outside where I meet Vanessa and a Captain from The State Police has arrived. I might be the Chief in this town, but this is not my show. These guys were much higher up on the law enforcement food chain than I was. Everyone is just standing around still in shock over losing one of their troopers. His name was Captain Joshua Carter. He was kind of a big deal in the Arkansas State Police. He just looks like an asshole with a badge.

"So we have the shooter?" he asks.

"Sir.....I don't think he did the shooting. Someone else did." said Vanessa.

"What?"

"You might want to take some of your men and have a look at those rocks directly in front of his body. I agree with Vanessa." I add.

"Who the hell are you?"

"John Golden. I'm the Chief of Police here in Reynolds."

"Well John, because the shooting did not occur on a State or Federal Road, this is your investigation. The law is pretty clear on that point."

"Let's go have a look," I say.

I've never been in charge of a homicide investigation before. I'm like super nervous. I make one little mistake and the whole case can be tossed out of court. I'm going to have to watch a lot of internet videos on homicide investigation when I get home.

My gut was telling me that Martinson just wasn't the shooter. Where the hell was his gun? No way a handgun could do damage like that. It had to be from a rifle. I don't even like guns and even I know that.

I really have no idea what I'm doing. I know if I make one mistake with the Statives, I'm done.

I'm the first one to arrive up top. Carter was too old and fat to make it up the hill. Sure enough, my hunch was correct. I look down and see an empty shell casing sitting on top of a pencil that was stuck in the ground. I put on my surgical gloves and hold it up for everyone to see. I smell it. It was recently fired. I can still smell the gunpowder. It was an empty cartridge from a .308 rifle.

Carter finally got his fat ass up the hill along with the rest of the troopers. He grabs the casing and smells it.

"Where'd you find it?" he asks.

"Right here. Somebody wanted us to find it." I add.

"Damn. We got ourselves a shooter. I'm going to have to call Little Rock. Chief, I can't tell you what to do here, but I would strongly suggest you let CID take over this investigation. No offense, I just don't think you're equipped to handle something like this." said Carter as he put his hand on my shoulder.

I nod and walk back to Matt. He looks none too happy.

"What a dick. This is what we get paid to do, solve crimes. We're not going to just hand it off to someone else. This is in our town."

"It's out of our hands Matt. I'm more worried about the shooter."

"What do you mean?"

"Someone managed to make a headshot on a moving target two hundred feet away with one shot. I don't know too many people who could do that."

"Yeah, you're right. Jesus, you think he might shoot more people?"

"He shot a state trooper. He'll shoot anyone."

The next two days were a blur. There are a total of six officers, including myself in the Reynolds Police Department. Myself, Matt, Percy, and two part-timers who are pretty much useless. We also have Chad, who everyone just calls *the kid*. Reynolds has only 812 people according to the latest Census survey and I doubt it's even that much. A serial sniper is not something that should happen to a small town like ours. The State Police were using our office as the headquarters. CID and Special Investigations from Little Rock were working on the case. Not that they had much to go on. Watkins was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. I tried just to stay out of everyone's way. They had daily briefings and never even invited me. I didn't want to go anyway.

Matt and Percy and I liked to call ourselves "The Three Amigos." It's a stupid nickname, I know. Truth is, I never even wanted to be a police officer. My wife is from Reynolds. We met in college. We moved here and didn't have a dime between us. Her dad got me the job at the police department. This is the last place in the world, I wanted to raise a family, but my wife loved the place. I hated being a cop back then and I still do. It's a terrible job, with terrible pay. The worst part about this job was dealing with the Chief of Police, One Bud R. Hughes. Jesus, what an asshole. Just a typical small town, Arkansas redneck. How this guy never got fired or sued, I'll never know. He was a nightmare. He hated me. I'm not kidding. I don't mean he didn't like me, I mean he told me on more than one occasion that he couldn't stand the sight of me. The thing was, I was already off probation when he became the chief. I joined the law enforcement union and eventually became the president of the law enforcement union for southern Arkansas. He

couldn't touch me. He was stuck with me. Bud and I once chased this huge escaped convict through a junkyard in town. Bud was so out of shape, that he couldn't run more than fifty feet. I'm sprinting, trying to catch this guy. We end up meeting in a corner and he threw me to the ground and started kicking me. My gun fell out of my holster. I was completely defenseless. I did the only thing I could think to do.....I played dead. Yup, that's what I did. This idiot turns around and runs headfirst into a giant piece of steel and knocks himself out. He fell down right in front of me. I rolled him over and put the handcuffs on him. By the time Bud got there, it was all over. He couldn't believe I had handcuffs on this guy.

"Jesus kid.....nice work," he said.

