

Conversation with My Killer

By:

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I'm an Orthodox Jew. This means keeping to Jewish Law as it's written down by the ancestors. I do the best I can. I'm also a detective. I work underground for the L.A.P.D. I hunt down serial killers. These are guys with twisted minds. What kind of heads they have, I couldn't say. I could, but who would take a chance figuring that out? These heads go in strange places. Because it's not one thing going on in there, and that's the reason. That's one reason. It's a bunch of things, and they're all related. Wired up around an impulse. Impulse happens, like you're here in one place one day, and a few hours later you're in another place and you're in action. It's like a junkie – his legs are taking him to a certain neighborhood on a certain day on a certain hour and he's not exactly thinking about that, he's not exactly thinking, but the synapses are flashing in his brain and there he is cutting some guy's head off. Boom, blood is spattering all over the joint. He puts the head in a refrigerator and wipes up.

Personally, I'm into physical fitness. I got bars on my doors for pull-ups, along with the *mezuzahs*. I have a *mezuzah* on every door. I do bikes. I swim in a pool. I'm in shape. You would know by looking at me. I'm small and wiry. Ordinarily, I do the Jewish way, I wear the *kippa*, I have earlocks, I keep kosher, I go to *Shul*. An intellectual, I'm not, but I keep up with events and I read. I keep current. I'm proud to be of the Book. Smarts I have that have been cultivated for thousands of years. So, yes, Jews are smarter and more talented. This could be true even for a cop. Nineteen years I've got already in the department. Because I do my job well and I live the right way. And I can shoot. I was third from the top when it comes to shooting. Any kind of gun. A pistol, a machine gun, you name it. The two guys ahead of me, *Goyim* who played with guns since they were four. A Jew, at four, he puts honey on a Hebrew letter and he memorizes the bible.

I'm exaggerating, but there is a truth there. The problem is the nature of Man, and nobody knows about that more than me. I have seen the worst of the worst. I have infiltrated motorcycle gangs and executed drug dealers. Some of you might take offense at that. Fine by me. How does he do it?, you might be wondering. When I go out on a job, first I cut my earlocks off and my *yarmulke* I leave in the drawer. I carry two guns, one in my boot and the other in my belt. I can talk with any kind of accent. But I shoot before I talk, and that's why I'm still alive. That's more important than being immortal. Where I come from, there is no such thing. Immortality was invented by Gentiles. For us, we bow in gratitude for the opportunity to live. Hopefully, the blood lives on in your children and someone remembers your name and that once you walked the earth. *Selah*.

They call me Judah the Just. Sometimes it's Joe the Killer or Killer Joe. They get that from television, like everything else. My real name is Joseph Weinststein. Feel free to not believe me. I have no reason to tell you who I am, and we'll leave it at that. Otherwise, I live in the Valley. I have two kids in the Israeli army, and as soon as I can finish this final job of mine, my wife and I will join them in the homeland.

The final job is this wiseguy who likes to cut off heads. Black heads. Big black heads with lots of hair. Big young black guys with big heads and big hair. He uses a sword. He, too, has various names. The Avenger. White Pharaoh. The Sword of Justice, and so on. His real name nobody knows. Probably something like Jimmy. He hangs out in the Echo Park Region and makes a living stealing car radios. He'll go by with a wrench and a screwdriver and rip out your radio. You can't see nothing because the neighborhood is dark and the roads are narrow and wind-y and the area is full of canyons. You see a big white guy with no teeth wandering around, you don't mess with him. Even the Mexican kids stay clear of him, because they're superstitious types. They don't know anything, so they believe anything. You could tell them water was nitrous oxide and sooner or later some kid will come along and say water is nitrous oxide. He'll insist. On a test. So much for his education. But don't get me wrong, as a Hebrew, I believe in education. On the other hand, I know this Yeshiva graduate in the Valley Village, Jonathan, who walks the streets talking to God. Out loud. Too much education and his mind is fa-cocked. So much for the human condition. Say that water is nitrous oxide one thousand times, the one thousand and one time – water is nitrous oxide and that's all there is to it. I blame television for that, and all those fucking commercials. They'll tell you lies until they come out of your own mouth.

