

HUOO BOOME



i kill me

"A HILARIOUS
ACTION-PACKED
THRILL-RIDE!"

- Some Guy



PART **1**

i kill me

P A R T O N E

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*For those who are not afraid to laugh at life. Or
themselves.
Even in the darkest, most difficult of times.*



*"Everything is funny
as long as it is happening to somebody else."*

– WILL ROGERS

Honestly, I didn't even see the skunk.

Well, not until it was “too late” – for me, *not* the skunk – so don't call the animal abuse hotline and tattle on me for pancaking Pepe LePew. If anything, I should've contacted the human rights council for what happened next. But then – I'm getting ahead of myself.

I was roaring through the Redwood Forest on my 1953 rustic-red Indian Chief – the “Rodney Dangerfield” of V-twin motorcycles – reminiscing about happier times, when the once-famous, now job-less Hugo Boome was a household name. Lost in thought and the towering majesty of trees wider than a Brooklyn garbage truck and taller than the

Statue of Liberty, when I caught a glimpse of something scurrying across the road.

The skunk.

I squeezed the front brake, but as I went to stomp the rear brake, my boot slipped and the weight shifted suddenly forward – sending the bike end over end through the air.

For a moment, my eyes locked with those of the skunk and, if I had to guess whose were wider, I'd have to say mine. For reasons which were brutally hammered home as the Chief and I parted ways, then simultaneously became one with the pavement. Pain exploded in my brain as I flopped like a rag doll, arms and legs flailing as the road tore my jeans and jacket to pieces.

Finally, mercifully, my world stopped spinning and I just lay there. Frozen. Face down. In agony.

Minutes passed.

Minutes, but no cars. No hikers. No help whatsoever.

Slowly, ever so painfully, I rolled onto my side. Literally everything ached. Every part of me was either throbbing or burning. Hey, when I do something – I do it right. I was almost afraid to see what I'd done to the bike. But I had to.

So, gritting my teeth, I reached up with a trembling hand, unlocked the battered helmet, lifted it from my head and then let it roll onto the pavement.

Twisting my neck, desperately trying to find the bike, I'm stunned to see my pal Pepe, mere inches from my face. Our eyes locked once more.

“Hey, little—”

But before I could finish, the skunk began hissing. Then, Mister LePew quickly turned and sprayed my face. Talk about adding insult to injury.

And, as if the sulfuric stench wasn't enough, the friggin' liquid burned my eyes so bad I couldn't see!

Story of my life.

So poetic, it's pathetic.

And I could imagine the headline: '***Love Stinks' Star Sprayed by Skunk***. Hey, these days *any* publicity was good publicity. At least I'd *be* in the headlines again.

Who knows? Maybe a washed-up comedian who's claim to fame was a sitcom about married sanitation workers didn't even deserve that. Either that's what the skunk believed or he thought *Love Stinks* was a derogatory documentary on his family – because, for some sick reason in his twisted little mind, Pepe apparently thought that I still hadn't suffered quite enough.

So he bit my butt.

Three months...

And one week...

And six days later...



*"If life was fair, Elvis would be alive
and all the impersonators would be dead."*

— JOHNNY CARSON

Rabies is a real pain in the — well, you know.

And I do too. At least, now I do.

Now I know way more than I ever wanted. Like the fact that rabies is the most fatal disease in the world. Worse than AIDS. It's even worse than the Ebola virus which claims over 90% of the people who get it.

Rabies, to my surprise, has killed untold millions throughout history and, despite there being literally thousands of new cases every year, there have only been four recorded cases of people recovering from the rabies. Four. Ever.

Yeah...that's what I thought.

Of course, if you get your rabies shots within seven to ten days of being bitten, you've got a great chance to survive. Unfortunately, I *didn't* get the shots within seven to ten days, because...well...I was busy.

I mean, I *did* have all the warning signs – headaches, confusion, sleepiness, irritability – but I've suffered from those symptoms for years. My wife Jennifer calls it *marriage*.

I'm also highly sensitive to medications, natural and otherwise.

And yeah, having a butt bite is more than a little embarrassing.

It's funny though, ever since my parents prophetically named me Hugo Boome – then accidentally dropped me down an open manhole – I always knew I'd die from some sort of fatal disease. Even my physician, Doctor Pitts, finally lived up to his name when he delivered my dire prognosis in his typical, dry, *I've-seen-a-hundred-people-kick-the-bucket* monotone. And me? All I could do was sit there. Like dumbfounded idiot. Just sit and listen with morbid fascination as my greatest fears blossomed into a Godzilla-sized venus flytrap with a sweet-tooth for sitcom stars.

That was it.

The moment I realized my life was nothing more than a cruel, cosmic joke. That forces beyond my control had written a part I no longer wished to play.

So...I decided to kill myself.

Now, not that I care, but I know a lot of people think suicide is taking the “easy way out”, but let me tell you...there ain't nothing easy about it. Suicide may sound good at the time, but when you're in the act it somehow loses its luster.

Sawing into my wrist with a razor blade was out of the question. So was hanging myself. Or snorting exhaust fumes, which would undoubtedly make me barf my brains out.

No, I needed help. Professional help.

And yes, I know what you're thinking, but that's not the kinda' help I'm talking about. I'm talking about hiring someone to do what I didn't have the guts to do myself.

Which is what brought me back to Little Italy, New York – the place of my birth. My buddy Jon Monticello...who everyone except his mother calls Monti...owns the *Ristorante Il Monticello*, which has a rather notorious list of patrons. One such patron, Monti's "uncle" had already contacted a hit man and now all I had to do was deliver ten-thousand dollars.

Why I had to deliver it to Monti's restaurant, I didn't know. But Monti always did love living on the razor's edge.

Regardless, I was finally here under the restaurant's awning and I just wanted to get this over with.

The doors had either gotten heavier – or I was getting weaker.

Then, just as I released their handles, the impenetrable gates burst open.

“Boome, baby!”

So much for keeping a low profile.

“Hi, Monti,” I half-whispered.