Bud kind of left me alone after that. I could never prove it, but I always suspected that he and his number two, a shit bag named Nells Johnson were doing some illegal activities here in Reynolds. I could never prove it, but I've got a good nose for dirty cops and both of those two stunk.

Anyway, Percy got a call about Tom and Wanda Jenkins. Two local drunks who get nasty once the booze and food stamps ran out. A neighbor called in and said they could hear the two of them fighting and throwing dishes at one another.

I decide to go with him. I loved talking to Percy. He played football at the University. I tried to go in a different direction when I hired him. I didn't want any more dumb rednecks who couldn't talk to people. Percy was a big dude, but he knew how to talk to people. That's what I liked about him.....*he was a drama-free police officer.*

I knock on the door. Tom answers. He doesn't look drunk. In fact, he looks.....*almost normal.*

"Tom.....mind if we come in?"

Tom moved out of the way and Percy and I came into his trailer.

"Did you hire a maid or something Tom? This is the cleanest I've ever seen this trailer." I say.

"John. Wanda and I have been sober for the past four months. I haven't had a drop. I wasted far too much of my life on the sauce. I'm going to make it this time. I'm in AA and have a sponsor."

"Where's Wanda?"

"She's been staying with her mother in Jasper. Our sponsor thought it would be best if we separated for a while."

"So, she's not here?"

"No.....why?"

"Somebody called in and said you two were going at it again."

I talked to Tom and Percy looked around the trailer. He came back into the living room and shook his head.

"Looks fine in here." he said.

"Guys.....she's not here. I was just about to make myself some chili. You want some?"

"Maybe some other time Tom. We got cop stuff to take care of."

"Well, here, let me get you something to go. You always treated me right, John, even when I was at my worst. You're a good man. I ain't going to forget that."

"Alright. I'll have it for dinner."

Percy and I walked back outside. I thought the whole situation was just kind of *odd*. Something just wasn't quite right about this. I should probably have listened to my gut looking back on it. I should have listened to my gut from the very beginning of this whole nightmare. I don't know who's living in my gut, but they're never wrong.

Tom comes running outside from his trailer with two Tupperware dishes full of chili.

"Tom...you don't have to do this."

I dropped my keys on the ground and with my bad back, I had to pretty much bend all the way down in order to pick them up. I heard what sounded like a zip. It was loud, only a few feet overhead. I looked over and see Tom clutching his chest, then I see blood everywhere.....I mean like everywhere. Tom just looked at me with these giant eyes in shock, realizing that he has only moments to live. Me, being the dumbass I am, I stand right up. Percy knocked me to the ground as the second round went right into Tom's trailer. When I realized what was happening, I took out my weapon and crawled underneath the steps. Percy was already on the radio. I quickly came to and ran around the side of the trailer. I couldn't see anyone. I didn't even hear a shot. I realized then that the bullet that killed Tom was meant for me. It was only dumb luck that I was still alive at this moment. I call dispatch and tell them what is going on.

"All units, 11-99, officer needs help on Branch Avenue at the Jenkins house. Be advised, we have a shooter on the loose." I said nervously over the radio.

"I hear the State Police saying they are sending units, as is the Poinsett County Sheriff's Department.

"All units assisting, we need a roadblock on Branch Avenue and Main. We need to cut him off from leaving town. We need a roadblock at the highway 49 entrance as well."

"10-4 John, we're setting up the roadblocks right now."

"JOHN!" shouted Percy as he pointed across the street.

I looked and saw someone climbing out a window across the street and taking off. Percy took off in the other direction, trying to box him in. I ran across the street with my weapon drawn, ready to blast him to pieces. He was running, but I'm a runner as well. I keep right up with him, screaming at him to stop. He did when he saw the lights from the other police cars and ran down

a small alley. He ran right into Percy, who lifted him off the ground and tackled him. The guy had his hands up and wasn't resisting.

"So, you like shooting at cops, huh?" I say as I put the handcuffs on him.

"Wait....what? I didn't shoot at anybody. What the hell are you talking about?"

"Don't play dumb. You're in enough trouble already."

"Whoa, whoa.....I didn't shoot anyone. I was sitting in my cousin's house watching the game. I look outside and see a cop car in front of my house. I figure you guys were here to arrest me for that warrant. I don't want to go back to jail."

"Did you shoot at us or not?" screamed Percy.

"No.....Jesus, I'm not going to shoot anybody, especially a cop."

By now, dozens of units had arrived. The suspect was booked into Poinsett County Jail. Tom was dead. It only took a few minutes to piece together what had happened. There was a house directly across the street from Tom's. It was occupied by an elderly woman named Morrison Hayes. Troopers found her strangled to death in her rocking chair. Right beside her were two empty .308 caliber shell casings. Percy and I had walked right into an ambush, but it was Tom who had died.