I'm in shape because I work hard. People say Joe the Killer, or Judah the Just, is obsessed with fitness. But I don't wear one of those things on my wrist that tells you you're not dead yet. I can figure that out for myself. In my tradition, as I've said, we bury fast and take care of the children. I know when I've pushed myself – one more, and I'm done. I don't sleep much anymore, so I can wander the streets early and late. L.A. is the loneliest place at night. This is my last shot. I walk up and down, looking at the cars, and I'm looking for Jimmy – probably a toothless blonde motherfucker walking around with a butcher knife and a screwdriver. I'm just gonna shoot him and ask questions later. It's Jewish ethics. Guy at my precinct, Captain Jack, he thinks I'm a chauvinist prick. I tell him Jews are the best because we've been purified by persecution. Culled, you could say. You're good at money, he says, and that's it. Modern culture, I remind him, was founded by Einstein, Marx and Freud. Three Jews. Find this serial killer, he tells me, and we'll call it even. Even though they think of me as a killer, a rogue cop, they let me do a few things, especially now that I'm getting ready to leave. And they won't help me, they go on to say. I'm on my own. It's all right by me. I enjoy shooting these creepy assholes out there.

They, the department, needed someone in shape who could wander the streets of Echo Park like a homeless. They wanted me to do it on my own, as I said, without

back-up, which is fine with me, because the guy is a maniac. I had a long-hair wig and a beard and wore tattered clothes. My sneakers were losing their soles. I have two guns, like I've explained, and I will kill this motherfucker as soon as I find him. This person, a.k.a Jimmy Smith, is a white man who saves the heads. He'll kill as big a black guy as he can find and then cut off his head and keep it somewhere. Like a trophy. Well, I won't kid you, we don't know much, like what he does with the heads. We just find these headless black bodies lying in the streets or a head in somebody's refrigerator. Nobody knows but us, because you can't explain these things. It's human nature, which tends to go amok. I have this fantasy where I'm hiding in a canyon – behind me is downtown L.A. – and I'm looking at this big picture window facing the canyon. A giant of a white man walks across the window, it's like a stage, and he's carrying a big black head. The head's eyes are wide open and they look alive. Terror and ferocity are bulging his blood-shot eyes. The white man puts the head down. The head's eyes look out. They see me. The white guy backs up. The head scampers quickly to the left, grabs a glance out at me, scampers more to the left, looks to his right, and screams. A living head that sees and scampers and screams. I open fire, shooting everything in the window until I'm out of ammunition, and I'm hardly breathing. And then I wake up.

This is a recurring dream, and it actually almost happened, as I'll describe in a minute. To tell the truth, I'm scared out there at night. Nothing spooks me more than homelessness. Poverty and nothingness and meaninglessness and filthy darkness. So I keep to the Faith. I won't bother to explain. Better to be the hunter than the hunted, but the human stain, as has been said, really stains. On top of that, I'm fighting aging and retirement and walking from streetlight to streetlight. Hate rises up in me, but I fight it off with a blessing or a curse. A good old Yiddish curse. Like may you die and all your ancestors before you and the progeny to come. Doesn't make sense, but it works in the moment. And I spit up a brown lump of phlegm from the stupid bronchitis I'm walking around with. All that shitty dust in the air. In Israel they have good air. Or so they tell me.

I'm wondering what the motherfucker is thinking. Maybe it's this: There's a little Jew after me. Even the cops think he's out of his mind. Judah the Just, or Killer Joe. He's got two guns, one in his boot, one in his belt. He's a rogue cop. No one else will bother with me. Only this little prick. And he coughs and spits. I can hear him a mile away. I can watch him walking up Glendale Blvd. up into the canyons. Dodger stadium is a mile away. I could be playing center field for all he knows. He's looking for car radios ripped out. Then he checks out the nearby houses. He'll hide in a canyon and watch. We're all watching. Me and the heads, we watch this little Hebrew, as he watches us. It's very annoying. One day I'll shoot the Hebe with my shotgun and my heads will eat him.

So that's a little crazy. What does he really do with his heads?, I wonder. Speaking of which, I've got a nutcase in my neighborhood – Jonathan. Actually, he's a Lubovitcher Rebbe who spends half his time in a nuthouse. Don't ask me how these things can happen, but they do. Families are walking around, arguing loudly in the

streets – in English, Yiddish and a little Hebrew -- there are Nephews and Uncles half out of their minds. Nobody complains. God wills it. According to Jonathan, God hears all your thoughts. According to certain Muslims, you could blow up a truck in the midst of a hundred innocent people – God knows what they are thinking – and then you go directly to Paradise where beautiful maidens await you on satin sheets. I should know. Not about the beautiful maidens, but the idiots who want to go there. I had to infiltrate a Mosque once and pray to Allah five times a day. I made the mistake one Friday of dahvening a Hebrew prayer. A phrase from the *Amidah*. Just for an instant. Who knows where it went? An old man looked over his shoulder, but he thought he was dreaming, or he thought he was hallucinating, I don't know what, but I got out of that mosque, actually a storefront on Sunset, quickly.