Monti flashed his crooked smile, threw a muscular arm over my shoulder and theatrically led me inside. Apparently, everything had been renovated with a tannish, Italian Renaissance style in mind. There were cream-colored pillars and molding, several statues, white table cloths and tan chairs, tan doors and tan floor tiles.

“You like?” Monti asked. “They say it’s soothing.”

Actually, it kinda' made me wanna' vomit – which, in all honesty, I might find soothing, but I doubt Monti's customers would agree.

“Yeah...it's great.”

“Just act natural, buddy” he said. “I've done this a million times.”

“Help kill TV stars?”

“Them and Yankee fans,” he growled.

For a moment, I thought he was serious. Maybe he was.

“Hey, Boyle!” Monti called to the dining room. “Look what the junkyard dog dragged in.”

I turned to see a short brunette in ebony pants, ivory blouse, and a blood-red apron approaching. Hesitantly, she asked, “Huggy?”

I cringed.

Monti chuckled.

“Olive?”

“Huggy Bear, it *is* you!” she smiled, deep dimples unveiling the High School sweetheart I once knew. She gave me a quick, one-armed hug.

“Oooh, *Huggy Bear*,” Monti mocked.

Olive popped his shoulder.

“Crap, Olive, that hurt!”

“Oh, suck it up, Monti.”

Yep. Same old Olive.

“It's, uh...great to see you,” I mumbled.

“Don't sound so thrilled,” she teased.

“Oh, I am, I am,” I lied. “I just don't wanna' get hit.”

“Don't worry,” Olive said, glancing at Monti. “I only punch my employers.”

I smiled. “Sounds like a great career strategy.”

“Says the guy with the man-purse,” Olive said.

I followed her line of sight, down to my laptop case.

“Oh...this? No, it's just my computer—”

“I know what it is, Huggy” she smirked.

“Man, you're wound tighter than Trump's toupee.”

I dipped my eyes like a reprimanded child.

“Listen, I gotta' get back to my tables,” she said, thumbing back over her shoulder. “Maybe we can catch up later.”

“Yeah. Sounds good,” I lied again.

Olive spun away, then glanced back and added, “Jesus loves you, Huggy.”

Watching Olive leave I asked, “What the—?”

“Her latest *phase*,” Monti replied, rolling his eyes. “You know Olive. Last week she got Jesus, next week she'll get Darwin. Keeps things interesting.”

Monti massaged his shoulder then turned and motioned for me to follow. We wove in and out of tables and finally into a separate, much smaller dining room with one long table. Monti closed the door, tossed his jacket on the table, then pulled out a chair and joined me.

“The staff calls this *The Closet*,” Monti said. “We throw our hats and coats in here. Especially, in winter.”

I nodded, nervously laying my laptop case on the table.

“Does she know?” I asked.

“Who? Olive?”

“Yes,” I said. “Does she know...about *this*. About why I'm here.”

“Oh, yeah, sure. She saw the billboard I posted on Broadway,” he mused. “What? You think

I'm a freakin' moron?! I didn't tell anybody and you better not either or you'll get us *both* killed," he added, stabbing a finger toward me.

"Sorry, I—I'm a little nervous."

Monti narrowed his eyes. "You having second thoughts? 'Cause that could be a serious problem."

"No," I answered. "I'm ready to do this."

Monti's eyes studied me for a moment, then fell on the laptop case. "So, I'm assuming there's no computer in there?"

I slid it over to him.

"*Etch-a-sketch*," I said, forcing a smile.

Monti unzipped the leather case and peered inside. "That's good," he said. "Crackin' jokes 'til the end."

"It's all there. Ten thousand cash, just like you said."

Monti fanned through the bills, then paused and slowly pulled out a credit card-sized hotel key. "What the *freak* is this?" he asked, dangling it before me.

"You said to get an extra hotel key. For the hit man."

"Yeah, but...*Best Western*? Who wants to die in a friggin' Best Western?!"

"I didn't know that's where he was gonna' kill me!"

"Well, why do you think he wanted a key?!"

"I don't know," I answered. "I've never hired a hit man before."

Monti slammed it down on the table. "Elvis dies on a crapper and you wanna' die in a crap hole like that. What's wrong with you guys?"

"Maybe we don't give a crap."

"Well maybe *I* do," he snapped. "I got a rep to protect y'know?"

“I thought you said nobody knew.”

“Well, the mob does and I can't let me or my friends look like cheapskate pansy-boys.” He went on, “Good God, Hugo, you're a TV star for crying out loud! You couldn't spring for someplace posh like the Tribeca Grand?! I thought you'd wanna' go out with a bang.”

“That's the general idea,” I mumbled.

“Well, forget it,” he said, ripping out his cellphone. “Either you swap hotels or I'm calling the whole thing off.”

“Are you kidding?” I asked incredulously.

“You're the comedian, Hugo. Not me.”

Monti was steaming. He probably could've killed me right there and put me out of my misery. Might have enjoyed it too.

“Fine. Whatever. If it means that much to you, change the stupid hotel.”

“Thanks,” he said, dialing and flashing that fancy smile of his. “You won't regret this.”

Minutes later, while Monti was still trying to book a room worthy of him...I mean, *me*...I already was regretting it. And growing very annoyed. So I left him a credit card and told him to call me with the info. Then, I exited the small room. I had almost made it out the front doors when I heard a familiar voice say, “Huggy!”

I turned to see Olive, a few tables away. “You forgot your the man-purse?”

“I left it for Monti,” I said. “He'll be coming out of The Closet any second now.”

2

*"There are worse things in life than death.
Have you ever spent the evening with an insurance salesman?"*

— WOODY ALLEN

There's no such thing as a "good"-bye.

Whether you're losing a friend, sending a kid off to college or preparing to vicariously blow your brains out, saying goodbye always sucks.

That's why I never mentioned anything to Jennifer.

That's also why I walked out on Monti and Olive so fast. Of course, I barely knew them any better than I recognized Little Italy. Like the rest of my life, everything — literally *everything* — had changed. The once miniscule Chinatown had virtually devoured the Little Italy. Nearly all of the residents had left, moving to "greener" pastures like Tulsa, Oklahoma...or Hollywood. Now, only a

handful of original establishments remained on Mulberry Street to remind visitors of its once rich Italian heritage.

