

Perfect Killer

“I simply hinted that an ‘extraordinary’ man has the right ... that is, not an official right, but an inner right to decide in his own conscience to overstep ... certain obstacles, and only in case it is essential for the practical fulfilment of his idea (sometimes, perhaps, of benefit to the whole of humanity).”

--Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*

Part 1

CH. 1

Fayetteville, AR

“You think that’s funny?”

Coy Burchess knew his friends were in line behind him begging him to make this happen.

“No,” said the man half-obsured behind the plexiglass window of the white lunch truck. It was the same man and the same truck for the last three days in the same spot in the gravel parking lot.

“Then why the hell are you grinning like that, shitheels?”

The man complaining about the sandwich he had just received from the concession man was performing for his friends and the girl from the taco line he was hoping to impress. She was wearing those white skinny jeans to work again and the outline of her valentine-shaped ass was firmly imprinted in his neocortex like a baby chick’s image of its mother. The beer he’d put down before their shift at the Black Goat was adding more fuel to his display. He told his friends he was going to make that “stuttering sombitch” look “smart” at break.

“Tell him, Coy,” said the man behind him.

Coy recognized Donnie Hugheart’s voice. “Hug” was his best friend. They were high-school buddies who planned to go to war together after high school. Instead, they both knocked up their girlfriends and found themselves stuck on the same graveyard shift in this taco factory.

“I don’t like your face or your sandwiches, Sandwich Man,” Coy said.

“I’m s-sorry about that, s-sir,”

I’m sss-sorry about that, Coy mocked the man’s terrible stutter, hoping the girl was behind Hug somewhere. “You guys hear that? He gimme me a roadkill sandwich and he fuckin’ says he’s sss-sorry.”

“So what are you going to do about it?”

“I-I’ll r-refund your money r-right now, s-sir.”

Coy couldn’t get a good look at the concession man’s face. Despite the cowed response, he didn’t look all that weak, more like how somebody thought he should act to a bully.

“Give me my fuckin’ money, right now,” Coy growled, “or I’ll climb through that window and git it myself.”

“No need for threats, s-sir,” said the sandwich man.

Coy imitated the man’s stutter again and heard the yuks from a bigger audience now.

When the concession man handed him the money, Coy snatched his wrist, twisted, and the man dropped to his knees. Coy yanked the toward him so that the side of his head struck the plexiglass.

“Gimme me a sandwich tastes like rat turds again,” Coy growled in a husky voice, “I’ll break your got-damn arm off and shove it up your ass.”

Coy stuffed the bills into his front shirt pocket and high-fived his way down the line of shift workers. Two men and a woman wouldn’t meet him in the eye.

Shee-yit. She was there, must have seen it all. Coy strolled past, pretended to hip-bump her by accident. She playfully slapped his shoulder. He hoped she felt the rock-solid delts. The hangover from the Goat had disappeared. The tumescence in his groin felt like a door opening and coupled with image of her bucking beneath him had him erect by the time he made it to the men’s washroom. Once inside the stall door, he freed Jumbo and improved his erection with a couple strokes. He thought of Evie back home. He could save it for her. *No, hell with that,* Coy thought. He’d go for it right after shift, see if that look was for real.

While Coy was fondling himself and plotting his seduction, the last customer in line had just received his change from the concession man. He peered through the plexiglass and said, “Don’t let him bother you none. Coy, he don’t mean nothing.”

“Not to worry, sir, I won’t” came the reply, no more stutter.

The shift supervisor wanted to fire Burchess and that Hugheart, too, for always coming to work smelling of alcohol. They drank during shift break, too, because Hugheart and Duane Crawford used to stand around Burchess’ car, the trunk wide open; you could hear the tabs of beer cans being pulled clear to the loading dock.

The canteen truck driver’s full name was Charles Tyrone Wöissell. He watched his last customer of the night return to the lunchroom. Laughter echoed from the loading dock. Replaying his humiliation, probably giving more back-slaps to the bully.

The sandwich man wasn't humiliated, however. He winced when he recalled the man's grip on his wrist. He'd nearly reacted; he could have easily slipped free and pinned the man's hand before he knew what was happening. Charley Wöissell had trained with jiu-jitsu masters in small-circle fighting back home in a room converted to his gym. He disdained going for belts. He was interested solely in mastering holds, kicks, strikes, and throws and he learned from anyone his wealthy father hired to teach him. He knew more about the body's pressure points than most doctors.

It was pleasing to think of popping the man's metacarpal bones like snapping breadsticks. The screams would have drowned out the third, fourth fingers breaking. Thumbs were harder, but break that stubby digit, and you assumed complete control over your opponent. Without control, you had nothing; you were an atom floating in black empty space.

Charley had spent three weeks scouting the shift workers of El Torito's Tacos & Nachos, and it finally paid off tonight. Night after night of the nauseating stench of steamed cornmeal reek in his nostrils watching this parade of minimum-wage zombies pass in front of him—*Thank you, s-sir; thank you, m-miss*—then disappear back into their cement-block prison to be released until the next shift drew them back. Charley didn't hate them; he even pitied them. Night work was the domain of the unskilled laborer and it was ideal for trolling. Even the old apologist for his co-worker. He was a worn-out horse in a knacker's yard who'd be replaced by some other slaughter horse when his time came. Charley thought of himself as a benevolent butcher come to look over this useless flock and make his selection. It was done: *Mr. Tough Guy, you're it.*

It was a weight lifted. He touched the small knot on his forehead where his head slammed the plexiglass. The stutter was fake, not the Tourette's syndrome. His clonidine patch kept the squeals and tics at bay and no one knew. In his youth, the screeches and howls that erupted from his throat at his various private schools made him the butt of jokes. Tenex worked best of the different antihyperintensives tried on him; the side effects, such as dry mouth, headaches, and fatigue, were managed through adjustment and repeated dosages.

