

TWINKIE

John Boston

Horace Spellman ran the wing with an iron fist. Three hundred and ten pounds of good old boy redneck coming at you. He made the blacks in the pod pay him protection money. He was the mother-effer-in charge, but he never wanted to be. He just wanted to do his time, get out and go shopping with his mother. Maybe take her to church, cut the grass, be the good son he never was. She wasn't much of a mother either, but he was hoping to change all of that. It all changed the day one of the other inmates challenged him on his second day in the pod. He was a fresh fish, just out of the fish tank in receiving. He was so nervous, he thought he was going to puke.

It wasn't always like this, at least not in the beginning.

He towered over the other inmates and outweighed most of them by over a hundred pounds. As big as he was, he was always afraid. He had never even been in a real fight before and here he was, fighting for his life. He ignored them at first, but they just kept coming. He started doing push-ups in county with the other inmates. By the time he got to prison, he could do over two hundred without stopping. His fat had turned into muscle. His mind had also gotten stronger. No longer was he the weakest link in the group. He had always known he was just as smart as anyone else, he finally started to believe it. One of the *Whiteboys* tried to help him, but they were badly outnumbered in the pod. The Whiteboys were a prison gang. Horace didn't even know what a prison gang was until he arrived here.

"Homey, if you don't stand up for yourself, you're done in here. A guy your size, people expect him to be able to handle himself." One of the Whiteboys said.

Horace thought back to his miserable childhood. He was a constant victim of bullies and meanies. He remembered their names, everyone who was ever mean to him. Some days he would just sit in his cell and dream of catching up with them and what he would do to them.

His father had split shortly after he was born and his mother was an alcoholic. In many ways, he was a battered and abused puppy, too afraid to stand up for himself, even though he could easily have crushed anyone he wanted. He didn't want to get more time added to his sentence, but he knew it had to be done. The other *Whiteboys* in the pod were going to help him, but he would have to take the fall for what happened after that.

Just as his new bully sat down to eat his food, Horace grabbed his tray and swung it as hard as he could right into the man's nose, breaking it instantly. He grabbed him off the bench, picked him up, and body-slammed him onto the concrete, knocking him out. He grabbed another bully and drove him headfirst into the table. Some of the blacks in the pod were about to jump him, but the Whiteboys made it abundantly clear, he was one of them now.

You mess with Horace, the mess with the whole damn pack.

Horace continued to punch him even though he was unconscious. He was so angry, he could have killed the man.

"Shit Horace, don't kill him. We'll all be screwed." said one of the Whiteboys.

The guards knew they had to let Horace take care of business. They came rushing in at the last second when they thought he might really kill him. Everyone in the pod laid down on the floor and put their hands out in front of them. They handcuffed Horace and took him to the infirmary.

He spent a month in solitary. Not that it mattered. He was a new man. Everyone in the prison had heard what he had done. Most just figured he did it all the time. No one had any idea that this was the first time he had ever been in a real fight. By the time he came out solitary, Horace Spellman was no longer a frightened little puppy, *he was more like a hungry lion, looking for his next meal.* From that day forward, he was the "Pod God" the guy who kept the peace and the guy who dished out necessary beatings. One day an inmate gave him a Twinkie. He had never even tried one before. They quickly became his favorite, earning the name Twinkie, by the other inmates.

Horace got tattoos. He even had some contraband ink smuggled in for his masterpiece. He had never even thought about getting a tattoo before coming to prison.

They just seemed so damn permanent.

Horace had the words: *REDNECK AF* tattooed on his back. Being the man in charge meant you not only had to act the part, but you also had to look it as well.

He went from being an anime addict at home to writing letters and taking classes in prison. He got his GED and even earned college credits. He did so well in class, he was allowed to take a college mathematics course, where he earned a 'B'. As tough as he was and as strong as he was, he knew he faced his most difficult challenge yet when he signed up for a course in calculus. In high school, he was always in remedial math and remedial everything else, now here he was, about ready to complete the class. When the instructor posted his grades, Horace couldn't believe it. The guy who everyone had called an idiot, the guy who everyone made fun of, the guy who had never even kissed a girl, had just finished a calculus course with a 'B' average. He scored 90 percent on the final exam. To Horace, this was the equivalent of being able to walk on the moon. He had done something that ten years ago, he would never have dreamed possible. The painfully shy, awkward teenager had been transformed into a man. A man so scary, the other inmates knew to avoid him. Even the prison guards were afraid of him.

Horace wasn't always scary. He liked to draw and do math puzzles. He was allowed to have a prison pen pal. Her name was Anzu. She was a student at UNLV from Japan. Her English was excellent. She and Horace quickly became friends. She wanted to know all about the prison and he just wanted to know all about her and her culture. He was fascinated by all things Japanese, especially Anzu. She taught him the art of Origami, which means *folding paper* in Japanese. He quickly became fascinated by the incredible attention to detail it required. Technical Origami involved higher-level mathematics. Horace would spend days trying to figure out how to create a

certain pattern. When he finally completed it, he had it sent to her address at UNLV. Their relationship quickly blossomed. They were by all accounts an odd couple. A very odd couple. Anzu and Horace made plans to meet up once he was released. He was as nervous as he was excited. When she sent him a picture of her, he kept it with him at all times. She was the light at the end of this very dark tunnel.

Horace was paroled a year early. He had spent nearly four years in prison. He started using drugs to escape his situation at home. Drugs had landed him in prison. He would not be returning to his old lifestyle anytime soon. He was not the same person he was when he came into this place four years ago, not even close. He was Horace Spellman 2.0, ready to take on the world. When the gate closed behind him and he was finally free, he felt as if he had been reborn. His cousin picked him up at the front gate. He hadn't seen him in nearly five years. He was thoughtful enough to at least bring him a cold beer.

"Here you go. I was locked up too, I know how it is," he said and threw him the beer.

"So, how does it feel to be a free man?" asked his cousin.

"Are we ever really free? At least I don't have to shower with ten dudes anymore," said Horace.

The two of them went to a casino to gamble for a while. They had dinner and ate real food. Horace had been dreaming about this moment for four years. Four long, miserable years that followed his miserable childhood. Horace had learned some very valuable life lessons while locked up.