Shit had just gotten very real in the tiny hamlet of Reynolds, Arkansas. We had a very dangerous, very smart lunatic running around shooting at cops. All I want to do is to go home and watch Jeopardy. Instead, I'm in the middle of a nightmare.

There were about two dozen officers and troopers who responded to my call. Not one of them saw anyone or anything. Somehow, the shooter had managed to just walk away. I figured the gun must have been nearby, so we searched and searched for it, but nothing. Not a goddamn thing. The only thing they reported seeing that day was a girl dribbling a basketball down the street and some kids riding their bikes. That's it. This guy was either brilliant or incredibly lucky. Maybe both.

We did knock on just about everyone's house in the neighborhood. I knew almost every one of them. I just couldn't see how any of them could be the shooter. I've known some of them for over twenty years. Many were offering their services to help catch the shooter. I was half tempted to take them up on their offer.

Everyone, including myself, now had to wear body armor everywhere we went. We even had Kevlar helmets and rifle plates. Poinsett County SO had assigned half of their deputies to Reynolds. We set up a tip line. Some calls came in, but nothing panned out. I was certain the shooter was a local. Others weren't so sure.

The Governor had decided to lend his services and asked the FBI for help. So, now I have to deal with them as well. I figured at this point, I was going to need all the help I could get. I also knew they were going to ask some very difficult questions of me and my deputies. Two of them arrived

that afternoon. They wasted no time in getting right to the point. The lead FBI Agent was named David Boyle. He looked like an FBI Agent and acted like one as well. Polite, but as sharp as a knife. I'm sure he suspected we knew more than we were telling. I was interviewed for over an hour by him and his team. I told them I knew nothing and had no idea why anyone would want me dead. I'm a cop in a small town. I've made my share of enemies over the years, but never to the point of violence. I had no idea who was behind this, or why.

"John.....we've analyzed the metrics from Trooper Watkins's death. Whoever shot him was obviously a very, very experienced shooter. That would be a very difficult shot, even for our snipers. That gas station is a well-known speed trap for your department, correct?"

"Yeah, we've handed out quite a few tickets there over the years."

"The shooter must have just been waiting for one of your men to park and step out. Trooper Watkins was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe the shooter thought it was you."

"If someone wanted me dead, I'd be dead by now. I think this asshole is just trying to kill as many cops as he can." I say

"You're damn lucky to be alive. If you had just been standing up, you'd probably be dead right now. Look, we're dealing with a sniper. Someone very good at what they do. They won't be easy to catch. The DC Snipers from 20 years ago were clumsy and careless. They shot at anything that moved. This guy is far more careful about his targets. I'm afraid the only way we're going to catch him is in the act, or shortly thereafter. He had your hit planned down to the last-minute detail. He'd probably been watching you for weeks. You're sure, you have no idea who is trying to kill you?"

"No."

"Okay. Send in the other officers, I need to speak to them as well," he said.

I understood what he had to do, I just didn't like it. Truthfully, I had kind of wondered the same thing about my group. What if one of them was dirty? It would certainly explain things. None of this made any sense to us. Percy and Matt and I met at my house after the meeting and went over what we knew.

"If this is a hitman, why kill Watkins? Don't hit men only kill their target?" asked Matt.

"I was thinking the same thing. No, whoever this is, they aren't going to stop until we stop them. It's a game to them." said Percy.

"Guys.....if anybody in this department has uh.....well, if anyone of you is dirty.....now's the time to speak up. If you don't, you're just as guilty as they are." I say.

"John.....I know Bud was up to his eyeballs in shit. He was running drugs for the Dixie Mafia on Highway 49." said Matt.

"What? You knew and didn't say anything?"

"Jesus John, my wife was dying of leukemia. I make 32 grand a year and have shitty health insurance. She would have died if I didn't take the money. I came to Bud and pleaded with him to help me. The bills were killing us. Her medication was almost 1200 a month. He tells me I can make ten grand a month, off the books. All I have to do is follow a car across I-40 to Little Rock, then some other cops took over. If I hadn't have done it, my wife would be dead right now."

I was pissed.....and hurt. I considered Matt to be a brother. Percy was shocked too. None of us knew what to say. As angry as I was, I understood. The pay here in Reynolds was a joke. Still, that's no excuse for what he did. Once you cross that line, there's no going back....ever."

"I ought to fire you right now.....the only reason I won't is that I don't think this has anything to do with what's happening. The last thing in the world a drug lord would want is this kind of attention on his operation."

"Are you going to tell the FBI?"