Wandering the weary sidewalks like a zombie, I felt a odd kinship with this place. The way we had begun. The way we were ending. The way we were both...*dying*.

Even the sun had begun to fade, its golden tendrils slithering back through the cracks in the New York skyline. Night was on its way – and so was I.

Maybe...maybe I should call Jennifer. We weren't on the best of terms, but maybe I *could* suffer through one last goodbye. I guess she deserved it.

Pulling out my phone as I continued toward the Tribeca Grande, I dialed Jennifer's cell.

No answer.

So I hung up and dialed again.

Still, no answer. *Great*.

This time, however, I decided to leave a message. It would probably be easier that way. Well, easier for *me* anyway.

“Jen, hey...it's Hugo. Listen, I'm here in New York and I've been doing a lot of thinking. Anyway, I guess what I want to say is – I'm sorry. For everything, really. I know I let you down...in so many different ways...and I—I just wanted to say I was sorry.”

God, this was hard.

“You deserve better. You do. Honestly, I don't know what you ever saw in me. I never was that handsome. Or rich. Or funny – and I was supposed to be a comedian.”

Don't waste time, Hugo. The clock's ticking.

“I...I just feel like everything's my fault. Man,

there's so much I want to say. So much I'm sorry for. Like not being able to have kids with you. I mean, I guess we could've adopted some like Brangelina."

Cut the cute crap. This is it. The end.

"The point is — I'm dying. That stupid, freakin' skunk gave me rabies and now...now I'm dying. Not like I wasn't before this. Just wasting my life — and my marriage — away. What I'm trying to say is...I love you."

Where the heck did that come from?

"I do. Jen, I—I *ache* for you. Your kiss on my cheek. Your hand in mine. God, if I could just hold your hand again. I swear I'd never let it go. Man, I want you more than anything. I want you so bad I'm shaking."

The crazy thing is, I *was* trembling. All over. I was crumbling to pieces.

"I know it's too late. I screwed everything up and I know that you don't want me anymore. I don't want me anymore. And if we can't be together...if we can't *live* together...then I don't want to live at all. You were all I had left. And now...now I don't have anything."

Stop crying, you idiot. You're making a scene.

"Goodbye, Jen. I love you, I really do," I choked. "More than I ever showed you. More than you'll ever know."

The phone clicked off.

What was I thinking?

I didn't know.

Or did I?

The still-flowing tears told me more than I wanted. Even as I steadied myself against a wall with one hand and wiped the blinding water from my eyes with the other, I knew.

I had made a mistake.

I didn't want to die.

Not yet. Not like this.

I had to call Monti. He and the hit man could keep the money for all I cared. I just wanted to live.

“Hey, Boome!”

Glancing up, eyes still hazy, I noticed three guys heading my way. Probably some high school buds or, less-likely, “Stinkpots” – the illustrious name given to *Love Stinks* fans.

“Just one sec,” I said politely.

“What? You ain't got time for some of your biggest fans?”

“Sorry,” I said. “This'll only take a sec—”

“Same here.”

Before I fully understood what was happening, one of the men had knocked the phone from my hand and slammed me against the wall.

“Please,” I begged. “This is important.”

“So is what we wanna' talk about, Boome.”

The fog had lifted from my eyes and I now saw what I was up against. Three of New York's finest sanitation workers, still dressed in their uniforms.

Definitely *not* fans.

“Ya see,” said the one in front, with my collar in his fist. “We didn't appreciate your show...”

You weren't the only ones.

“...and we always said if we ever had the chance to do somethin' about it – we would.”

Glancing over his shoulder, I caught sight of the phone teetering between the road and the sidewalk.

“I'm sorry,” the self-proclaimed leader said. “It seems I still don't have your attention.”

A hand cracked across my cheek.

“Howabout that? No?”

Lightning-fast, a fist found my gut and breath fled from my lungs.

“Howabout now? Can you hear me now?”

Another fist to my gut. Then to my eye, bashing the back of my head into the concrete wall.

My world went white.

“*Cann you hearr me noww?*” said the voice bouncing in my brain.

Somehow, between the blinding flashes, I saw the larger one step forward. He back-handed me and everything went blurry again. Then, I felt them drag me off the sidewalk and into an alley. I struggled, but each effort was met with another brutal blow. Suddenly, there was a hand in my pocket – fumbling for my wallet and keys.

“No...please...?!” I begged.

This was answered by a blow to my chin.

“P-please...” I pleaded as the world faded to bitter, empty blackness.

“...I don't wanna' die.”

3

*"I'm not a vegetarian because I love animals.
I'm a vegetarian because I hate plants."*

— A. WHITNEY BROWN

Calogero Tataglia, aka "Charlie Tags", was a real sick puppy.

This wasn't because he had grown up as a devout vegan. Although, the ruthless childhood tauntings for this undoubtedly contributed to his sociopathic tendencies.

It also wasn't because Charlie collected Precious Moments figurines. Though some would understandably argue that this, alone, was a sure sign of mental illness.

Nor was it because of some odd physical deformity. On the contrary, Charlie's appearance was that of any Italian titan, complete with ice-blue eyes that were as sharp as his sense of fashion.

And it wasn't even because Charlie was said to be personally responsible for more morgue toe-tags than the Bubonic Plague. Or rabies. Which, while an obvious exaggeration, was not that far from the truth.

No, Charlie was a rather demented individual because he truly *enjoyed* killing. He hungered for it. Often trembling with unspeakable joy at the very thought of it. Like he was now, seated in a dark hotel room with a lovely silencer-adorned Glock in each leather glove.

“Death,” as Charlie liked to say, “is my mistress. *My...amante.*”

Breathing slow and deep, he steadied himself with the knowledge that he wouldn't have to wait much longer. Night had fallen and his *mark* would be here any moment.

The original plan was to shoot the target in his sleep, but – where's the fun in that? Whether the mark was awake or asleep, had one bullet or a hundred in him, Charlie would get his green.

Besides, he couldn't wait.

It had been too long since his last hit and, with the mafia, the question was always, “*Who* have you done for me lately?”

