

I looked at him like the inexperienced kid he was. “People don’t want to see the truth, Jimmy. Do you know who the best actors are, kid? The best actors are all liars.”

Memoir

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I checked to make sure the luger was loaded.

Dropping out the magazine, all eight rounds were in the box. I slid the magazine back into the pistol and cocked the ejection mechanism, forcing a round into the chamber. The weapon fit snugly under my trench coat.

“Let’s go get a drink,” I said.

“We don’t have time for a drink,” Max protested.

“Come on. Get in the game, Rhienhart,” I insisted. “We have time for one drink.”

Bounding up the stairs, Rhienhart followed me. The bar was crowded and filled with tobacco smoke. It had your classic smell of beer dripping from the taps and sawdust. I slid into an open space and ordered a whiskey. The bartender slammed down a glass and yanked the cork out of an unlabeled bottle with a distinctive pop. He poured the liquid into the glass with all the class and sophistication of a Mexican bullfighter. Every drop went exactly where he wanted it.

It tasted like warm apple juice. I slammed it into the back of my throat with the same gusto with which I thumped it down on the bar. Max grabbed my arm, pulling me away. “Dicky will be pissed if we miss the delivery, Boxhull.” He had to practically shout to be heard over the din.

“They can wait,” I spat back. Despite my attempted protests towards ignoring my responsibilities, I headed out for the door. The street was full of cars. Model A’s, Cadillac V-16, Chevrolet Universals. None of them were running. They were being pulled along by teams of men, dragging hard on ropes. Whiffs of smoke rose from the tailpipes to give the illusion the engines were running.

Men walked up the street and turned around, walking back the same way they had come. Mothers and their baby carriages prowled the street. By the corner as was a man with a stack of open boxes. He was selling apples, oranges, and grapes from under a beaten-up old umbrella. The fruit shined like it had been waxed. Peoples mouths moved but there was no sound. There was no roar of auto engines. All I could hear was the tap of people’s shoes on the pavement. It had the click and clack of a train, but with an out-of-place form of muted sound.

I checked for the lookouts. There was one by the fruit stand and another at the far end of the block. The one by the fruit stand was no older than a kid. “At least Dicky could have sent a grownup for this job,” I muttered. Max ignored me and pointed at the far side of the street.

Across the street, the garage appeared nearly empty. Only one mechanic was on duty. Laying under the front of a Bentley 8 Litre. Max and I passed right by him. We headed for a flimsy door in the back. The poorly constructed door rattled when I opened it. Paco and Herman were sitting on a group of crates. Paco was smoking a cigarette. The luger as out in a rush, the barrel flashed, and Paco jumped as the blood exploded from his chest. His arms flailed like cooked pasta. I continued to pull the trigger as the gun barrel flashed.

Everything stopped. Paco sat back down for a moment. He took a few more casual puffs from his cigarette. Ejecting the luger’s magazine, a man dressed in a dark-blue jumper handed me another magazine and I slid it into the handle. Paco stood back up again and I began plugging him once more. Once this magazine ran out, Paco fell to the ground.

“Cut!” The director yelled. “Ed we just need one more take.”

I pointed the empty luger at the director. “What do you mean we need one more take. It was perfect.”

The director got off his seat and shook his head. “Well, you were perfect Ed, of course, but the lighting wasn’t so great.”

He took me by the arm and started to lead me back toward the bar. “What do you mean the lighting wasn’t so great? You’ve got lights all over the damn place. I could get a sunburn inside the garage, you German fart.”

“Just one more take.” The director insisted.

“Wait a minute, wait a minute,” I shouted. “That’s not the way it happened.”

Everywhere, everyone froze.

I reached out above my right ear and pulled out the memory rod. As soon as it started coming out, I could see my reflection in the mirror. The stupid rod was six inches long and ran right across the base of my brain. It always made me a little nervous to pull the damn thing out of my skull. The stupid thing was like a parasite digging into my memories.

“What’s the matter now, Ed?” a young kid rose from behind a console.

“I did those shots in one take.” I bellowed, still holding the memory capture stick in my hand.

“Of course, you did, Ed.” The kid was patronizing me, the little prick. “One take Ed Forrest. You’ve always been famous for it.” He put his hand on my shoulder. “Look, the memory stick only shows us what you did. What your brain has stored.”

“People don’t want to see reality,” I spat back. “When people put the stick in their heads they want to see what they believe in, Jimmy. Not what really happened.”

The director gave me a wry smile. “Don’t worry Ed. We’ll edit out the parts which don’t fit the profile.”

I gave the kid a cross-eyed look. “I thought you couldn’t edit these things?” I asked incredulously.

He smiled back at me. “There are ways and then there are ways.”

I looked at him like the inexperienced kid he was. “People don’t want to see the truth, Jimmy. Do you know who the best actors are, kid? The best actors are all liars. Film isn’t about truth, it’s about the lies we believe in. It’s about making people believe the lies.”

“This is a memoir, Ed,” Jimmy explained. “It’s not a film. When we slide this into another person’s head they get to be you. They get to be the great Ed Forrest, if only for a day.”

“You still have to giv’em what they want,” I responded.

The kid pushed me back into the chair. He took the rod out of my hands and started slowly sliding it back into my skull. “Trust me. I’ve made a couple of these before. It’ll be great. A bestseller.”

I cringed. “You sound like my agent. How do I know I can trust you?” I asked.

“You don’t,” he laughed, “That’s why they call it trust.” He slapped me on my shoulder.

Once he finished sliding the rod back in I was back, crossing the street set and heading for the garage. I stopped halfway across and adjusted my tie. I passed the mechanic in the garage, stepping over one of his legs. The flimsy back door stood before me, parts of it painted green and other parts painted red like it had been rebuilt from several different doors. The hinges creaked as I swung open the door. Paco and Herman looked up at me from their group of crates.

It didn’t look like the same actor who played Paco, the original was some Mexican stunt guy. This guy looked exactly like William Macready. I hated the pompous bastard. *Oh. Look at me, I worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company.* The twerp. I hated his guts.

I reached in and pulled out the luger. Paco rose, he had something in his hand. There was a flash. Damn those squibs hurt. Why’d they have to put so much power in those things? That one really hurt. I tried to pick up the luger and aim it at Paco, but it felt like a lead weight. I just couldn’t get it up. There were a few more flashes from Paco’s hand. Before I realized what was happening I was on my knees.

When I looked up, I saw myself in the mirror again. I was sweating like a pig. I tried to reach up to pull the rod out of my skull, but I couldn’t move my hands. Everyone was rushing around like chickens who had missed their casting call. I heard someone say, “Call 911.”

The kid director was looking at the stick engineer, “What happened?”

“Something went wrong,” he responded.

“No kidding Buckwheat,” Jimmy said, “He’s having a heart attack.”

My vision began to narrow to a tunnel. The kid director was standing over me, blocking my view of the engineer. In the background, I could hear the engineer say, “there was some kind of feedback. A memory was fed into his brain.”

“That’s impossible,” the kid director held open one of my eyes and looked down at me. In the background, I could hear, “I’m just telling you what I saw on the monitors. It looked like someone shot him.”

“That didn’t happen,” Jimmy groused.

“I know.”

The director looked at me like I wasn’t there. “Where are the damn paramedics?”

I pulled him down with my last ounce of strength and whispered in his ear, “I never did the Sopranos ...”

My arm fell down to my side and I looked up at ...