"Not right now. What is said between us, stays between us. Understand that when this is all over, you're done. I can stand a lot, but I can't stand a dirty cop. I hate them almost as much as I hate murderers and rapists."

"Right," he said

"I'm going to need you. Right now, we've got bigger fish to fry. You guys need to watch your every step. Don't take the same routes home and wait before getting out of your car. The last thing in the world I want to do is to have to tell your wives you're dead. Please don't make me have to do that. I'm not sure I could." I say.

There was a very uncomfortable silence among us. We were no longer the three amigos. We were two honest cops and one dirty cop. I've known Matt for years. I'd like to think I can read people. Clearly, I'm not very good at it. Matt did say that when Bud retired, the drug smuggling operation stopped. He says he hasn't done one in almost two years.

I want to get mad at him, but if I were in his shoes, I don't know what I would have done. Everyone makes choices, I guess he did what was best for his family. Still, I was going to have to keep him on a short leash, and right now, that was the last thing I wanted to do.

That would also explain why Bud and his wife retired overseas. I never could figure that one out.....until now.

I hate being woken up. You would think that after being a cop for over twenty years, I'd be used to it, but you'd be wrong. You never get used to it. I reach over and grab my cell. It's Matt.

"Hello?"

"John.....Jesus.....they just shot Ben Collins." said Matt hysterically.

"What?" Where?" I said now fully awake.

"At his house. He took the garbage out and somebody shot him. They just fucking shot him right on his lawn!"

"I'll be right there."

"My wife didn't say anything. She heard everything. Ben was like a father to her. He was our Mayor. He was the heart and soul of this little town and now he was dead. Murdered. Gone and never coming back.

I was only half-dressed when I arrived. There were dozens of units already on the scene. My wife showed up a few minutes later to try and console his wife. She went out looking for him and found him with a giant hole in his chest on the front lawn. The guy never bothered anyone in his life. I wasn't scared now, I was pissed. I mean like super pissed. I never thought of myself as a killer, but if I knew who had done this to him, I wouldn't bat an eyelash about ending their life. At least it was quick. EMTs said he was probably dead before he hit the grass.

"They shot him right through the heart." said one of our volunteer firefighters.

Boyle was half-dressed and talking on his phone. A quick survey showed the killer simply waited for him in the bushes across the street. No one in the neighborhood heard anything.

"We've set up a perimeter around town. No one got in or out after we took the call. If the killer is still here, he's on foot. We've got every dirt road covered as well. He won't get away. We have drones in the air scanning the woods around town. John....his wife just had a heart attack. They've rushed her to Jonesboro, but it doesn't look like she's going to make it. I'm sorry." he said and put his hand on my shoulder.

The hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life was keep my shit together. My town needed me right now, I couldn't afford to let them down. I hugged my wife and told her I had to go. She nodded. She was still in shock, as was I. I met Matt and Percy a few minutes later and we decided to head back to the station.

The State Police were sending an entire troop of officers to assist and the Poinsett County Sheriff's Office had activated all of their reserve deputies as well.

It was an election year and the good Governor had decided to assist. He had activated an entire company of military police and they were on their way as well. Our little hamlet had now turned into a war zone.

The three of us were met by dozens of citizens at the station wanting to assist. Many of them were armed. They were clearly not in a *let's talk this shit out* type of mood.

"Damn, they got better guns than we have," said Percy.

I knew I had to do something. I just didn't know what. I had a lynch mob out there and all they needed was a victim. The last thing in the world I wanted was for an innocent person to get hurt in all this. We had enough dead bodies as it is.

"Guys.....let's calm down here for a second. I know you're all pissed, so am I, but we got to be smart about this." I say to the angry crowd.

"John, they just shot Ben. I've known him since we were kids. He was like family to me." said Carl Forsberg, one of our local hotheads.

"Carl, he was like family to me too. I know this sucks, but you guys have to let us do our jobs. The best thing you can all do now is go home and protect your family. We've got some major cavalry coming into town. We'll get this son of a bitch, I can promise you that."

"If we find him first, there ain't going to be any trial. I can promise *you* that," he said and stormed off.

The crowd disappeared after a few minutes. A State Police captain and a major arrived about two hours later, as did the sheriff of Poinsett County. We turned the station into our headquarters.

"John, we had deputies all over these streets within a minute of taking the call. We stopped every car and truck. All we found were some girls sitting on a fence and a few locals walking their dogs. I just don't understand how this guy could get away." said the sheriff.

We looked at a map of Ben's neighborhood. He literally lived right in the middle of town. Indeed, it would have been very difficult for anyone to escape, especially by car.

"What if he's still hiding?" I ask.