My prayer did not go to Allah, I'm sure of that. Allah doesn't give a rat's ass about me or anything else that goes on in Echo Park. Who knows what Allah thinks? How can anyone know? Who the fuck is Allah? We Jews also have a God who has a name but you never say his name, God forbid, it's unhealthy and illegal. Maybe he heard me and saved my life. I got down on my knees and I murmured. I did what they did and I let them see me. I pressed my forehead into the floor. I wept, spiritually and fearfully. Too loud, I thought, and I eased up. I got out of there, walking slowly, slowly. But they saw me. They looked sideways at me. They can smell a Jew, it's instinctive with them. Sworn biological enemies are we, and I was after some of those assholes. I had to become a member and a fellow believer and discover if there was a suicidal plan there to blow up buildings or shoot people. This is something we Hebrews also can do but we don't blow ourselves up along with the building. That is just sheer stupidity, in my opinion.

Anyway, I thought something was going on there. Bearded men whispering into their cell phones. I grew a goatee and shaved my head and wore an Islamic-type beanie. I acted like the tough L.A. guy I actually was, one who harbored extra resentments against authority. Not only authority but the Western World, ruled by Satan and a legion of devils, some white, some black, even the Chinese. The whole thing frightened me, I have to admit. Give me an ordinary psychopath, like Jimmy, I'm okay with it, I'll deal with it, but these guys were doing shit for Religion itself, for Allah. Young guys with brains in their heads and lives to live were thinking of killing themselves for God. It's impossible to deal rationally with that kind of shit. You have to kill them all.

Maybe it's money and status, too, you never know. Everybody wants to be a big shot. It's in the human genome, the human condition. Give me what I want, when I want it, now. This one guy, Mohammed, naturally, I think he had a secret agenda. Make a contribution, he would say -- just like the hustlers from *Chabad* – balm for the suffering Muslims of the world. Little did he know who he was talking to, or that I had two sons in the Israeli Army. Forget about it, as my friend Jonathan would say. No chance. We fought it out with them one time in the desert, as far as I know, and they claim that they won the battle and took slaves. This was a thousand years ago or more. It's been touchy ever since. Like my friend Paul, in the

department, the Marrano from Portugal, convert or die. But I'm losing the thread. I'll just say that some converted and others died and the rest dispersed. What is it with the fucking Jews? I tend to lose it when I think of all the abuse from the beginning of time, and I can't stand it when my fellow culprits dress in black and advertise their differences.

I became a cop for reasons. To be normal. To stand up. To participate in the violence of life. Which brings me back to Jimmy. Jimmy has my number, he knows I'm after him and it's me. I feel like he's watching me. I feel like he knows who I am and what I'm thinking. Maybe I'm paranoid. I worked a motorcycle gang once and was totally cool with it. I could ride with the guys. I have a giant motorcycle of my own. A Honda. So I wasn't fearful, though the depths of brutality they were capable of would give a normal person pause. I'm not a normal person. I wore a leather jacket with insignia and boots and a helmet and shades and a shaved head and I rode. They were deeply prejudiced and patriotic people. Three of the brutes I arrested for crank. I still see some of them around the canyons. They don't recognize me. Usually, I park on Sunset and walk up the hill. I don't give up. I perservere. If I see a big white guy with bad teeth and a stupid haircut, I'll talk to him and then I'll kill him. My image of Jimmy. Jimmy in the window walking back and forth with a human head in his hand. Like the death's head on the jackets. It's a hell of a world we live in. I can't believe it sometimes. Mainly I stick to my job. There's a kid walking two bikes up the hill. He's got to stop every few feet to get his balance. Police sirens day and night, along with the red ambulance truck and the fire engines.. It never stops. I keep in shape so I can face the danger. In Israel it's the same, an ever-present danger of death and annihilation, but there I'll be a complete citizen. Here, I'm a target. They know me, the people from the underworld..

I would say to Jimmy, if that's his name, Jimmy, pack it in *bubala* because you don't have a chance against a determined person like me, who will walk up and down these hills and canyons endlessly, endlessly, for one good shot. Could be this kid for all I know. It's hard to ride one bike and guide another one up the hill at the same time. Stolen bike, no doubt.