No one respects the smart guy in the room. People don't respect intelligence or good manners or eloquence, they respect force, that's about it. The toughest guy in the room is the one who is going to be in charge. After dinner, his cousin needed some smokes. Horace offered to buy. He figured it was the least he could do. His cousin had been the only one in the family who had stayed in touch with him over the years. In some ways, he felt more like a brother, than like a cousin. He stayed in the car, while Horace went in to grab the smokes.

There were several people in line ahead of him. He just stood there and waited, like everyone else. It was when the guy in front of him turned to say something to his wife or girlfriend next to him that Horace instantly recognized him.

It was Matt Green. The kid who had tortured him throughout high school. In an instant, Horace thought back to that fight he had the second day he was in the pod.

Had to be a mistake, couldn't possibly be the same person. No way.

"Excuse me, are you Matt Green," he asked

The man turned around. He didn't recognize Horace at first. Horace had lost nearly all of his fat, replacing it with muscle.

"Yeah, I am. Who's asking?"

"You're the same Matt Green that went to Spring Mountain High?" asked Horace.

"Yeah....Do I know you or something....."

In an instant, Matt's face went as white as a ghost when he suddenly realized who it was he was talking to. Horace was a whole head taller and a hundred and fifty pounds heavier.

"Oh.....hey man, what's up. I thought it was you. Good to see you again. This is my wife, Julia." he said nervously.

Something inside Horace just switched. He thought back to his miserable teenage years. The anger, the loneliness, the despair.....and this little asshole was responsible for a good chunk of it. Matt could see what was coming and tried to get away from him, but it was too late.

If he thought having his wife with him was going to save him, he was dead wrong. Horace punched him so hard, he heard Matt's jaw crack. He spun him around and slammed him into the freezers so hard he shattered them. Horace just picked him up again and kept punching him. His hands and fists were so big and strong, it was like Matt was getting punched by a sledgehammer. Matt's wife was screaming at him to stop.

"So, you're his wife huh?" he said, throwing her over the aisle onto the floor.

One of the clerks came running out just as Horace had picked up Matt off the ground. He lifted him up by his neck and was choking him when he heard the shotgun being pumped.

"That's enough son, you're going to kill him." said the clerk.

Horace dropped him. Matt collapsed on the ground. He bent down and whispered in his ear.

"I'm coming for all of you. Everyone in your little gang. Montez, Keith Jackson, Kyle Stone. I'm going to hunt them down and kill them one by one. Go ahead and call the cops.....that would really piss me off. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry."

Horace walked by the clerk. His cousin was standing outside the door. He did not look pleased.

"Jesus Horace, you haven't even been out for two hours. You couldn't even make it a full day before you decided to start some more trouble. You know they're going to send you back for this."

"Maybe," he said.

"No, not maybe, more like definitely. Your mom is going to be pissed."

"Yeah, she cared so much, she hasn't come to see me in over a year," he said getting into the car.

His cousin sped away. They pulled into his cousin's apartment. Horace knew what was coming next.

"Look, Horace, I just don't think having you stay with us is such a good idea. I mean, I'm sure they got my license plate. Won't take long to find me. The last thing in the world I want is the cops sniffing around here. I kind of have a lousy record myself. I'm an ex-felon too."

"Whatever. Guess I'll see you around."

"Dammit, Horace! I'm trying to help you here, but then you go and do something stupid like that? What in the hell could he have said to you that made you go off on him like that. You fucked that boy up real bad. You could have killed him. So, what did he say?"

"He didn't say anything."

"So what the hell did you whoop him for?"

"I guess if you were me, you would have done the same thing. Let's just say that he and I are old friends."

"Shit, if that's the way you treat your friends, I'd hate to see how you treat your enemies. I mean, you're better than this Horace. I know you are. You got to be smarter than this. You ain't in prison anymore. Completely different set of rules out here. I just don't know what we're going to do now."

"Look, I don't want to cause you and your wife any problems. I'll go."

"Where are you going to go?"

"I got a friend. She might let me stay with her."

"And if she doesn't let you stay with her?"

"Well then, I guess I'll join the growing ranks of the homeless population," said Horace.

"No, you won't. No kin of mine is going to go homeless. I was homeless for a while after I got out. I was finally free but I had no money and no place to go. If I hadn't gotten that job at the mall, I don't know what I would have done. You know the cops will be out there looking for you. A guy like you kinda sticks out."

"I can take care of myself."

"Horace.....you're as strong as an ox and you got a bad temper. Not a good combination. If you fight someone again, you could kill them. Then you're going to go down for murder. You'll never get out of prison. Is that what you want for yourself?"

"No."

"That guy you beat up, who was he?"

"Just some guy that used to bully me."

"He used to bully you?"

"Yeah. Him and his little gang. Used to do all kinds of terrible things to me. They once poured chocolate milk all over my head in the cafeteria in front of the entire school. Crazy thing was, I could have destroyed every one of them, but I was too scared to do anything about it. They ruined my teenage years. All I ever wanted was to be left alone. That was all. Just to be left alone and to let me figure things out on my own. They wouldn't even afford me that tiny little luxury." said Horace.

"Horace.....that was years ago. Come on man, you got to stop blaming other people for how your life is right now."

"Easy for you to say. You were always the cool kid growing up. I wanted to be just like you. You never got bullied. You never had girls laugh in your face when you tried to talk to them. You never had to run away from school in tears.....you just wouldn't understand."

"Well, maybe not. I just don't think anyone like that is worth throwing your life away for. You got to move forward and start thinking about your future. You can't go back and change the past, what's done is done."

"I just feel like I have unfinished business with them. In some ways, they made me into who I am today. If they hadn't tortured me every day, maybe I wouldn't have started smoking meth. Maybe I would have stopped. Maybe I wouldn't have started robbing stores to pay for the drugs. Maybe I wouldn't have gone to prison. I was just so angry. Angry at life, angry at my mother.....*angry at God*. Maybe I figure by paying them a little visit and making them feel like I felt, that I could move forward. I just don't think they should be able to walk away from what they did. They destroyed my life. I want them to know that."

"Did you stop to think that maybe by becoming just like them, that they've won?"