The door seemed to rattle in response.

He was here now. The mark. Soon, this wait would be worth it.

Charlie smiled softly, closing his eyes for a moment then reopening them with unparalleled, undeniable focus.

The lock clicked, door opened and before the fool knew what hit him, there were two bullets in his brain and his body was face-first on the carpet. Then another, much-larger figure stepped toward the threshold. His eyes were filled with horror as he

stared at his fallen companion. Then, a well-placed shot to his heart severed its rhythm and dropped him on top of the other man.

Suddenly, a third man stepped up behind the bodies and – while Charlie hesitated, thinking *this was simply too good to be true* – the man turned and vanished just as bullet splintered the doorframe.

Charlie, however, would not be denied. Like a bloodthirsty lion, he leapt from the chair, over the unmoving pile of flesh and into the hall.

The third man hurried away, but a bullet through each calf swiftly halted any hope of eluding his pursuer. Writhing with pain, the wounded sanitation worker barely noticed the man standing over him.

“Where’s Boome?”

“Wh-who?” the worker asked, clutching his bleeding legs. “We...uh...we left Boome in a...a dumpster...d-down the street...”

Charlie casually glanced at his wristwatch. “Then, I guess it’s time.”

“T-time...?” the bewildered, bleeding man asked. “For what?”

Charlie raised a pistol.

“To take out the trash.”

4

*"The supreme irony of life
is that hardly anyone gets out of it alive."*

— ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

Painful reminders are often the best ones.

Or, at least, the most *effective* ones.

There I was, once more in excruciating misery. Once more barely able to breathe. Let alone *move*. Of course your insides are moving when you're breathing, but your outsides are pretty important too. At least I think so. Without your outsides, your insides would be all over the place. Actually, that was probably a great way to describe how I felt.

At least I was alive, but...for how long?

I had to get out of this — whatever *this* was — and get a hold of Monti, before his hit man blew my insides all over my outsides. Sniffing around, I immediately knew where I was. A dumpster.

Naturally.

So, finding a wall of the dumpster in the darkness, I wearily finger-walked my hands to the top and pushed the lid open. Covered in *who-knows-what*, I clumsily climbed over the edge and dropped down to the alley floor.

Man, did I stink. And ache. Not just for Jen either.

Oh, if she could only smell me now.

Knowing she never would unless I could get a hold of Monti, I crawled out of the alley and onto the sidewalk, desperately searching for my phone.

It was gone. As was my wallet.

So, using a parking meter to pull myself up, I peered around and saw a lot of New Yorkers peering back at me. They were obviously keeping a safe distance from the bum who'd just climbed out of the alley...and my *aroma*.

I didn't have time for this. To waste asking for a phone or a few bucks for a cab ride back to Monti's restaurant.

So I ran.

As quickly as my wobbly legs would carry me.

I ran.

Heart and head pounding.

God, I never felt so alive.

This was what it was like. To live like every day, every moment like it might be your last. It was invigorating. Inspiring.

I was flying now. Racing under the streetlights like Lance Armstrong. Or, at least, like Sheryl Crow.

Up ahead, I could see the *Ristorante Il Monticello*, but...the lights were going out.

Were they closing? What time was it? How long had I been unconscious?

Judging from the moon it was probably sometime around midnight.

No, no, no! I don't wanna' die!!

A familiar silhouette exited and began to lock the restaurant's doors.

"Olive!"

She glanced my way, her expression swiftly changing from surprise to utter confusion. "Huggy?"

Coming to a halt a few feet from her, I bent over and breathed in great gasps of air.

"Huggy, are you alright?"

"Yeah, yeah," I huffed. "Give me a sec."

Finally, I looked up.

"Is Monti still here?"

"No," she answered. "He left hours ago. Asked me to lock up for him."

Figures.

"Why? Did you need him?"

Like I needed my next breath.

"Yeah, do you know where he is?" I asked. "Or could I just borrow your phone?"

She studied me, obviously a bit taken aback by my personal hygiene.

"Please, Olive, it's an emergency."

"Yeah, sure," she said as she rifled through her purse. "Of course."

I wiped sweat from my brow and brushed off as much of the hitch-hiking refuse as I could.

"Here you go," Olive said, passing her phone.

Unfortunately, due to sweat, slime or both, it slipped from my hand.

Fortunately, I knelt down to retrieve it just as a bullet brushed through my hair and splintered the glass window, dotting the "i" in *Monticello*.

"Run!" I screamed, grabbing Olive's hand and guiding her through a crowd of oncoming

pedestrians. Thankfully, the streets were coming to life, which – *hopefully* – meant safety in numbers.

“What in the world’s going on, Huggy?!”

“Someone’s trying to kill me,” I shouted back.

“Obviously,” she said, now running alongside.

“But who?”

“I don’t know.”

“Howabout *why*?”

“I’ve got a few ideas,” I said, ever so *slightly* twisting the truth.

“Like?” she pressed as we pushed through the crowd.

Another bullet tattooed the concrete mere inches from my face.

“Could we please talk about this later?” I begged.

“Fine,” Olive said, taking the lead. “But I want the truth.”

“Nothing but,” I promised, gladly letting her lead me around a corner and down the next street. Thankfully, it was a one-way street which didn’t allow any cars to turn and follow us. Assuming the hit man was *in* a car...and that he wasn’t some radical anarchist who refused to obey street signs.

Halfway down the block, the fact we were still breathing was evidence enough for me that we’d made the right call.

“Follow me,” Olive ordered, nearly yanking my arm out of its socket.

“Do I have a choice?”

Moments later, we were rushing past a line of oddly-dressed individuals and toward a very large, very muscular black man. Some sort of bouncer from the looks of him.

“Hey, Ken,” Olive said quickly. “Listen, my bud and I are in a bit of a bind and we need to cut

through the club.”

“You know you aren't allowed in,” he said. “Especially, after the last time.”

“Ken, please,” she begged. “I won't break anything...or anyone...we're just cutting through. I promise.” Then, she reached up and softly touched the cross hanging on his chest. “What would Tyler Perry do?”

“Aww, don't go dragging TP into this,” he said.