"We're going house to house now for two blocks. We know they took the shot across the street. If they escaped on foot, where's the rifle? It can't be very far. If we could just find the rifle, we might get some answers."

I looked at my watch. It wasn't even three in the morning and I was wide awake. The reality of what had just happened was finally beginning to sink in. The entire town was depending on me to catch this guy and I didn't even know where to start. I had to start someplace and at this point, I knew it wasn't going to be the FBI that caught him, it was going to be us. The killer had to be one of us. Someone with a grudge. Someone who had clearly gone off the rails. Someone who also had extensive military training.

Somebody who had just recently separated themselves from the rest of the human race. Nobody that calls themselves a human being is capable of something like this.

An hour later, Agent Boyle and his cadre of shirt tuckers came into the station. We were to have a closed-door meeting with VIPs only. That meant no Percy or Matt. Boyle looked like he had just masturbated a few minutes before coming in here. He was probably one of those people that needed like ten hours of sleep a night or they were worthless the next day.

"Gentlemen, I can't go into specifics, but I can tell you the agency has received credible information that what is happening here in Reynolds may only be the tip of the iceberg."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"Imagine something like this happening in small towns all across America. Imagine what happened tonight on a nationwide scale."

"Sounds like the south side of Chicago on a Saturday night." said one of the Sheriff's men.

"Only, it won't just be Chicago. Chicago is prepared for emergencies, sort of. Small towns like this one aren't. We've seen the kind of damage one skilled marksman can do. Imagine a hundred of them, or a thousand."

"You think this is a terrorist attack?"

"John, last month the Border Patrol intercepted four very white-looking persons in a group of Hondurans sneaking across the border. It just didn't seem right. Turns out we know that at least two of them are *SPETZNAS*, Russian special forces. There could be hundreds, or even thousands of sleeper agents already inside our borders, just waiting for orders to strike. We have to accept the fact that there may be foreign operatives doing the shooting. At this point, all we can do is sit back and wait. Hopefully, they've moved on by now. They must realize it will be impossible for them to escape with all the law enforcement we have in town. If he does strike again, it will be his last time. He won't escape next time. We have every street and intersection covered. Once we know he has shot anyone, we move. We'll close in on him. We'll get this bastard, it's just a matter of time."

"Agent Boyle, isn't there a flaw in your plan?" I ask.

"What's that?"

"More cops means more targets," I say.

He pretended not to listen and continued on for several more minutes. It seemed pretty obvious, at least to me, that we had three, possibly four people running this operation. The FBI was trying to tell everyone else what to do and it was getting nowhere. The Sheriff had only asked for them to review data and point them to a possible suspect, not take over the investigation. Arkansas law was quite clear. Sheriff Gilman was in charge of the investigation. The State Police were conducting their own investigation. We now had a major from the National Guard who was in charge of the military police. Every person in the room wanted credit for catching this guy. None of them realized the killer was right in front of us, only we were too blind to see it. After the meeting, Sheriff Gilman took me aside. He waited until everyone else was out of earshot.

"John. We have a suspect," he said solemnly

"Great! Who is it?"

"Chad Donahue."

"That name sounds familiar."

"He was one of my deputies up until last month. He lied during an investigation about excessive force. I didn't want to fire him, but I had no choice. It wasn't pretty. He pretty much threatened everyone in the room. There's one more thing."

"What?"

"Trooper Watkins was the one who turned him in."

"Jesus. How long before Boyle finds out?"

"We're sending our SWAT Team to serve the warrant right now, but unless he starts talking, we don't have much to hold him on. He's just a suspect at this point. We have a court order to test his guns and see if the bullet we recovered from Watkins was fired from any of his guns, but it's a long shot. If he is the shooter, I doubt he'd leave the murder weapon just sitting around for us to find it."

"Keep me in the loop, okay?" I said as I let him go. I really needed a nap. Just two hours would do wonders for me. I was having a hard time concentrating. All I wanted to do was lie down. I found Boyle and one of his men at the coffee station. He looked up at me when he saw me coming in.

"Gilman is wasting his time with his suspect. He has an alibi for one of the shootings. We had two agents talk to him last night. John, the good Sheriff means well, but he just doesn't have enough grey matter between his ears to crack this case. This is your town, it's your investigation, but you'd be a fool to turn us away."

"Of course. I'm not trying to get into a dick-measuring contest here, I just want this guy stopped." I say as I pour my coffee.