"Maybe. Maybe they have. Maybe if I had been stronger I could have dealt with it and just gotten over it. Maybe if I were a different person but, I'm not. I'm me. This is how I deal with things."

"So, what are you going to do? Track them down and beat them up, one by one?"

"Something like that."

"Horace.....you'll be locked up for twenty years. You'll be an old man by the time you get out. You'll spend half your life in prison. Is that really the future you want?"

"I already am in prison, cousin. I already am."

"Why can't you just let it go?"

"Because I can't. I wish I could, but I just can't. If you were me, you'd understand."

"If I were you, I'd be doing my best not to go back to prison. The hell are you going to tell your parole officer?"

"I have no idea."

"That's not much of a plan."

"Well, I'm not much of a planner," said Horace.

"Cops will probably find us in a day or two. If you're here, you're going back to prison. There's an old trailer at the very end of the scrapyard where I work. Boss told me I could stay there until I got back on my feet. Everything works, including the heat and ac. That's your only option at this point unless you want to sleep in the park."

"The trailer will be fine."

"My boss did time as well. He knows how it is. He's a good guy, I'll let him know you'll be staying there for a while.....oh, one more thing."

"What?"

"You might want to cover up them white power tattoos. It draws the wrong kind of attention to yourself."

"I'll take it under advisement. Thanks man.....I really mean it. You always were my favorite cousin." said Horace.

"I'm your only cousin, Horace."

"You're still my favorite," he said.

He dropped off Horace at the trailer, which was out in the middle of nowhere. Once the gates were locked for the night, he was stuck in there. The scrapyard had a very extensive security fence, along with perimeter alarms. Not that anything in here was worth taking, the fence cost more than the rest of the operation.

The trailer was older, but everything seemed to work just fine. He was even able to take a shower. The bed was way too small for a man his size but would have to do. He knew this could very well be his last night of freedom. He had to make every second count. He knew his cousin would never rat him out to the cops, but that didn't mean he was safe. One wrong move and he was right back in prison. He took out a picture of Anzu. He often wondered what she was doing when the photo was taken. She looked so happy and carefree. If there was anyone he wanted to see, it was her. His last letter to her was almost six pages long. Hers was about the same. She would tell him all about Japanese art and culture. How the Japanese people valued organization and intelligence. How Japan is very crowded, but most people are all alone, some going weeks without talking to another person. She says that Americans seem much happier. In America you have freedom. In Japan, we have to do whatever our parents tell us to do. Anzu was expected to

work at the company where her father and grandfather worked. In Japan, you literally are your job. The corporate culture controls everything.

During the second world war, we followed our emperor to our own destruction. The emperor has been replaced by corporations, but the result will still be the same. When will we ever learn? She wrote.

Anzu sent Horace pictures of Japan. Everything seemed so neat and orderly. Everyone knew their place and never stepped out of line. He couldn't wait to try real Ramen Noodles or go to a Saki Bar.

He fell asleep with a picture of her on his chest. She was his angel. The one who was going to save him from himself.

He woke up the next morning and realized this was the first time in over four years he had not woken up in a prison cell. No headcount, no shitty prison food. No snoring cellmate.

He was free, white and 21.....well, maybe not 21.

He made a cup of coffee. Real coffee, not that instant crap they served in prison. He reached into his wallet and took out his money. He had a total of 241 dollars and thirty-six cents to his name. Not exactly a nest egg he could fall back on.

Horace was a big boy and big boys required big meals. In prison, he had no trouble getting all the food he wanted. He would usually eat two dinners and no one would say anything about it. Problem is, food was expensive and he had very little money. He knew his cousin and his wife were strapped financially as well. He didn't want to bury them any deeper in debt. He knew there were two soup kitchens in the city he could use, but he still had to get there and get back home. He checked the trailer for food. He found some oatmeal and a can of beans. Neither had expired, so he decided to help himself. He remembered why he hated oatmeal....it was made out of oats.

He knew he had to check in with his parole officer. He figured they would just be waiting to show up and arrest him. Horace loved not being in prison, but he also knew you don't do the crime if you can't do the time. He figured he'd be in deep shit for beating up Matt and his wife, but it had to be done. Now, it was time to pay the consequences for it. He didn't mind going back to prison. If he could have just one night with Anzu, it would all be worth it. He felt like he had let her down the most. He had the PO's address. He knew it was time to pay the piper. He walked for two miles until he got to the main road, then walked another mile until he got to the casino. He caught a shuttle going into the city center. He got off and took a cab to the parole office. He called his cousin and told him he appreciated everything he had done for him. His cousin told him the cops had been there looking for him. Actually, they weren't sure who they were looking for. He didn't give the cops his real name, so they still weren't sure who they were looking for. Horace thought that was odd. Surely Matt knew exactly who he was. Why didn't he give the cops his name? Maybe he wasn't even conscious by the time they showed up. Horace didn't want to hurt him too bad.....just enough so it hurt badly the next day.

His PO was Officer Brian Gantly from West Virginia. Had no idea how he ended up in Las Vegas. He was young but wasn't a cocky dickhead like many of these guys are. He even offered

Horace a coffee and cigarette, but he didn't smoke. Horace didn't understand this. Why wasn't Brian putting him in handcuffs? Guess the Vegas police weren't in any big hurry to arrest him. He figured with the ass whooping he gave Matt last night he should be public enemy number one.

"Horace, I know it's not easy for someone like yourself to succeed on the outside. Here's my cell number. If you ever need anything, don't hesitate to call. I answer the phone 24 hours a day." said Gantly.

Just like a lightning bolt, it hit Horace. It had to be, there was no other logical answer.

Matt never told the cops his name. If he did, Horace would be on his way to the county jail right now.....wonder why not?

"Well, thank you, Officer. I will do my best to stay on the straight and narrow. I am in no big hurry to go back to prison." said Horace.

"You've got six months and you're off parole and you never have to see me again. I hope you make it. If you need food or toiletries, they're available at the front desk."

"Um ok.....thanks. Guess I'll just be on my way then," he said and headed for the door.

"Horace.....don't mistake kindness for weakness. Fuck up just once and I throw your ass right back in prison," said Brian.

"Right. Understood."