I got to get a good night's sleep. I think about everything bad. Paranoid and delusional. I think they all can see what I'm thinking and feeling. Nothing is hidden. It's all known. Damn. It's not God I'm thinking about, it's my survival. My basic survival. That's it. And a drink and a good meal, though I don't drink anymore because I can't sleep because of the blood pressure medicine. Splotches on my body, bruises and stains, I have no idea where they come from or what they are, or what they mean. And I can't taste the food anymore. It's like sand, or the shit they put on walls - - plaster. And I have no sex. No sexual thoughts, even, nothing to entertain me in that area. Nobody I imagine erotic events about. Certainly not my wife, who is a typical orthodox wife, with a wig and sagging tits. And I have no friends, except Don maybe, only enemies, one in particular, my boy Jimmy. The others are all hallucinating fools. And they know what I think of them. They know.

It all sounds crazy to me. What's going on in the world? It must be the End. It's the Apocalypse, at last. The End of Days. People cutting people's heads off and parading up and down. Bedlam. An epidemic of stupidity and madness. And the kid keeps walking the fucking bikes up the hill like nothing else is happening. Now he stops to rest and think over his situation. No way out, Pal. Here we are on Glendale Boulevard and it doesn't make any fucking sense. A bomber could come along, a lost bomber, who couldn't find his way to the Federal building.

There is a dirt path I know which leads to a cabin overlooking a canyon. That's where I'm headed. It's twilight. I amble along, but I feel watched. I'm wearing a blanket like a homeless and a straw cowboy hat. Won't do much help if it rains. I decide that the hat is too much and toss it into the brush. Homeless people do strange things. And I'm talking to myself. "They got atomic bombs and atomic waste, it lasts to the end of time, crazy people who don't know what they've done, amassing poisons in the ground, and in the air, it's a crazy species. Is this survival of the fittest or evolution? We have a President who doesn't read. He twitters. What could that mean? I don't even know what a twitter is." I'm talking like that out loud, like my acquaintance in my neighborhood, Jonathan. And on and on about technology and ignorant politicians and the end of the world. I'm not far from the kid with the bikes and he's looking at me the way people look at mad homeless people. "What are you looking at?" say I, belligerently. He doesn't answer and picks up his pace. I decide to go after him. Something in my legs decides. I have no idea why, I just start going after him. "Whatsamatter, you don't like bums? You don't like street people? Fuck you, you punk asshole!" And on and on like that until the kid stops. He looks at me with pity and contempt. It occurs to me that I could shoot him right there on the street. It's an impulse we have as cops. We're armed, after all. But thou shalt not kill and I don't want to blow my cover. I've killed before and it's a mess. I cringe and hold my arms over my head, capitulating. Whimpering. He stares at me for a minute and then spits and goes on his way.

Who was I at that moment? Who am I now? I stay where I am. It takes me a minute to remember myself, and figure out what I'm doing. I'm good at that shit – I can play a Muslim householder or a homeless bum. That's not chopped liver. Although at the moment, I'm stunned. Jimmy. It's all about Jimmy. Toothless Jimmy with his wigs and disguises. We have a lot in common: He cuts off heads and I stalk people. We're the apex of human development. How could all this be happening? Everything seems random, out of control, meaningless. I feel like I have to slide a disc into my head. The Ancient People of the Book disc. Meaning. The Torah. The Talmud. Instead, it starts to rain, and I'm stumped, mentally.

I'm sheltering under a tree and water is pouring down from the sky. I feel for my guns, and I'm reminded. I have a purpose: ridding the world of psychopathic killers. It's a calling, like God in the burning bush. But whose God is God? We don't own God, but we think we do. The black-clad *haredim* think they own God. I don't know how I'm going to handle that in the State of Israel. Probably I'll keep my mouth shut.

Or give up all this orthodox behavior. Probably I'll do nothing. No, I'll get a job with the Jewish Police. We have a big problem with the Arabs, 180 million to 6. Not good odds. And yet people get up every day and go on with their lives. Even Jimmy. With a hundred thousand hydrogen bombs all over the place.

A *Chabad* guy comes over to my house in the middle of the night, banging on my door. These are the gangsters of the Orthodox world. They don't ask for money, they demand it. It's extortion. I say No!, I don't let them in the door. In every other respect, I'm a mark. I can't say no, not to my sons, not to my wife, but to these guys, I say, "Get the hell out of here or I'll call the cops!" I'm a cop myself, and I'm armed, and they know that, but there's an unwritten rule: Jews don't shoot Jews. Or so they think. Next time this guy comes – it's always the same jerk, with his *tzis-tzis* showing, pounding on the door, shouting in Yiddish, cursing me. Next time I'll shoot the motherfucker, and I'll enjoy it.