"There will be about seventy National Guardsmen here by tonight. They'll be establishing checkpoints and doing roving patrols around town. I doubt very much the shooter will try anything for the moment. Even a complete lunatic like this guy has to realize he'd be caught. What scares me is knowing he might just walk away. We'll never know who did it. About two hours ago, a van was stopped near the border between the Carolinas. The driver had a fake passport from Poland. When they searched the vehicle, they found three fully functional anti-tank rockets and thousands of rounds of ammo. We have no idea where he was going, or what he intended to do with them. I'm afraid Reynolds isn't going to be the only small town in America going through something like this. This is just the beginning. We may be pulled out of here at any time if I'm right. There won't be any time for goodbyes." said Boyle as he grabbed himself a donut.

Matt and Percy and I spent the rest of the day in shock. There was simply no way we could concentrate with what had transpired over the last 72 hours. I'm glad I had the three of them, I don't think I would have made it through all this without them. Sometimes, we wouldn't say anything for an hour. Sometimes we'd talk for an hour. Dealing with overpowering grief doesn't follow a playbook.

Here I am, the Chief of Police in this town and there's not a damn thing I can do. I just have to sit by helplessly and watch my town fall apart. Everyone was wondering who would be next. We thought the sniper was targeting cops. We were wrong, he was targeting anybody he wanted to target. One minute you could be ordering drive-through and the next minute, you could be dead. It was a lot to think about.

I tried to console my wife who broke down when Ben's wife of 52 years died on the way to the hospital in Jonesboro. Our little town was hurting and there wasn't a damn thing I could do. The killer was calling the shots now. All I could do was sit back and wait for him to kill again and hope he makes a mistake. I really needed to watch college football or something. Anything to take my mind off this insanity. It's not like I was even involved in the investigation at this point. I was just a coffee getter. Nothing more. I shouldn't really be in this job. I was in way over my head. I just couldn't help but feel that I let down the whole town. I let them down and there was no way I could fix it. I've never felt so ashamed in my life. I never really wanted to be a cop in the first place, let alone the Chief of Police. I had to catch this guy. I had to be the one to put the cuffs on him. It was the only way I could ever gain respect from the town. It had to be me that stopped him. There was no other way.

I got the call that night at around midnight. It was Matt. We were all taking turns doing 12-hour watches at the station. I was supposed to go in at six AM. I was going in early.

"John.....he just shot a soldier."

"What? Where? How?"

"Right at the railroad tracks, near the old depot. I guess he got out to take a call and take a piss. The two in the Humvee never even heard the shot. It blew his head off. They chased him into the swamp behind the railroad tracks, but he was gone by the time help came."

"Do you want me to come in?"

"Naw. That Major is calling the shots now. Boyle got pulled a few hours ago to go to Tennessee. They think there might be another shooter there outside of Memphis."

"I hoped Boyle was wrong. I really did."

"They left behind one agent for now. Not much we can do at this point anyway. I'll see you at six." he said.

I was in and out for the next few hours. I got up around five and changed into my uniform. I put on my body armor with my Kevlar helmet. It felt like I was in a war zone, just waiting for a bullet with my name on it. Waiting for my ticket home in a body bag.

I relieved Matt and Percy was supposed to be at six tonight, but I knew he couldn't stay away. He pulled in about ten minutes after me. Matt had already called him with the news.

"Shot a soldier. Man, this guy has some balls. He's just shooting at anything that moves."

"He's hitting it too, that's the problem."

"Matt said the soldiers never even heard a shot. This guy must be using a silencer. For a .308 caliber rifle. That shouldn't be too hard to track down." said Percy.

"That's what the FBI was doing before they pulled him out."

"John.....I'm afraid to step outside. Every time I leave my house.....I have to wonder if this is the last time I'll see it. We got to get this guy. I can't just sit around and wait for him to kill somebody else."

"Let's go for a ride. I want to see what the National Guard has been up to." I say.

We met a Lieutenant who told us that the entire town is being monitored by drones. Every square inch of the town is being watched. If the shooter shoots again, he's done. There were now checkpoints and barbed wire set up all over town. Every vehicle that came into or left Reynolds was searched. Everyone's ID was checked. The Guard had soldiers on every rooftop in town. Poinsett County was driving around in circles. Several arguments had broken out between the soldiers and the State Police as well as the Sheriff's Office. The soldiers had begun to suspect that the shooter may be a cop. They were now taking this thing very seriously. One wrong move and they were going to open fire. As of 9 AM, there were over two hundred National Guard and law enforcement officers deployed to Reynolds. This guy would have to want to be caught to try anything at this point.

We got the call shortly before noontime. A National Guard Patrol had spotted someone running across the street. When they approached him, he opened fire. They followed him for a few blocks and had him trapped inside the old poultry plant just on the edge of town. They had all sides of the building surrounded. Poinsett County and the State Police were on scene as well. A deputy was shot from inside the building. I could hear the gunfire from my vehicle as we sped toward the scene. We stopped a block away and grabbed our rifles. Matt joined us a few minutes later, as did my two screw-ups, Chad and Cody.