Horace knew that challenging law enforcement usually ended very badly for the challenger. Of course, Matt wasn't a cop.....he wasn't anything. This time the rules were different. His cousin had given him a disposable cell phone with minutes already loaded onto it so at least they could stay in touch.

"I don't understand it. He never said a word about what happened last night," said Horace, giving him the good news over the phone.

"Yeah, that is kind of weird. Maybe he didn't recognize you. You don't look the same as you did in high school, that's for sure."

"No, no he definitely recognized me. I'm sure of it."

"So, why didn't he give the cops your name?"

"I know exactly why.....so he could find me and get his revenge. Maybe it won't be just him, maybe it will be the whole gang. Wouldn't that be something? Save me the trouble of tracking them all down."

"Horace, Jesus.....you're lucky you aren't in jail right now. Count your blessings and just let this one go. These guys aren't worth losing your freedom over."

"Right. Tell the wifey I said hi," he said and hung up.

Horace knew where to find one of the others in Matt's little gang. Kyle Stone was a professional mixed martial artist who trained out of a gym in Las Vegas. Horace thought he ought to at least stop by and wish him the best on his upcoming next fight. There was already talk of him becoming the next light heavyweight champion.

The gym was located next to a casino. Horace took the bus over and walked the rest of the distance. He wiped the sweat off his brow as he walked inside the gym. He went right up to the receptionist and smiled.

"Hi, I was told Kyle Stone is here? I have something for him," said Horace, holding up a large briefcase.

"I can give it to him." the girl said.

"I'm sorry, he's got to sign for it."

"Okay, let me page him. He should be here in a few minutes. He was sparring with someone." she said.

"No problem, I'll wait here," said Horace.

As soon as Kyle came down the stairs and locked eyeballs with Horace, it was on. Kyle waved him over as they headed up the stairs. Horace had to be careful. He was big, but he was also on Kyle's turf and very outnumbered. Once they were at the top of the stairs, he turned. He was surrounded by five other guys. Horace had some bricks in the bag he was holding, just in case things went south, he had a small wrecking ball at his disposal.

"I got a call from Matt last night. He sounded really messed up. Said I should be expecting you and that you're not the same little ball of shit you were in school. He wasn't kidding. You're the size of a fucking house. Doesn't matter. I'll cut you down to size real quick. let's see if you got the balls, Horace." he said and pointed to a make-shift octagon ring.

"You ever done any MMA before?" asked Kyle

"Nope."

"Just cause you been to prison, don't mean shit to me. let's see how you do in a real fight, one on one."

"Do you really think I would have come down here if I thought I was going to lose?" asked Horace.

They both stripped down. Horace was given a pair of MMA gloves. One of Kyle's lackey's stopped him before he stepped into the ring.

"Dude....Kyle Stone is 16 and zero. He's never lost. He's fighting for the championship next month. He's going to kill you." he said.

"No, he's not. Tell you what: after I beat his ass, I'll take on the rest of you. Look at you little bitches. Take some steroids, watch some videos and you think you are a badass. You guys wouldn't last two seconds in a real prison fight."

A small crowd had gathered to watch the fight. When the door closed, Kyle started circling. Horace wasted no time. As soon as Kyle went in for a takedown, Horace kicked him as hard as he could in the nuts. Kyle screamed out in pain. Horace grabbed him by his hair and lifted him off the ground, driving him face-first into the canvas. Horace's speed and power shocked the audience. He let Kyle get up on his own, but he was still in crippling pain from that groin kick. Horace punched him so hard in the stomach, Kyle got the wind knocked out of him as he collapsed against the cage. Horace then picked him up, lifted him over his head, and threw him across the ring, like he was a rag doll. Kyle was knocked unconscious. The crowd was stunned. Finally, his coach opened the door and ran into the ring.

"That's enough. The fight's over," he said crouching over Kyle.

"Come on.....I'll take on all you bitches.....who's next?"

A large wrestler got into the ring and immediately went after Horace. He swung, but missed. The wrestler shot in for a takedown, but Horace sprawled, stuffing him. He reached up over him and grabbed his ankle, twisting it with such force that it cracked in two. The man screamed in pain as Horace picked him up and body-slammed him. He picked the man up by his neck and drove him backward into the cage, continuing to beat him. Two others rushed into the ring to help their friend. Horace pulled out his knife.

"Come at me, bro. You'll be breathing through a fucking machine for the rest of your life," he said holding the knife.

"You made your point, okay. Just get the hell out of here." said one of the onlookers in the gym.

Kyle had to be helped out of the ring. He was put on a stretcher and given a neck brace. Horace walked over to him and pushed the two people out of the way. He looked right at Kyle.

"Karma's a bitch, isn't it? Good luck on your big fight," said Horace as he started laughing.

He knew several people in the gym had recorded the whole fight. Some of them followed him down the stairs. Not because they wanted to fight him, they were more in awe of him.

There was a new lion in the jungle.

"Hey....what's your name man?" asked a boy.

"My name is Twinkie....why?"

"We just want to know what to call you.....I guess this is your gym now. Kyle was top dog in here and now you are."

"Yeah, so?"

"Top dog in the gym calls the shots. They can even live here for free." said the receptionist.

"They're taking Kyle to the hospital. I've never seen him beaten up like that. I've never seen anyone beaten up like that. That was fucking savage man!" said one of the gym members.

"Wait.....so the shot caller in this gym gets to live here for free?"

"Well, yeah. That loft is yours now. I don't think anyone is going to challenge you after seeing what you did to Kyle and Apollo." said the receptionist.

"Really? Well, I could use a new apartment. I'll give Kyle 24 hours to get his shit out of there. I'll be back in two days. That apartment better be ready."

"Yes sir." said one of the gym members.

"Okay then. Guess I'll see you guys later," he said, grabbing his brick bag and walking out the door.

Well, Damn! That was a pleasant surprise. Anything would be an improvement over the trailer. He might even have real TV for a change.