She was getting to him though. That much was clear. This big bear of a man was clearly more of a Teddy Bear. Well, at least he was with Olive. His features magically changed from a scowl to, well, a *softer* scowl, then to a smile and, finally, into a great warm grin.

“Go on in,” he said. “Just make it fast.”

“God bless,” Olive said, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Always does,” Ken said as he opened the door for us.

“Hey!” said a skinny white guy in a homemade samurai suit, complete with plastic sword. “That's not fair! We've been suffering out here forever!!”

Ken slowly turned as we passed him and faced the loudmouth. “You better shut your trap,” Ken warned. “Or I'm gonna' shove that fake sword so far down your throat you'll sprout a tail.”

And the grizzly was back.



*"Operator!
Give me the number for 911!"*

– HOMER J. SIMPSON

Out of the frying pan and into the...
freakshow?

“Kaiju!” Olive yelled as she pulled me through the crazy crowd in a large warehouse-like room. I thought she had sneezed or something. Then I glanced around and saw a Japanese heavy metal band on one side with some sort of modified boxing ring in the middle. Wrestling inside the ring were two people in monster suits – one which looked like a pink Godzilla and the other like a living Statue of Liberty...with a wiffle-ball bat.

“What Jew?!” I screamed over the confusion.

“Kai-ju!” she repeated. “It means *mysterious creature.*”

Oh, I can think of a few other names for it.

“So, this is, like, one of your *things*?” I asked.
“You get into this stuff?”

“I did,” Olive said, now heading toward the restrooms. “It was a phase.”

“Sounds like you have a lot of those,” I noted.

“A lot of what?”

“*Phases.*”

“Doesn't everyone?” she asked.

“I suppose, but yours are a little...*extreme.*”

“If they aren't extreme, then what's the point?” she replied, pushing relentlessly through the pack of partiers.

“The point of what?”

“Living,” she said. “This thing we call life. How can you find the answers if you aren't willing to ask the questions?”

I nodded, feigning interest. Not in living, of course. I was vehemently interested in that. “So, what did you learn from your mystery monster phase?”

“Creature,” she corrected. “Mysterious *creature* phase.”

“My bad,” I said, feigning regret. “So what'd you learn?”

Olive stopped near the ladies room line on the far side of the ring and turned to face me. “Always put a zipper on your Kaiju suit.”

I looked nervously around for the gunman, then said, “Enlightening.”

“I thought so.”

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a bright, pink blur arcing toward us. I ducked and narrowly avoided the giant projectile.

Olive wasn't quite so lucky.

Before she could move, Pinkzilla had slammed

into Olive's shoulders and driven her down to the ground. Then, just as swiftly, Olive double-kicked Pinkzilla off of her and sent the hefty hellion flying.

“Lay off, Josie,” Olive warned the person, apparently, within the Pinkzilla suit. “I'm not in the mood.”

Suddenly, Pinkzilla flung off its mask and revealed a very large, very angry middle-aged goth with horrendously drawn eye brows.

“Look what you did to me!” the woman screamed at Olive, pointing a large, pink claw at her head.

“Please,” Olive said. “That was over a year ago. How was I supposed to know they wouldn't grow back.”

“You...shaved her eyebrows off?” I asked.

“She had it coming,” said Olive.

“Why you little—” Josie growled as she, again, dove at Olive.

Surprisingly cool and collected, Olive simply waited for the right moment, then whirled and landed a perfect roundhouse kick to her adversary's chin. Josie's head snapped up, her eyes snapped shut and Pinkzilla was out for the count.

Then, the crowd began to chant, “Queen Thong!! Queen Thong!! Queen Thong!!”

“Let me guess,” I said as she led me away. “You were a giant gorilla in a banana-yellow bikini.”

“Zip it,” Olive advised. And I obliged her.

Seconds later, we had slipped out the back door and were pounding frantically down the pavement of a long, dark alley.

“My car's just a little further,” called Olive.

“Car?”

“I've gotta' get you out of here. This guy seems like a professional and, if he is, your only

chance is to get out of New York as fast as you can.”

“Or we could grab another phone and call Monti,” I said, breathing heavily.

“There's no time and besides, what's Monti gonna' do?”

Well, either Monti lied to me or Olive didn't know him as well as she thought. As always, the truth was probably somewhere in the middle. She was right about one thing though...I was definitely running out of time. Now, my heart and head were hammering even worse – undoubtedly from being beaten, out-of-shape and a bitten by the great Count Skunkula.

“We're here,” Olive announced as she ran to a rusty, old garage door and started fumbling with a lock.

Moments later, the door rattled up and out of the way, and – after Olive threw a light switch – I was face-to-face...with the ugliest car in the world. There, in all its infamous glory, was the bubble butt of an AMC Pacer. It had obviously been re-painted – olive green – and was covered with a bizarre mosaic of bumper stickers that chronicled its owner's “journey”. Everything from women's rights to anti-abortion, *Keep it Green to Drill Baby Drill*.

“You don't have anything less...conspicuous?” I asked.

“What's wrong with it?” she asked, sounding half-hurt, half-confrontational.

“It's just...hard to hide in something like this.”

“We don't need to hide. We need to get away and the Olivemobile's got plenty of get up and go.”

“The Olivemobile?” I laughed.

“Got a better name?”

The Pea Green Putt-Putter.

“Not really,” I answered.

“Good,” she said, sliding into the driver’s seat. “Get in.”

Reluctantly, I did as I was told and the engine roared to life.

“Impressive,” I conceded.

“Told you she had a lot of *get-up-and-go*.” Olive grinned and threw the car in gear.

Once we rolled out of the “Olive Cave”, the car wheeled left and clipped a few garbage cans as we raced toward the light at the end of the alley. Apparently, Olive had something against using headlights. Eyes wide, fearing for my life, I pulled the seat belt down and fought with the old-fashioned lock.

“Sorry,” Olive said, eyes facing front. “That belt’s broken.”

Naturally.

Just then, I saw the silhouette of a man crossing the rapidly approaching sidewalk.

“Olive!” I cried.

“I see him,” she said, refusing to let off the gas.

Suddenly, the figure twisted toward us and pointed two rather large pistols.