"We got him. There's no place left for him to go," said Sheriff Gilman.

"What do you want to do?" I ask.

"We're going in after the son of a bitch."

"Are you nuts? Wait till we get more officers here. He isn't going anywhere!" said Matt.

"No son.....you don't understand. *This is my kill*," he said with a grin on his face.

"Jesus, that whole building is a HAZMAT site. They were supposed to start work on it next month. It's a tinderbox."

The officer in charge of the soldiers was eating at a steakhouse and gave strict orders not to enter the building until he arrived. Everyone was hiding behind their vehicles. The killer was on the second floor of the building. It had been several minutes since he last fired.

The State Police assembled a SWAT Team and were preparing to make their entry. Poinsett County SO was going in the front. The five of us were just standing behind a Humvee trying not to get shot. I find someone wearing a silver bar on their helmet and stop him.

"That whole building could go up in minutes. Let's fall back and just establish a perimeter. We can wait this guy out if we have to." I say.

"Tell them that. I have my own boss."

The Sheriff and his team went in the front, while the State Police went in the rear. The teams were to converge on one another in the center of the building. As they advanced, two smoke grenades were dropped from up above. Both teams started firing at one another. The killer simply dropped more smoke and shot two of the officers. Everyone was shooting at everyone else. The fire began immediately and quickly spread. Sheriff Gilman had to drag his wounded son outside. We ran over and helped him load his son into an ambulance. The shooter had killed a state trooper and severely wounded two others.

We all shot into the building once the teams were out. The National Guard unloaded into the building with machine guns and .50 cal rifles. They lobbed several grenades into the building as well. I had to cover my ears, the noise was too intense. Round after round went into the building. Between the gunfire and explosions, the building was completely destroyed in under an hour. I figured there was no way anyone could survive that. We would find their body in a day or two.

"No way could anyone survive that.....nothing human anyway," said Matt.

Somehow, I knew we wouldn't be so lucky. The killer had been so meticulous before this. What had changed? Was this part of his grand finale? Trap all the cops in a building and pick them off, one by one? I didn't think we got him. Somehow, I just knew this evil creature had survived. My worst fears were confirmed ten days later when Lt. Vanessa Hart called me. The State Police had been put in charge of the investigation by order of the Governor. The firefighters had discovered a basement floor, with a large drain pipe that connected to a storm drain some thousand feet away. It may have been possible for someone to crawl inside the pipe and make it to the storm drain. It was unlikely but possible.

"We did find two bodies. Man and a woman. Both elderly. Both very thin. We're not sure if they were the shooters or not. We took a DNA sample and just got the results back. Nothing, nada. We don't know who they were."

"I heard from a few locals that there were some vagrants staying in the building. I wonder if the bodies you found were them?"

"I don't know either. I just don't see how anyone could have survived that. It was like a movie."

"It must have been them. It's been ten days since the last shooting. I doubt if he survived, he would have just decided to quit. How's Watkin's widow doing?"

"About as good as can be expected. His funeral is tomorrow."

"Hard to believe this guy could murder six people and still remain a mystery. I'm afraid Agent Boyle was right in more ways than one."

"How do you mean?"

"Let's say he's wrong about the whole Russian terrorist angle. It really doesn't matter, because the shooter has shown the world how easy it is to kill cops and get away with it. It took a couple hundred of us to catch one sniper!"

"I don't know John. I've been watching what's been going on in Memphis. I don't think Boyle was too far off. I doubt this guy is acting alone. There may have been more than one."

"Let's hope not. The middle and high school resumed classes today. Things are finally beginning to get back to normal around here if they will ever be normal again. I just wish I could have been the one to put the cuffs on him."

"I'm sure we all feel that way. He didn't just shoot anyone.....he shot our family," she said.

I hung up and started eating a cupcake. Everyone else had gone to Ben's funeral in Jonesboro. It was just me and the kid, Chad. I had almost fired him a year ago while he was on his probation for lying to me. I decided to give him a second chance. Matt and Percy wanted him gone, but I overruled.

"Boss.....I think I know who the shooter is. You won't believe it." he said.

"Hold on," I said as I answered my phone. It was the high school principal. He said that he was concerned about a student named Lisa Monroe. She hadn't been to school in over a month. She was a popular girl on the basketball team. It was unusual for her to simply drop everyone. He gave me her address. I told him we can do a health and welfare check on her. We needed something to take our minds off the drama. The station was eerily quiet. It was just us two and the dispatcher.

Lisa Monroe lived down a dirt road off Hwy 49, outside of Reynolds. I had no idea who she was. The family had only been in town for a few years. We pulled up to a mobile home out in the woods.