It's confusing, what goes on in life. On the one hand, I want people to like me and on the other I want them to fear me. It's like the general society. There's nothing holding the whole thing up. I don't mean me – my legs are holding me up and the law and the department and the Orthodox life – but society in general? Forget about it. It's hanging by a thread. It's like people are walking around with shelves in their heads. Shelves or metal plates. Press on the morality there and it turns to mush. You don't know what they'll do. They're capable of anything. It all depends on the situation. Take my present murderous quarry, Jimmy the head-chopper. Where'd he get the idea? Television news. But, to tell the truth, I don't know where the motherfucker gets his thoughts. What kinds of thoughts could he be thinking? What is he doing in his spare time? What does spare time mean to him? What is time?

He 's in the neighborhood. I can smell him. He smells like a Gentile who doesn't bathe. An unclean animal. A pagan with rotten teeth and a hatchet and a knife. I'm on Lake Shore Ave. now, which winds up the hill off Fletcher Drive. I'm on foot and it's stopped raining. No place to park, as usual. Then I see a BMW with its passenger-side window smashed in. The radio console has been ripped out of the car dashboard. What's a BMW doing around here? An actress, slumming. Anyway, she'll regret it. Good thing for her the car 's still there. I'm breathing fast and thinking fast. The motherfucker could be around here, close by. I've tracked him here a few times and I know he's seen me around. I'm hoping he's not watching me now. I step off the road into a dark patch and catch my breath.

Life 's not eternal. This is it. Only God is eternal because he's God. For us, it's the blood, the grandchildren, the genes. Of course, there are maniacs amongst us who believe in all kinds of the things, like the earth is flat and that we transmogrify or become *dibbuks*. People have to believe, or they become like Jimmy, and give in to the killer impulse, the evil inclination. There are dirt paths going up into the woods, into the canyons, where there are hidden cabins. We're a mile or two from downtown L.A., but it's woody and dark. I stand quietly, listening. Water is

dropping from the leaves. The road is shining wet. Sirens. Always sirens. Traffic. Then my phone buzzes. It's a text.

"Joe," it says. "Killer Joe. I'm up here. Come get me."

I thought I'd left my phone in my car, down on Sunset. For a moment, I'm stupified. For a moment, I'm wondering about the meaning of life. I forgot about the phone. What am I? Who am I? Joe, the killer cop. Chasing bad guys, mainly on his own. Lies and justifications and phony identities. I'm tempted to give it up and wander. The Wandering Jew, formerly an undercover L.A. policeman. Getting old and shaky. I remember when there were no walk-around phones. You had to find a phone booth. And how did he get my number? I'm holding the phone where another text appears:

"Got head in my hand. Lots of hair. Once it was part of body, walked talked. Had thoughts. Family. Now look at im."

I'm thinking the time has come for Jimmy the Head-chopper, when the text continues:

"Life is strange," it says.

Above us, a helicopter is going by. I'd thought that there was no helicopter on offer for the mission. Is that for me? We have a lot of helicopter action in L.A.. I should make contact with them. I should call in for the back-up. I look up at it through the dripping trees. Yes, a police helicopter, looking for somebody, circling the area. Noisy. Maybe looking for Jimmy, looking for me. My phone buzzes and I know they know. But they're not back -up.

"Perpetrator in the cabin," says the speaker on the helicopter, "Go get him, Rabbi." "Rabbi" is a term of abuse. Fat Eddie's voice, with a Spanish accent. The helicopter hovers. It occurs to me that I'm a serial killer as much as Jimmy. Mostly in the line of duty, but not always, like now -- I'm stalking Jimmy and I'm going to kill him, and he knows I'm near. "Come, come," Jimmy says, from somewhere in the cabin. I notice a slim dirt path winding up the hill through the trees and brush. The helicopter circles above. I check the forty-five on my hip. Locked and loaded. I crouch and get on the path. I'm on an adrenalin high now, I'm excited, I move with quick, quiet steps. No need to be cute, he knows it's me, he knows I'm coming. I see a light on top of the hill. Beyond it is a canyon. Beyond the canyon is Dodger Stadium. Jimmy is watching. I can feel his eyes on me. I step off the path and into the dark. I want to get around the cabin and into the canyon, so I can get to Jimmy from there, but it's not so easy because of the foliage and rocks and old junk lying around.