*"Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful.
It's the transition that's troublesome."*

— ISAAC ASIMOV

“Hold on,” Olive said, yanking the wheel to the right.

The pacer slammed into an empty garbage can and sent it flying forward, ricocheting off the walls and heading straight for my assailant.

The well-armed shadow merely rolled to the side, deftly dodging the can as it tumbled past him out into the street and over the hood of a passing cab. The startled cab driver swerved off the road and into a fire hydrant, from which water exploded into the sky.

Undaunted, the silhouette stood once more and raised his weapons, but a split-second before he fired, Olive hit the headlights and momentarily

blinded the gunman. His shots sailed far wide of the windshield.

Then He fired again.

This time closer, but he was obviously still shooting blind for only one shot managed to pierce the windshield and it was at least a foot over my crouched and trembling body.

Olive squinted, focusing intently on the figure before us.

“Charlie?” she said, half-whispering.

Then, he dove out of the way as we rocketed past, out of the alley, then turning, up on two wheels, then down and through a wall of falling water.

“You know him?” I asked.

Olive swerved, dodging two other taxis which were spinning out of control.

“We dated,” she replied.

“Dated?” I said. “You dated my hit man?!”

“What do you mean *your* hit man?” she asked rather curiously.

I ignored the comment. “So, what was he? Your hit man phase?”

She turned again, this time barely avoiding a bus.

“Every girl goes through a 'bad boy' phase,” she quipped.

“Yeah, but your bad boy chops the head off of other bad boys.”

“I think you're confusing hit men with terrorists.”

“Does it matter?” I asked.

“Well,” she said with a wink and a smile. “If we're splitting hairs.”

Olive soared through an 'orange' light, then turned onto Broome — not to be confused with

“Boome” – and headed for I-78 and New Jersey, the place of Jennifer’s birth.

“Are we safe?” I asked, finally.

“Not from Charlie,” she said. “He never rests until the job is done.”

“Normally, I’d find that a rather redeeming quality.”

“Me too,” answered Olive. “Well, except for that whole *killing people* part.”

“Yeah,” I said. “I’m not a big fan of that part either.

“Everyone has their faults,” she casually noted.

“Most faults aren’t quite so—”

“Extreme,” Olive offered.

“I was gonna’ say ‘fatal’, but that works too.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” she said. “Take what you’ve got going on, for instance.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked, clearly defensive.

“Well, someone hired Charlie Tags to kill you, so I’d say that’s pretty fatal.”

“That was...a *mistake*,” I admitted.

“Speaking of mistakes,” she said. “I just remembered something.”

“Which is?”

“The reason I rarely drive the Olivemobile.”

“Which *is*?”

“When we were dating, Charlie hid a tracking device on her.”

A chill spidered up my spine.

“Then, why the flying—”

“*Bleep*.”

“Did you just ‘bleep’ me?” I asked, stunned.

“No profanity,” she said.

“You’re censoring me?”

“No profanity,” she repeated.

“But there's profanity on a bunch of those bumper-stickers back there,” I said, motioning toward the Pacer's butt.

“That's different.”

“How, exactly?” I demanded.

“Those were part of my journey,” she said.
“My past.”

“Well, they're still *presently* on there.”

“*Back* there,” she corrected, thumbing over her shoulder. “That's the past.”

“Well, it looks like your past just caught up with us,” I said, noticing a black Mercedes rushing up on us, headlights blaring.

“Looks like you're right,” she said. “For once.”

“What now?” I asked, shrinking down in my seat again.

“I'd probably pray if I were you.”

Peering over the dashboard, I see what has Olive's attention. The road ahead is literally consumed with construction workers, signs and barricades.

“Oh—”

“*Bleep!*”



*"Life is too short
for traffic."*

— DAN BELLACK

The Olivemobile hurtled toward certain disaster.

Before us, a construction worker was waving wildly. Behind us, my ex-girlfriend's ex-boyfriend was gaining in his menacing black Mercedes.

"You wanna' play?" Olive asked the rearview mirror. "Alright Charlie, let's play."

Terrified and personally *not* wanting to play, I slipped down even further and clutched the door handle for dear life. Then I closed my eyes...and prayed.

A construction worker screamed.

And the car jerked right.

Another construction worker screamed.

And the car leaned left.

Horns were blaring, tires were screeching and, honestly, I couldn't bear to look. The one thing I knew was that Charlie was obviously still on our tail.

So Olive hit a barricade and sent it flying. Apparently, she was more adept with garbage cans.

"Come on, Charlie Tags," she taunted. "Just a little closer."

Olive had clearly forgotten the objective here. "We *are* still trying to get away..."

"Don't tell me how to drive, Huggy."

"I'm not. I'm telling you how to keep us alive."

"Just leave that to me," she replied.

"I'm trying. I really, really am, but—"

"Huggy!" she yelled. "Not! Right! Now!!"

Another barricade met its maker.

"This is between me and Charlie!" she said.

Of course, I couldn't help feeling caught in the crossfire.

"Kiss it!" Olive shouted.

"Excuse me?" I asked. Then I saw that look in her eye. You know, the one typically followed by a one-way ticket to the rubber room hotel.

Then, with eyes as wide as her smile, Olive spun the wheel and slammed the brakes, causing the Olivemobile and its intrepid passenger — *me* — to tumble sideways several times before plopping unpleasantly back down on her wheels. And, as if nothing happened, Olive floored the gas pedal and peeled out, barely missing a drunk as we cut into the cross street.

"Like to see you do that to your precious Mercedes!" Olive taunted.

Upside down with legs looped over the top of

my seat, I untwisted myself just enough to see the black beast brake too fast for the truck behind it which screeched and slammed full-force into it. It was difficult to make out Charlie through the tinted glass, but I was certain I could see a big, white airbag.

“I thought you said he was unstoppable?” I asked as I rolled back into a sitting position.

“No,” she corrected. “I said Charlie wouldn't *rest* until the job was done...”

Olive turned the wheel and headed for the Newark Turnpike.

“...and he won't.”



*"Life being what it is,
one dreams of revenge."*

– PAUL GAUGUIN

Charlie cursed.