Keith Jackson had done quite well for himself since leaving high school. He was a car salesman at a huge dealership in Ontario, California. Not just any salesman.....*top salesman*. Had been for over four years. He made over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars last year selling cars. He was good at it.....maybe even too good if there is such a thing. He got to take home the very latest cars, trucks, and suvs. One of the perks of the job. The cars pretty much sold themselves, all he had to do was smile and tell the customer what they wanted to hear. Financing options these days were so cheap and plentiful that pretty much anyone who could sign on the dotted line could drive away a new car. He got a call from his boss. A young professional had asked for a test drive. She specifically requested him. She said that she and her husband would be test driving the news truck and to please have it ready. They would swing by and pick her up while on the test drive. Keith didn't think too much of it. He gets crazy requests all the time. He didn't mind dealing with crazy people.....his pet peeve was cheap people.

Horace asked the nice receptionist at the gym to make the call for him. She was happy to oblige. Didn't ask any questions either. She was eager to please her new boss. He liked her. He was going to have to keep an eye on her.

It had been almost eleven years since he had seen Keith. He made certain he wore a cap and sunglasses. He had a long drive ahead of him. The receptionist gave him the keys to Kyle's car. Horace figured he wasn't going to be needing it for a while. Before he left, he made it abundantly clear to anyone who could listen, that he was the new king of the hill around here.....*and he ran a very tight ship*.

"I've done time. I've been in real prison fights. I'm not afraid of cops. You can call them and I might go away for a while, but I'll be back sooner or later.....and you'll have to deal with me." he said and walked out the door.

He could barely fit inside Kyle's car. It was made by skinny hipsters for skinny hipsters. The kind that wore slim-fit jeans and drank lattes. He also reached into the cash drawer at the gym and helped himself. He was going to need some funds to cover his trip expenses. No one said a word. No one had to. They weren't dealing with some pretty boy who thought he could fight. They were dealing with Horace Spellman.....*and Horace was as real as they come.*

He stayed overnight in the trailer. He was so massive, it rocked back and forth and side to side whenever he moved about. He turned on the radio and listened. He was allowed to have a radio in prison. He would listen mainly to AM radio. He found the FM airwaves to be populated by village idiots with a microphone. He eventually stopped listening when he realized that all they did was talk.....and talk and talk. They never actually did anything. It was like the tough guy who never fights. He was listening to a radio program on a local channel. Callers would phone in and tell the host their problems. The host seemed genuinely sympathetic, which is why he listened. He was floored when he heard the name of the next caller.

"Our next caller comes all the way from Osaka, Japan. She is here studying. Her name is Anzu. Hi Anzu, thank you for calling. So, tell us what's on your heart this evening." said the host.

"It's easy to be an angel when you are in heaven. It's much more difficult to be an angel in hell." said Anzu.

"Interesting.....what do you mean by that?"

"I mean in Japan, everything is so orderly and structured. Our culture prides intelligence and hard work, but not change. We are still stuck in the past. In Japan, everyone is the same. You meet the same person over and over again. Here in America, you never know who you are going to meet. Everyone is so different. I meet a man who is in prison. He is so smart. He should not be in prison. I feel he is out there right now, not sure of what to do or how to do it. I feel I will lose him forever. I just want him to know that he needs to be that angel in hell right now, as difficult as it may be. He needs to be better than everyone else around him.....because he is better than everyone else around him. If he is listening, please tell him.....I make Origami for him. I want to give it to him."

"Well....Anzu. I hope you can give it to him. He sounds like a special person." said the host.

"He is. He is my special person."

"Thank you for the call Anzu. We have to take a quick break, we'll be right back." said the host.

Horace sat up in his bed that was far too small for him. He wanted to be with Anzu so badly right now. He wanted to hold her and kiss her. She was his angel.....and he needed some angel love real bad right at the moment. He couldn't believe it was really her. In another parallel universe, maybe the two of them are together right now.....maybe in another parallel universe, he can finally be at peace with himself.

He arrived at the dealership half an hour late. He had gotten lost and driven on the wrong freeway. He pulled in and parked in visitor parking. The dealership was huge. It seemed to go on forever. Sure enough, Keith was waiting for him in the visitor's lounge. Horace was praying he didn't recognize him. He was hoping his disguise would work.

"Keith?" he said shaking his hand.

"Keith Jackson.....nice to meet you. Man, you are one big dude," he said.

"So I'm told. Hey, can we get going? If I'm late, my wife will get pissed. If she gets pissed, she won't sign on the dotted line if you catch my drift." said Horace.

"No problem. She's already waiting for you. I just need your driver's license." he said

He handed him his license. He had gotten it renewed a week before he went to prison. Keith gave it to a receptionist and off they went. They hopped in the truck. Keith talked for several minutes about the new truck and all of its features. Horace just kept looking for a quiet, out-of-the-way spot to pull over and beat his ass. He figured he'd slowly turn up the pressure and see if Keith cracked.

"Keith.....I know this is going to sound crazy, but I'm pretty sure we went to high school together," said Horace.

"Really? You went to Spring Mountain High?"

"Sure did. Class of 2010. Are you sure you don't remember me? My name is Horace Spellman."

Keith's razor-sharp smile quickly evaporated. He began to squirm in his seat uncomfortably.

"Oh, sure I remember you. Horace Spellman. Yeah. On the phone, your wife said your name was Timothy. I don't understand." he said nervously.

"I lied. I don't have a wife," said Horace.

"Oh.....so, do you want to buy the truck or not?"

"Nope. I love me some trucks, but fifty-six thousand dollars for a truck is just plain stupid."

"Maybe we should go back to the dealership now," said Keith.

"I mean, I guess I could be persuaded to buy it. I kind of want you to convince me. After all, it is a lot of money. Let's pull over and talk. I want to really look this thing over." said Horace.

He pulled into a large parking lot in front of a dog park that was deserted. He turned off the ignition and took the key with him. He went over to the passenger side and swung the door open. He pulled out Keith and threw him on the ground.

"So.....convince me, Keith. Why should I buy this overpriced piece of shit?" said Horace.

Keith got up to run, but Horace was on him quickly. He grabbed him and threw him up against the bed of the truck.

"Betcha didn't think somebody my size could move that fast. I'm thinking of trying out for the Raiders next year."

"What do you want?" asked Keith.

"I want you to sell me this truck.....and I want you to know what it feels like to get your ass whooped by the kid you used to terrorize. The fat kid who was too emotionally crippled to fight back."