"Can you handle this one on your own? I've got to make a few calls." I tell him.

Chad gets out and goes up to the front door. He seemed very nervous and unsure about his next step. He's met by a young lady and they both go inside. I was talking to my brother when I heard several gunshots. I see Chad running out of the house firing his weapon through the door.

"WHAT THE FUCK!" I screamed

I could see Chad holding his arm. He had been shot in the chest, but the vest had saved him.

"Call for backup." I say as I run towards the house. I run to the back door with my weapon drawn.

This is it.....just like on TV.

I open the door and look around.

"REYNOLDS POLICE DEPARTMENT! SHOW YOUR HANDS OR GET SHOT!" I say nervously.

"Help me." says a voice from down the hallway.

I know I should wait for backup, but fuck it. I'm a cop.....*and this is what cops do.* I run down the hallway to the bathroom and before I'm even there, I can smell it. The worst smell in the world. It's unmistakable.

Decomposing flesh.

I turn and see a teenage girl in the corner of the bedroom. As I open the bathroom door, I know I'm going to find more bodies.

"Please don't hurt me again," she says.

"How many others are in the house?" I say.

"Just one. He's in there," she says.

"Are you Lisa Monroe?"

"Yes," she says nodding.

I turned my back on her for just a few seconds. That was all she needed. She unloaded on me. Thankfully, the vest stopped all but one, which hit my elbow, causing me to drop my weapon. I collapsed to the floor. I turned around as she stood over me. She was emotionless.....like a machine.

She was the perfect assassin.

"How did you find me? How did you know it was me?"

"What? What the hell are you talking about, why did you shoot me?"

"I thought you were going to arrest me."

"Arrest you? Arrest you for what."

"For shooting all those people."

In an instant, it hit me. I was in agony, but I suddenly came into very clear focus. I was standing right in front of our sniper.

"Lisa.....did you shoot all these people?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"Cause of my damn ACT scores. They made me do it."

"What in God's name do your ACT scores have to do with what happened in town?"

"They said I was just average. Just an average girl. I had to show the world that Lisa Monroe is not your average girl."

She said it so calmly, so normally, that she didn't fully realize what she had done. I was sitting across from one of the scariest human beings I had ever met.....*she was only a 17 year old girl.*"

"Cut the bullshit, there's no way you could have done all of this. there's no way you are responsible for all this."

"That day near the gas station, I was just going to shoot at people's tires. Maybe cause an accident or something. Then that cop decides to stand right in front of me. I've never even fired a gun before. The rifle is my daddy's. I blew his head right off. I felt incredible. It was so simple. I knew at that precise moment, what God had put me on this Earth to do and it wasn't to play basketball. So, how did you bust me? How did you know it was me?"

"We were just doing a health and welfare check on you. Your principal called. He was worried about you. Where's your father?" I said trying to ignore the horrible pain engulfing my body. My arm felt like it was on fire.

"He's in the bathroom. He won't be coming out. He's not my real father, just my stepfather. He was getting a little too touchy-feely with me, so I had to put an end to him. Man, did I ever screw this up, wow? Way to go, Lisa. You were home free and you blew it. No matter. Everyone will just think he shot you. Where's that other cop, I got to make sure he doesn't get away."

"I see Chad in the doorway. He raises his gun and shoots Lisa half a dozen times. She falls and dies right in front of me.

"I knew it was her as soon as I saw her. She was there that day dribbling her basketball in the street when I pulled up. She had her rifle disassembled in her backpack. That's how she got away. We were looking for a guy your age, not a 17-year-old girl."

"You're not as dumb as you look, Chad," I say rolling over.

"I knew it was her cause there aren't any basketball courts in town anymore. She was at Ben's house that night too. Nobody ever thought to look in her backpack." he said standing over her dead body.

"Chad?"

"Yes."

"You have officially redeemed yourself. I'm glad I never fired you." I say as he helps me up.

"I'm glad you didn't fire me either."

"How bad are you hurt?"

"I'll live."

"I can't believe we were both shot by a 17-year-old girl. I can't believe it was her. What the hell is wrong with kids nowadays?"

"I don't think you can blame all kids for her actions. This girl was the spawn of the devil," said Chad

"No one is going to believe it was her. They're going to think he did it.....only he didn't. It was her the whole time." I say.

I can hear the sirens in the distance closing in. For the first time in a while, I'm thinking this nightmare might finally be over. I'm going to go home and watch some college football or bake a cake. I might even clean my garage. I'm going to take it one day at a time. One hour at a time.....*one minute at a time after living through this.*

I'll never look at people the same after this. I could have a monster standing right in front of me and never even know it.