And it's dark. I decide to check the phone, see if he knows where I am exactly. Use the phone as a flashlight. I can't see anything but the light in the cabin. A shadow

crosses it. I turn on the phone. There is a text. "Back way," it says. Funny dude, this Jimmy, one of the strangest minds on earth. My heart is racing because I can't move without making noise. Have to concentrate, go slowly, one step at a time. "Come, come. No hurry. Tell the helicopter boys to fuck off."

A baseball game has started in the stadium. From where I am, I can see the lights over the field and hear the crowd and the announcer. Overhead, the helicopter continues going loudly round and round. I imagine Jimmy pacing in his cabin and peering this way and that. I move a few steps. Feels like a crescendo of noise. There's a little patio in the back, with chairs overlooking the canyon. An ashtray. A lounge. A barbecue. I can see it clearly because there's a light on there. Looks like I have to slide down hill a bit to get below the patio, arrange myself for a good shot. And then I hear Jimmy, close by.

"Where do you think you're going, Joe? I got a bead on you. You're trapped."

I duck under the patio ledge and then a floodlight comes on. I tighten myself into a ball.

Then the helicopter search-light bears down as well, joining the flood-light and illuminating my butt. The scene is lit up like a movie set. I peek up and see a large figure walking up and down in front of a huge picture window that looks out into the canyon. It's just like I imagined it in my nightmares. It's Jimmy. He appears to have a microphone in his hand, and there are speakers set up on either side of the cabin. Somebody liked to hear music out there as they had their smokes and their whiskeys and enjoyed the view. He's carrying something round and hairy in his other hand. And there's a sword strapped to his waist.

The helicopter is making a hell of a racket.

"She had a police dog, a German Shepherd, in the back of the car. Nice as you please. I got him up here with me now. If you look up, you can see him."

I don't look up.

"Okay, I'll whack him with my head and he'll bark."

A whack and a bark.

"I CAN'T HEAR YOU!," I yell out. I try to wave up to the copter but I can't tell if they see me or not. I try to pull my phone out, but I can't find it. Typical. It's stuck somewhere in this little crevice I'm wedged into under the patio. Behind me is a fall of about hundred feet down into the canyon. The copter can't hover forever and moves off, finally, presumably to circle the area again. No further communication. A moment of relative quiet.

“Looks like your friends are gone,” announces Jimmy through the mic. I can hear the sound of the copter fading toward the Stadium. “Can you hear me better now?” murmurs Jimmy into his mic, “Just raise your hand.” I raise my hand. “Good,” he says, “I can see you clearly. I can shoot your butt off, if I want to.” I try to squish myself further into the crevice. “I can still see you,” he says. “I’m surprised at you, Joe, you don’t usually have a helicopter checking up on you in the L. A. sky. I’m surprised you walked right into this trap I set up for you. I thought you were smarter than that. I guess you’re losing your smarts.”

I don’t say anything, but he hits home – I did walk into it. I feel a moment of self-loathing. Then anger. It’s not over yet. Re back-up, sometimes I do have back-up, sometimes I don’t. Helicopters tend to get in the way and make a lot of noise. You can hide from them easily. Now I can hear it circling Dodger Stadium.

“Anyway, they won’t be of much use unless they have rockets on that thing. Am I right? Just raise your hand.” I briefly raise my hand. “I got her dog, police dog, Elinor is her name. Not the dog, the BMW girl, an actress. A great looker. Left her dog in the car. This here cabin belongs to a friend of hers. I’ve known him for years. This is him. Take a look. This is Jerome.”

A pause, as I’m afraid to raise my head.

“Go ahead. I won’t shoot. I want to talk. This is it for me and I want to say a few things. Look at what I got here, Joe.”

I look up.

He’s standing naked in the middle of the room, a shotgun in one hand and a bushy black head in the other. It’s Jerome. I can see the whites of his eyes. Next to him stands the police dog. The golden sheath of the sword at Jimmy’s naked waist glints in the half-light. I duck right away.

“Elinor.” He says this wistfully. “Jewish girl. They fuck like rabbits. You should know. I walked her dog here one time. Duke. I was walking Duke and he ate another dog. I’m not kidding. We’re walking along, a little mutt comes by with a walker and Duke jumps the dog and kills him and eats him. Caused a lot of problems. As you can imagine. This here is Duke.”

I’m starting to get aches and pains from being wedged into this slot under the patio. I’m dying to ask if I can stand up, which is absurd. Did I say I was dying? I’ve got to get to one of my guns and get a shot at Jimmy. There’s the one in my boot.