"Jesus man, that was eleven years ago. I was a stupid kid. I'm sorry. I really, truly am for the things we did to you. It was terrible. I heard you went to prison. I actually tried to write to you and tell you how sorry I was for how I treated you. Sometimes I just wish I could hop in my magic Delorean and go back in time and stop Matt and the others for what they did to you."

"Wait.....you tried to write to me in prison?" asked Horace confused.

"Yes. I wrote you a letter. I guess I had to be on some kind of reprovod list for you to get mail."

Horace was caught off guard. He wasn't expecting this. Back in school, Keith was one of his worst tormentors. They used to shoot paintballs at him on the way home from school. *This revelation kind of changed things a bit.*

He grabbed Keith by his collar and lifted him off the ground.

"Imagine getting this nice, innocent little puppy that just wants to lick your face and be loved. You kick him and hit and that nice little puppy isn't so nice anymore. He's gone from being a puppy to being this vicious guard dog that will kill anything in its path.....and brother, I was that puppy. I just wanted you guys to like me. I just wanted to have a few friends. Guess it just wasn't meant to be.....now I'm fucking *Cujo*.....and you helped make me this way." said Horace angrily.

Keith actually started to sob. Horace didn't know what to make of it. He had only seen a grown man cry one in prison when he found out his mother had died.

"I knew this day would come. I rehearsed it in my head. I worked out everything I would say.....and all I can say is that I am deeply sorry. I just wanted to fit in too. I just wanted Matt to like me. If you want to kill me, go ahead. If that's how I make all this right, then go ahead. I deserve it."

"Alright, Keith. I mean, I fully intended to come down and here and fuck you up real good. But, in light of these revelations, I am willing to be the better man here.....almost. You're not going to get off without some bruises." said Horace, backing up.

"What do you mean?"

"Which one is your dick hand?"

"My what?"

"Which one to whack off with?"

"My right."

"Okay then. Put your left hand in the door."

"Oh, Jesus.....Horace no, not that."

"Put your left hand in the door. I'm not going to tell you again."

Keith rolled up his sleeve and exposed his hand. He put it directly in the door jam.

"Please don't do this."

"I said the same thing to you and Matt and Kyle and Montez on that last day of school in the ninth grade when you guys beat me with those lumber boards you found outside. Remember that day? Cause I sure as fuck do!" he said and slammed the door directly on Keith's hand.

Keith screamed loudly and immediately held his hand. He fell to the ground.

"Put it in the door."

"FUCK YOU!" screamed Keith.

"If I have to tell you again, you're leaving here in a bag. Now put it in!"

Keith was sobbing as he put it on the molding on the door. Horace yanked the door back and this time hit it much easier.

Keith was rolling on the ground, holding his hand. He was sobbing and in agonizing pain at the same time. Horace picked him up and put him in the passenger seat. He got back in and they headed back to the dealership. The only sound in the truck was Keith sobbing and holding his hand. He wanted to kill Horace, but he also knew he had it coming. He was trying to think logically through the searing pain. His hand was a broken, bloodied, mess. Horace said nothing and tried to navigate his way back to the dealership. Horace pulled in and stopped.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" said Keith whimpering.

"Shut up you little bitch. Because of you, I started doing drugs. Because of you, I wanted to kill myself. Because of you, I spent four years of my life in prison. Do you have any idea how bad prison sucks? Of course, you don't. You'll never go there. You got a broken hand. I got a broken life. You can go home and take some painkillers and forget about all this. I can't."

"Horace.....I will never forget this day as long as I live," said Keith coldly.

"Listen uh.....I'm going to pass on the truck after all. It's very nice, it's just not for me. Thanks for the ride." he said and got out.

"Montez is next. I don't even know what his first name is? Everybody just called him Monty. I remember his mom, she was nice. Can't believe she gave birth to such a piece of shit like him. If you can get in touch with him, let him know I'll be visiting him. He won't be too hard to find." said Horace.

"Doesn't it strike you as hypocritical?" asked Keith

"What are you talking about?"

"Your life was ruined by bullies.....you know what bullies can do and how much pain they can inflict.....and here you are, the worst bully imaginable. How does it feel?"

Horace had to pause for a second.

"It feels pretty damn good, to be honest with you. You got off easy. Count yourself lucky. I might not be in such a good mood next time we meet."

"Next time?"

"Yeah...did you think I was just going to walk away and never see you again? Oh no Keith my boy.....we're just getting started. I'll be visiting you from time to time. Maybe you might even have a few bucks laying around you could give to me. I bet your wife has super hot friends.....you are married aren't you?"

"I'm engaged."

"Whatever. Have her hook me up. We can all have dinner together next time I come to town. I assure you.....*there will be a next time.*" said Horace.

"You are really sick Horace," said Keith

"I got to see Kyle Stone in the hospital. I put him there. I'll tell him you said hi."

He walked away from the truck and back over to visitor parking. He passed by some salesmen on the way to his car.

"Hey, you guys got a hell of a salesman over there," he said pointing to Keith.

Just like that, another one bit the dust and was crossed off his list. He had saved the best for last. Seeing old Monty again was just the icing on the shit cake. He could hardly wait.

Albert Luis Montez didn't recognize the number. He figured it was just a scammer. He'd been getting lots of those lately. He decided to pick it up anyway, it might be legit.

"Yo," he said.

"Montey? It's Keith Jackson, do you remember me?"

"Keith, yeah man, how the hell are you? I ain't heard from you in years."

"Montey, I'm at the hospital right now. I have a very broken hand, I can barely hold the phone."

"Sorry to hear."

"Montey, do you remember Horace Spellman?"

"That fat kid we always used to pick on?"

"Yes. Montey, he's the one who broke my hand. He beat up Matt Green so bad, the doctors aren't even sure if he will ever be the same again. You should see what he did to Kyle Stone."

"Kyle? He's my boy. I read on the internet he had a training accident."

"Well, that's one way of putting it. Horace just walked into his gym and beat the shit out of him. There's a video of it on the internet. I think I could hear Kyle's bones cracking."

"Damn.....is he alright?"

"His girlfriend said he was still in surgery. I don't know."