He couldn't believe that schizophrenic bimbo had gotten away from him.

But then, the more difficult the job, the more he enjoyed the challenge – and savored the finale. Yes, he would certainly celebrate once Boome was dead. Olive would simply be...well...the *olive* on top of his metaphorical martini.

He never really wanted to kill her.

Well, not until today.

Now Charlie wanted to kill her even more than he wanted out of his smashed and smoking Mercedes. However, first things first. So he pushed the airbag away from his bruised face. Then he

glanced at the receiver.

Good, he thought. It's still receiving the signal from the tracking device.

He then picked up the large Hallmark bag which had slid out from under the passenger seat, detached the receiver and slid it in with the three figurine boxes in the giant Hallmark gift bag.

If she'd broken his figurines...

He didn't want to think about it.

"You okay in there?" came a voice from the cracked windshield.

Charlie looked up and gave the concerned construction worker a reassuring, albeit disingenuous, smile.

"Don't worry," the man said. "We'll have you out of there in a—."

Charlie kicked the door open with one great thrust, calmly climbed out with gift bag in hand and straightened his jacket, making sure his gun-holsters remained hidden.

"Uh...okay," the worker mumbled, then turned to see everyone scattering away from the mangled Mercedes which now not only had smoke, but also flames bursting forth from the hood. "We'd better get out of here," the man said, then ran for cover.

Charlie simply strolled at a leisurely pace. Being a hit man was all about control and he wasn't about to let this minor setback unnerve him or throw him off his game.

Someone screamed, "It's gonna' blow!"

Hopefully, she's driving Boome as nuts as she drove me, Charlie thought as he turned toward the street they used for their escape. I wonder if she told the idiot she still loves him?

Charlie reached into his pocket and pulled out

a cellphone.

“Yeah. It's Charlie,” he said.

He continued onto the sidewalk, then turned and watched the Mercedes explode.

“You owe me a car.”



*"He felt that his whole life was some kind of dream
and he sometimes wondered whose it was
and whether they were enjoying it."*

— DOUGLAS ADAMS, *HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY*

"We should pull over," I said.

"Bad idea," Olive replied.

"But we need a plan. We can't keep driving around like this forever."

"We won't," she replied. "Besides, I've already got a plan."

"Really? When were you gonna' share it with the rest of the team?"

"So we're a team?"

"You know what I mean," I said.

"Not sure I do," she paused thoughtfully. "You mean like Lois and Clark or Jon and Kate?"

"More like Abbot and Costello."

She hesitated. "And just which one would I be?"

"Take your pick. Would you rather be plump or proudly sporting a 'stache?"

"I'll take the mustache," she answered. "Shaving's easy, liposuction is a—"

"*Bleep!*" I said.

"Hey, now you're getting it! Oh wait...howabout Bonnie and Clyde?"

"Yeah, except we're not criminals and I don't plan on going out in a blaze of glory," I said. "Besides, you don't smoke cigars."

"I sort of figured I'd be Bonnie."

"I was speaking of Bonnie," I replied.

"She smoked cigars?" she asked.

"By the bushel."

Olive thought about this for a moment, then answered, "Then I guess they're out of the question."

"What about the plan?" I pressed.

"Oh that," she said as the Olivemobile rested at a traffic light.

"Yeah *that*."

She turned, looked me in the eyes and said, "You should turn yourself in."

"What?! Are you out of your friggin' mind?"

"Jail's probably the safest place for you," she asserted.

"I think I'd rather hear Plan B."

"There is no Plan B," she said. "That's plan A thru Z."

"So, I have no say in this whatsoever?"

"Not really. It's a free country, but I rule the Olivemobile."

"Then I wanna' defect," I said and tried to open the door. It wouldn't budge.

“Sorry,” Olive smiled. “Only opens from the outside.”

I then tried the window knob. Useless.

“Passenger window's been broken for a while.”

“So, basically, you've kidnapped me.” It was more of a statement than a question.

“Think of it more like a citizen's arrest,” she replied.

“That's not funny,” I said.

“I'm not laughing.”

“Besides, citizen's never arrest anyone anymore.”

“I'm doing it right now. And if you don't come quietly I'm gonna' have to taser...”

“Don't even.”

“...you—you're on TV, Huggy.”

“Yeah,” I said, rolling my eyes. “They're called re-runs.”

“I don't think so.”

I strained to see what had so utterly captured my captors attention and saw my big ugly mug behind a well-dressed anchorman. Then the screen changed to a live shot outside the Tribeca Grand, where an army of police-cars were parked outside.

“That's my hotel,” I whispered.

“We should probably check the radio,” she said as she snapped it on.

“...and it seems that all evidence would point to the unthinkable. That actor Hugo Boome has murdered three sanitation workers in his hotel room here at the Tribeca Grand. Police are not sharing much at this time, but authorities have confirmed reports that they have found a weapon with prints that match those of the accused actor.”

Those must be the guys that beat me up.

"If you have any knowledge of Mr. Boome's whereabouts, please contact the proper authorities and, as always, use caution. He is considered extremely unstable and very, very dangerous," the reporter paused. "Back to you, Daisy..."

Olive clicked off the radio.

"Dangerous? They clearly must have you confused with someone else."

"Yeah," I said. "Charlie freakin' Tags!"

"We don't know that for sure."

"Monti would."

"Monti? Why Monti?" Olive asked.

"Because...Monti hired Charlie to kill me."

Olive threw the car in *park*.

"Why in the world would Monti want you dead?!" she screamed.

"He doesn't...well, I guess he might...now that I screwed everything up."

"Huggy, you're making less sense than a politician."

Hanging my head, I opted to tell her the truth.

"Listen," I whispered. "I had Monti hire someone to kill me. Apparently, it was this Charlie Tags guy."

"Because—?"

I hesitated, then answered, "I have rabies."

"That's what my mother said."

"It's not a joke, Olive. I'm dying. I just...I didn't wanna' die like *that*."

Olive tapped the wheel as she tried to get a handle on everything.

"So you hired a hit man?"

I couldn't respond. Couldn't move. I felt...ashamed.