“Look up, Joe, I’ve put my pants on.” Sure enough, he’s got his pants on, black jeans. The whole image is cinematic. He stands closer to the picture window, holding the head of Jerome, the dog, Duke, standing next to him, the sword at his waist, smiling toothlessly, eyes wide, a madman, a shotgun in his right hand aimed right at me.

Because of the way I'm positioned, I can't reach my boot. I bow my head down, face in the gritty mud.

"And this here is my automatic shotgun. And this here is Jerome, the former owner of this charming little cabin. Jerome is, was, an artist." Jimmy stops. He's thinking it over. "I'm coming out now, Joe, and then I'll blow your head off with this thing," he says. I hear the door open and Jimmy come out and the dog panting. Another pause. "Stand up, Joe," he commands. "I got nothin' to lose from that." I'm frozen where I am, stiff as a board, pain in both knees and the right side of my neck due to the awkward twist of my head. I can hear him and the dog moving closer.

"Come on, Jew Boy, stand up and get ready to die like a man." This is infuriating. Then the dog walks up to me and growls into my left ear. "Get up, Joe, before he starts chewing on you." That's all I can take and I struggle to my knees. Duke growls and spits at me. "Take it easy, Duke. Come here, boy." The dog backs away. "Maybe that's fine, Joey, stay where you are, on your knees." Jimmy moves closer. "Throw your guns up here, Joe."

"I don't know where they are." The sound of my own voice is exquisitely painful.

"I'm shocked, Joey, shocked. Judah the Just, and he don't know where his guns are. What the fuck were you thinking, Joey?"

"I regret it now, Jimmy."

"My name 's not Jimmy. I ain't tellin' ya my name. Where's your phone?" I indicate where I think it is, somewhere in the chest area. "Throw it on up here." Sure enough, it's stuck in my jacket pocket. I throw the phone onto the stone patio. I realize how much I hate that thing and at the same time I get a fresh picture of my dire situation.

"I can't believe this is happening," I say, out loud.

"I'll bet you can't," says Jimmy, "and I'll bet you're sorry for it."

"I am." I wish I hadn't done any of it. What do I care if an American wants to go around cutting people's heads off? "I'm sorry."

"What do you care, anyway? It's none of your business."

"You're absolutely right."

"Absolutely. Right. I am. So, this is the deal. You might as well stand up. Stand up." I stand and lower my head, as if in contrition. I can't believe I'm doing that. I should have shot the motherfucker soon as I had a chance. But when did I have a chance? "This is the deal," continues Jimmy, or whatever his name is, "The deal is

this: I'm going to cut your head off in a minute. You got that?" I nod my head and leave it raised so I can see his face – same ugly toothless white man with thinning sandy hair. His voice is sandy, too, hoarse, like an old Junkie's. I look him in the eye. "Don't look at me like that, you Jew asshole, put your eyes down." I put my eyes down. Naturally, I'm wishing the helicopter would return in my behalf. I can still hear it in the distance, circling Dodger Stadium. "Don't make any stupid moves," continues Jimmy, as if he was on television. "I got Jerome's shotgun and Elinor's dog. The sword I got from a Chinaman downtown. You think that's interesting?" I nod. "I been homeless a lot, I been on the streets." He pauses. "That's how I know this here canyon."

I'm looking at the stones on the patio. I have an almost esthetic appreciation of how they're laid out – level and precisely joined. I'm trying to remember the name of the stone that was used – shale, slate? -- but I can't. Jimmy keeps talking.

"I'm a veteran, been homeless for fifteen years. But you know all that. Spent a lot of time down there in the canyon, had a lean-to set up, and I got to know Jerome here. He got me water once in a while and let me use the bathroom. Jerome was an artiste. Fucked up, though. Elinor would leave Duke with him, if she had a date. She would leave Duke with him and he would pay me a few bucks to walk him around. Right, Duke?"

Duke barks. I cringe.

"He won't hurt ya unless I sic him on ya. You probably have to take a piss. I can see liquid on your pants. Am I right?" I nod. "You might as well go on and piss. Won't make any difference. Once I get rid of you, I'll take Duke and the car and head up to Hollingsworth. I know a bunch of crazy Indians up there in the woods. Go on and piss, Joe."

Warm urine runs down my leg.

"There you go. Trouble with homelessness is you don't talk to anybody. I'm a talker."

"That he is," I say to myself. My guns aren't too far away, I'm thinking. Let him keep on talking and I'll pick a spot and make a dive for them. My pants are wet.