"What the hell does he want with me? Is he trying to get some kind of revenge for all the crap we gave him?"

"Yes. Montey, he's coming for you. I don't know when, but he's coming."

"Shit, we were just fooling around. Just being kids. I didn't think he would take it so personally. He even asked out my sister in high school. So, he wants a piece of me, huh?"

"Jesus Montey, please be careful. This dude is no joke. He's like three of me put together." said Keith, with his voice shaking.

"Yeah, I can handle myself Keith, but thanks for the heads up. Good to hear from you. Next time you're in town, we'll have to get together."

"Yeah, definitely," said Keith as he hung up.

Montey had no intention of ever meeting Keith. He couldn't stand that little white punk. The only reason he tolerated him is that he was good friends with Kyle. Horace would know he's a cop if he did any research. Montey had been in a deadly shootout a few months ago in which he had shot and killed the robber who opened fire on his officers. If Horace ever did do something as stupid as to visit him, he was in for a very rude awakening.

Montey took out one of his 9mm and loaded a full magazine. He had his dispatcher run the name, Horace Spellman. He told her to send everything over to his house.

Montey just couldn't figure out why there were no active warrants for Horace. If he had beaten up Matt and Keith and Kyle, he should be wanted for assault and battery. Montey almost felt bad reading his rap sheet. He never wanted any of this. He sort of liked Horace. He never thought he took any of the abuse personally. Sure, they probably did go a little too far sometimes, but they

were just dumb kids. Nobody should still be this angry for something that happened eleven years ago. He ran into Matt last year at their ten-year reunion and did some coke with him in the bathroom. Matt was always the life of the party. He found his number and gave him a call.

"Hello?"

"Matt. ...hey man, it's Montey. You aren't going to believe who just called, it was Keith Jackson. He said Horace Spellman might be visiting me."

Montey heard nothing but silence on the other end.

"You're a cop right?" said Matt

"Yeah."

"If you see him, kill him.....before he kills you. I don't care how you do it, just kill him."

"Whoa, Matt, easy there buddy. You aren't recording this conversation now are you?" said Montey, caught off guard by Matt's ice-cold demeanor.

"Montey, I'm going to need three surgeries to fix what that bastard did to me. I don't even have health insurance! Every bone in my neck and back hurts. He would have killed me if that clerk hadn't pulled a gun on him." said Matt sounding extremely uneasy.

"I'm sorry man. Look, as soon as he crosses that state line and comes into Cali, he's mine. I'll take care of it. Don't worry, I'll make him pay for what he did to you guys. I know people too. The kind of people that can handle these things."

"You're only going to have one chance, don't screw it up."

"Don't worry man, I'll take care of him. You get some rest. I'll talk to you soon." he said and hung up.

"Just be careful man. This ain't the same wimp we used to punk in high school. Not by a long shot."

"I'll handle it, man, don't worry."

Montey's next call was to his boy Jose. He was the muscle for the *Vatos*. A central valley gang that ran the prisons down south. Jose didn't even ask why he was killing someone. His nickname was *The Terminator*. You paid his price and he smoked whoever you wanted. No questions asked. As easy as ordering a pizza.

"Jose.....I need you to do a little job for me.....*por favor*." he said.

Horace tried to fit in the trailer as best he could. He didn't want to go back to the gym and claim his prize, at least not yet. He doubted Kyle was just going to go down without a fight. Someone had uploaded a minute-long clip of him beating Kyle senseless. It already had over 20 million views.

So much for staying out of the spotlight.

Everyone wanted to know who this monster was that had just destroyed two prominent mixed martial artists. Real fights don't have referees.....or rules. Horace knew this all too well.

As he read through the comments, he knew was going to be caught and probably sent back to prison. He may as well just turn himself in. Horace didn't want any of this to happen. He just wanted to be left alone with his art and his Anzu. He just wanted to lead a normal life, just like everyone else. He wanted people to know him for his art, not his physical abilities. He knew the path he was on and where it ended, he just had no idea how to get off it.

He realized a smart person wouldn't go after Montey. One of his people in prison told him that Montey was now a cop in California. That was bound to get ugly. Even if he did even the score, he would be running from the cops as well. Montey could kill him and get away with it. He would have more than enough probable cause. Life wasn't fair and getting more and more unfair by the minute. That was the hand he was dealt, he was just playing it as best he could.

He remembered the time Matt's gang followed him home from school, beating him and throwing rocks at him. He was in so much pain and so angry that human beings could act this way to other human beings. Horace never did anything to anyone, yet here he was, fighting for his life. He ran in the front door, crying almost hysterically. His mom was on the couch, too high or drunk to care. She looked up at him and asked him why he was crying. He tried as best he could to explain. His mother just looked at him and laughed. That laugh hurt worse than any rock he was hit with that day.

"Horace, you're like twice the size of them. Look at you, you're the runt of the litter. You make me sick." she said and passed out.

Horace never forgot that day. He wished he could just go back in time and undo everything that was done to him. He didn't want to be this person that everyone feared. He didn't want to be the person the prison guards feared and was never transported without extra security. He loved drawing and video games, just like any other kid. He wasn't born a monster, but he had become one.....*they had made him into one.*

He knew he should just let this one go. He could take over the gym and cash in on his newfound fame and fortune. Instead, he was going to most likely kill Montey and anyone else that got in his way. As dark as his life had become, he had never actually killed anyone yet. It was a bridge he did not want to cross.

Montey was taking no chances. He was packing everywhere he went and he had a badge to back him up. The Vatos did little favors for him and vice versa. That's just how it was out here in the central valley. There were too many bad guys and not enough good guys. Montey never realized that sometimes you have to choose between the lesser of two evils, knowing full well it's still going to end badly. He didn't want to alert anyone in his department. Of course, he was still a cop and that meant a whole hell of a lot of questions and interviews and more questions if he were to kill Horace. He called Jose and asked him to meet him behind an abandoned shopping center in Lancaster. He arrived about an hour later. There was someone with him Montey didn't recognize.

That made him nervous. He had just watched the video of Horace beating Matt senseless and it sent a chill down his spine.

"That can't be the same Horace.....no way. That dude is scary as hell. He beat Kyle like he was his prison bitch."