Charley Wöissell pulled out his fold-out cot from under the passenger seat of the Chevy truck. He had a few hours to kill, and he might as well get some sleep. The next phase was more pleasurable: track the prey. He had a self-taught capacity to empty his mind during the interludes, a recharging of batteries. Wöissell slept profoundly, a blackout. If consciousness resides in the whole human body, not just the three pounds of brain in its skull cap warm as a baby in embryonic fluid, Wöissell trained his body to wake him in perfect synchronicity with all five senses alert.

Coy exited the holding dock at 6:40 a.m. with his two wingmen Hugheart and Crawford flanking him. Charley calmly sat up, folded and replaced his cot under the seat. He didn't yawn and he didn't stretch.

Obscured in the glare of the morning sun bouncing off the truck windows, he watched the three men stop ten feet from his serving window. Wöissell couldn't hear everything the men said, his New England accent proved sometimes as baffling to Southerners as theirs to him. Something about his truck "musta broke down" and then he heard what sounded like "fishing."

The usual uninspired curse words and obscenities of men as they drifted away to their cars in the lot.

Wöissell had a clear view of the young woman in white jeans. She followed a meandering, teasing zigzags in Tough Guy's direction. The mating dance of a pair of simians. Wöissell imagined the leer of masculine conquest. He'd seen its like in hundreds of male faces at county fairs and farmer's markets from one end of the country to the other. What he knew about the sociology of *homo copulatio* was worth a doctorate.

Charley's view of the couple was partially blocked by men and women streaming from the factory. The parking lot soon cleared, leaving the couple alone. Coy flicked a cigarette into the gravel. Wöissell eased over to the small panel window at the back door. He kept a pair of field glasses hanging from a strap there.

Wöissell knew Tough Guy's car was an orange Challenger. He watched him squeeze his bulk into a pearl-gray Honda. White Jeans got in the passenger side. The car started and he watched it drive to the grassy edge of the lot. Tow motors and stacked pallets of empty 50-gallon drums formed a phalanx around the vehicle. The driver gunned the Honda over the rough ground until it was blocked from view of the factory exits and the loading dock. A plume of sandy dirt erupted behind the car's rear wheels as it edged deeper into the thick scrub.

Not very discreet, you two, Wöissell muttered. He'd seen more audacious examples of randy couples in his year of trawling county fairs and factories like this taco place.

He trained the binoculars on the Honda. The sun lit up the roof like a shimmering rectangle. Window glare obscured the inside action. A shadowy rhythmic bobbing suggested fellatio; he recalled her hair was tied off in a practical bun and he imagined the brute's fingers nestled in her hair. Wöissell wondered if Tough Guy's mouth opened and closed like a guppy while she worked on him. Very little changed in coitus except the location. He was not aroused.

Twenty minutes later, the engine started and the Honda bucked out of the grass with tires slewing gravel spitting from the tires. The Honda puled next to the Challenger. Tough Guy got out, left the engine running. The promiscuous couple shared a last tender moment. Tough Guy stuck his head inside the Honda while she assumed the driver's position. Wöissell assumed he didn't mind sharing his fellatrix's kiss. He straightened up, watched her roar off, imitating his bravado earlier with a rooster-tail of stones in her wake.

Tough Guy glanced around checking for witnesses to his indiscretion. He never considered looking at Wöissell's truck. The Challenger fired up and left the lot going in the opposite direction as the Honda.

Charley sat motionless behind the steering wheel. No rush now that he had chosen, and everything would follow logically; this wasn't his first rodeo. He thought in terms of the combat manuals he studied. Wöissell watched insects rotating in golden columns of light above the treeline beyond the factory where a pretty college town nestled in the Ozarks. The Chevy's air-

conditioner wasn't equal to the humidity of the South, but Wöissell didn't mind sweating. It cleansed the body's toxins like a dog stretching after a nap.

He started the engine. The morning shift would be arriving soon and he had things to do that did not include serving the various items on his menu, those "heart bullets for the mob," he called them. He often cooped in mall parking lots. The Walmart on Siloam Springs Road would provide a base for planning, then he could begin gathering what he'd need for tracking the man he intended to kill.

When he began, Charley wondered if he fit to some FBI profile type. That thought annoyed him, so he read several texts in aberrational psychology and every FBI profiler's memoir. They were all obsessed by a notion of deviant fantasies and disturbed people. Charley didn't think in such grandiose terms. He was a pragmatist with a peculiar vocation—that was all. He read several philosophers to see if they had an answer but found none. He discovered a preference for Wittgenstein. He liked the diamond purity of his logic. Others, like Sartre, harped about the universe's indifference as if that made any sense. He was Aesop's scorpion. Why sting the frog carrying you across the river? *Because it's in my nature.*