"Do you have any idea how idiotic this

sounds?” she said, glancing in her rearview mirror.

“Well I couldn’t do it myself!” I yelled. “I tried, Olive! God knows...I tried...”

Silence. Sweet, blessed silence.

Then, the perfect peace was obliterated by a horn behind us.

“So why didn’t you just let Charlie shoot you on the street?!” she asked.

“Because...now I don’t wanna’ die.”

The horn continued to honk, now accompanied by flashing headlights.

Olive exhaled, “And people call *me* fickle.”

I tuned to peek at the driver of the van behind us. Now, he was expressing his frustration with some choice words, illegal within the holy sanctum of the Olivemobile. Oddly, the Pacer’s self-proclaimed dictator seemed oblivious.

“Huggy, you can’t just cancel a hit because you’re not in the mood!”

More honking.

More lights.

A *lot* more profanity.

“I’ll be right back,” Olive announced, opening her door.

“Why don’t we just drive away?” I asked.

She reached into the backseat and withdrew a purple polka-dotted duffle bag. “Why doesn’t he just drive around?” she said as she twirled toward the van and casually reached into the – now open – duffle bag behind her back.

The taser.

Oh, crap.

I clumsily crawled over the driver’s seat and stumbled out the door after her.

“Olive, wait!” I said, but she was already at the driver’s open window and the two of them were

starting to cause quite a ruckus.

“Don't people know how to pass cars in Jersey?” Olive screamed.

“Don't you Yorkies know how to drive?!” the driver yelled back.

“Olive, please...” I said. Then softer, “We don't need this.”

“Who's this joker? Your bodyguard?” asked the handy-man with a name-tag that read *Elton*.

“Please,” Olive scoffed. “You're the one who needs guarding.”

I grabbed the hand with the taser.

“Don't,” I pleaded.

“Why not?” she growled, fighting my grip.

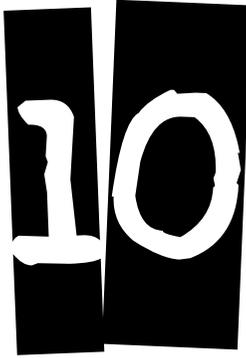
“Because Olive, it's...it's not what Jesus would do.”

This seemed to not only relax her, but also Elton who was apparently losing interest in this meaningless confrontation.

“And how would you know, Huggy?” she asked.

“Just never pictured JC as the *zap-people-with-a-zillion-volts* type.”

Suddenly, Elton went bug-eyed when he saw my face on the TV – looking back at me, then the TV, then back to me again.



*"That's the secret to life...
Replace one worry with another..."*

— CHARLES M. SCHULZ

The Eltonmobile drove really well.

At least...that's what my taser-wielding sidekick told me. She was still pretty bitter about leaving her “baby” behind, but I finally convinced her it was best to switch vehicles.

Wrapping Elton up with duct tape and bringing him along — as opposed to leaving him behind to tattle on us — was my idea.

Shaving off the unconscious Elton's eyebrows was hers. Apparently, that was a phase she was still working through.

“Is it dead?” Olive asked.

She was not, of course, referring to the engine...or my sense of hope, which was, in fact,

teetering on the edge of oblivion. She was, however, referring to Elton's pathetic excuse for a phone.

"As my career," I answered, shutting it in the glove box. "And he's only got a couple bucks in his wallet. No credit cards."

I still couldn't believe she talked me into going through Elton's stuff after we transformed the man into a duct-taped mummy. At least we had a full tank of gas.

"What about your duffle bag?" I asked. "Aside from razors and tasers, are there any other surprises in there?"

"Not really," she said. "A change of clothes, some granola bars and a petrified frog. The usual."

I wasn't going near the petrified frog. Literally or figuratively. I was, however, quite curious as to where we were headed.

"So, what's the status of Plan A?"

"Cancelled," she answered.

Angels sang, church bells rang and sweet relief filled my soul.

Then Olive announced, "I've got a better idea."

And *fear*, my dear old friend, came back for a quick little visit.

"We're taking the fight to Charlie," she said.

"Y'know, Plan A isn't sounding so bad—"

"No," she insisted. "If it's Charlie's crime, it's Charlie's time."

I groaned. "Aside from being incredibly cliché...and somewhat naïve...that is utterly, unbelievably insane."

"It's the only way to clear your name, Huggy." Olive turned the van onto the highway. "Charlie isn't going to stop and, more than likely, the cops won't

catch him. They've tried for years.”

I seriously couldn't believe where this was going. “So...what? It's up to *us* to catch him?”

“Something like that.”

“Something like that? Or *exactly* like that?”

“Well, if we can't catch Charlie — we'll probably have to kill him,” she said.

At this, Elton seemed to stir. So Olive reached back over the seat and bonked him in the head.

I cringed and started to develop a sympathy headache. How many whacks to the head could this guy take?

“And what about our buddy *Elton-khamen*? Are we just gonna' kill him too?”

This time, there wasn't a peep from our mummified hostage.

“Don't be silly,” she said. “We'll just dump him somewhere in Pennsylvania.”

“Pennsylvania?” I asked, clearly perplexed. “I thought we were heading back to New York!”

“Why in the world would we go to New York when Charlie's mom lives in Pennsylvania?”

“His mom?! Why in the world are we dragging his mother into this?”

“Because,” Olive replied with a mischievous grin “Charlie Tags...is a *mummy's* boy.”

**to be
continued...**

SUICIDE

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Life is a love story. And, when we don't feel loved...life, well, it *stinks*.

Life is also a war. Won one day, one hour at a time. This author, many of his friends and family have fought suicidal thoughts. Some have surrendered...and left many broken hearts behind.

Please, please, don't do the same. Fight. For your life. Love. The way you long to be loved. You are *not* alone. There are people ready and willing to help. All you have to do is ask...

Send an anonymous email to jo@samaritans.org

Or call 1-800-SUICIDE

Teens may call the *Covenant House Nineline*

1-800-999-9999

Also, if you're in the US you can call the
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255

Or you may visit suicide.com or suicide.org

Please, talk to someone. There *are* people who care. There *is* help. All you have to do is ask.

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