"What up?" asked Jose

"I need this situation taken care of. I don't want anything to come back on me. If I kill him there will be too many questions."

"No problem. We'll take care of him. You got an address or something?" asked Jose.

"No. He just got out over a week ago. Here.....this is a video that was taken a few days ago. That guy he's destroying, that's Kyle Stone, the UFC fighter." said Montey handing him the phone.

"Damn, that's one big cracker. No matter. I'll just shoot his ass dead. Just like everyone else."

"He won't try to attack me at the house. I can't imagine he'd be that stupid. As soon as it's done, you need to call me. I'll try and buy you guys as much time as I can. Whatever the hell you do, don't get caught, understood?"

"Relax, Montey. We got this. Ain't like this my first rodeo, you know what I mean?"

"Hopefully, it won't be your last one either," said Montey as he grabbed his phone and walked back to his cruiser.

Two days passed, then two weeks passed. Montey figured Horace just chickened out. It was one thing to beat up losers like Keith, it was another thing to go after a cop. Horace wasn't stupid. He knew he'd end up at room temperature one way or another. He had Jose and his boys staking out his house. Most nights, they were just getting high and waiting for the grim reaper to show up, but he never did. Jose drove a beautiful Lexus and always wore a suit and tie. He didn't even have any tattoos. He was smart. He didn't want to look like some double-digit IQ inmate. Normally, after his shift, he would just cruise by and ask them if they saw anything. Tonight, however, as he drove by, he saw Jose, limping out of his Lexus. Montey turned on his bar lights. The Lexus had a giant hole in the windshield. There was another hole in the driver's side window. Jose looked like he had been beaten to within inches of his life.

"Damn.....that gringo ain't no joke," he said as he collapsed on the street.

Montey put him in his cruiser and drove him back to one of the gang's houses. Two Vatos met him at the door.

"The hell happened to Jose?" asked one of them

"Horace Spellman is what happened to him."

"Who the hell is that?"

"Don't worry about it. How bad is he?"

"He looks like shit."

"Get him to a hospital."

"Why didn't you take him to the hospital?"

"You dumb shit, how in the hell am I going to explain that one to my Lieutenant?"

"Oh yeah. Good point."

"I've got to find this guy. If I call any of you and you don't answer, there's going to be hell to pay," said Montey as he ran out of the house and back to his cruiser. He heard his phone ringing and didn't recognize the number.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Montey. It's Horace. Hey, I was in town and I just remembered how much your mother used to love my drawings. I think I might just go and visit her. I drew one just for her." said Horace and quickly hung up the phone.

"Motherfucker!" said Montey as he turned on his flashers.

He had a very, very important decision to make. He could call in for backup, who would get there before he did, but then, there would be the questions. Montey was in too deep to get out now. He had moved drugs, tampered with evidence, even taken bribes from the gangs. Once the questions started, there would be no way out of it. He would end up in handcuffs. As much as he loved his mother, he just couldn't go to prison.

Hell, his cellmate could be someone like Horace. No thank you.

Montey didn't have his flashing bar lights on when he pulled up to his mother's house. He drew his weapon and ran inside, expecting to see the worst. He was expecting Horace to be standing over her corpse, or worse. Instead, he found the two of them drinking Mexican coffee and looking at old pictures from their neighborhood.

"Mijo.....look who it is, it's Horace Spellman. He brought us a gift. He made it himself while he was away." his mother said holding up his very intricate origami art.

Montey still had his gun behind his back. He wasn't quite sure what to make of all this.

"Horace made this for me out of a single sheet of paper, isn't it amazing? It's called Origami," she said holding up his creation.

"Yeah, that's pretty awesome," he said, taking his finger off the trigger.

"Come on, sit down, take your jacket off." said his mother.

Montey took his uniform jacket off and set it on the sofa.

"Oh.....it's good to see some old faces from the neighborhood, how are you?" he said shaking Horace's hand.

"While I was locked up, I thought of all the good times I had, like eating your mother's enchiladas at the park. She was more of a mother to me than my mother ever was. I guess I just wanted to say thank you in some way."

Montey's mom kissed him on the cheek.

"You know you are always welcome in our casa.....always," she said holding his arm.

"Thank you. It means so much to me to hear that. I wish I could stay for a few more hours and we could all catch up, but I have a plane to catch. It was so nice seeing you all again." he said and stood up.

"Stop by anytime Horace. You are always welcome."

Montey was taken back by just how massive Horace really was. The rest of them weren't kidding.

Homeboy really was the size of a house.

"Hey man, let me walk you out," he said and put his hand on Horace's back.

Montey stopped at the edge of the steps. Horace could see he was carrying his gun. He could see Montey was shaking.

"You son of a bitch.....I ought to kill you right now," he said angrily.

"Right in front of your mom? How the hell are you going to explain that one to her?"

"Why did you come here?"

"I meant what I said. Your mom is about the only person who ever showed me some kindness when we were growing up. I just wanted to say thank you." said Horace.

"Okay, great.....now get the hell out of here and don't ever come back. I see you back here again, you know what will happen."

Horace turned and started walking away. He stopped a few feet from the curb and turned around.

"You're in deep with those gang bangers, aren't you? The ones who were watching your house. That punk Jose started singing like a canary. He told me everything. You know you're going to get caught and go to prison, right?"

"I doubt it. I've done alright so far," said Montey.

"Maybe, or maybe your luck will run out. A dirty cop in prison.....shit.....you may as well just kill yourself. It would be easier. Good luck, you're going to need it." said Horace and he turned to walk away.

"Horace.....I'm sorry man.....for everything."

Horace stopped in his tracks. He didn't even turn around.

"Me too," he said and kept on walking, disappearing in the darkness. He kept walking for a while until he came to an intersection. He looked to his left, then to his right, then behind him. There were many different directions he could take, but he decided to take a new direction, one that led him away from all of this madness and despair. He wanted the road that led him to Anzu and a new life. One where he could learn to be a real person again. One where there were no bullies or tears. The kind of life that most people take for granted, that's what Horace wanted more than anything, just to be like everyone else.....just like everyone else.

Cause anyone can be an angel in heaven, but there are only a few very special angels in hell.....they're the real angels.