"The other issue is sheer human evil. I'm sure you know something about that. A cop like you, and a Jew. What you know? I mean, what you think? 'Course, you can't tell me in a minute. I'll tell you what I think, which is this: we're stupid animals and we'll do just about anything to survive. So, that's a start. Now, you make a start, too, Joe, it'll keep you alive for awhile and I can have some conversation. We can even sit down, if you want. I know your pants are wet. And I'll turn the light down a bit so the copter doesn't come back. They coming back, Joe?"

"I don't know," I say, which is true, because I have no idea what those guys are thinking. "And I don't know where they are." They seem to have gone from the scene. I can't hear that irritating whirring copter sound.

"Sit down," says Jimmy, "over there."

Hear O Israel, goes through my head, the Lord is God, the Lord is One. The basic Hebrew prayer. How did they come up with that in ancient times? What does it mean to me now, as I face immanent death?

"Move," says Jimmy whats-his-name, and I feel my legs twitching and my feet sliding. "Over there." He's pointing to a wooden armchair – redwood -- which has a design name, but I can't think of the fucking thing's name, and I go on over to it and sit down. It's facing away from the canyon, toward the cabin, and Jimmy and the dog are gazing at me intently as I do so. Behind me the Dodger game is going on and the helicopter has disappeared.

"I got this from TV," he continues, "Isis beheadings. It's an amazing fucking thing when you think about it. A show. It's a fucking show, what mankind can do, a fucking killing demonstration. What do you think about that?"

I try to answer, but I can't, I gag. I'm all wet from my own piss, and I'm thinking, "I've got to kill this guy, right now, right now." And he seems to read my mind and clamps my own wrist clamps on my own wrists. It's true what they say – my whole life passes through my mind, as does the history of my ancestors, in a flash. The Creation. Adam and Eve, the Flood, the Exodus, the Kings and the Prophets, the blaming of the Jews, the Holocaust, my Yiddish-speaking mother and father, my lies and wantings, my killings and shames, my wife and sons, and so on.

"I want to talk about myself as if my life had meaning," says Jimmy, the killer fuckhead, "even though I know it doesn't, the reason being: I loved Elinor and I loved Jerome and I strangled Elinor and I cut Jerome's head off with this here sword. She was always tempting me and manipulating me and enslaving me with Desire, which is a Sin. And he condescended to me and he thought I was a stupid idiot, though I'm not -- living on the streets will do that to a person, it will demean a person and disavow a person, no matter how he tries, how he holds himself together, how he deals with his insides, how he copes, because money's the thing, money 's the thing, and you're always crawling for money, debasing yourself, on and on, and on, to survive – so what do you think about that, Joe?"

I cough in response – my head is at a weird angle – and I say the word, "True."

"I don't actually give a shit what you think, we both know what that means. You get it, Joe?"

I nod as he draws his sword, an ancient device, glowing in the night, shining steel, inspiring and inviting, the shape of the crescent moon. "I love this thing," he says, "it's a fantastic weapon, steeped in history, steeped in the history of Man, the Middle East, in Asia, in Russia, everywhere -- but where was I? Yes, Elinor and Jerome. She was such a piece of ass and she knew it and she used it and I was helpless to deal with it, a homeless piece of shit with no money, but she found a way to use me against Jerome – are you following me? – Well, fuck you anyway, I don't give a shit what you think, it was confusing, it was definitely confusing, I'll have to admit. You know how it is when you want to fuck someone and it's not on the table? Me, I was a fucking saint, a devout, a chaste motherfucker, intimidated by feminine beauty, as always, as ever, too inhibited to make a move."

Selah, I think, the word of closure in the Five Books. I've never known what it actually stands for – only, "That's it, take a breath and think it over." But I'm not really thinking or breathing as this Gentile asshole looms over me with the gleaming sword. Sounds of the L.A. night: sirens and insects.

"America is an idea," he goes on, "it doesn't really exist. Money exists, strife exists, envy exists, lust exists, hatred exists, but America, the Land of the Free? That doesn't exist, Pal. I don't care if you heard me, or if you're paying attention, because I'm going to end your fucking life, in a minute, so fuck you, I just want to hear my own thinking in front of this Jewish cop, you, this wanderer of the world, this believer in some kind of Justice. You get that? You don't have to answer. Your life is over. A couple more things, and I'm done."

He wipes his mouth. He's frothing at the mouth. He looks at me, but it's not me he sees. He sees his own past, his eternal enemy, his endless frustration, and he means to get rid of it, slice it out of his life, for good.

"Prejudice? It will never end, because we are animals, not men. You get that? I hate Jews and I hate niggers. I was born with it and it will stay that way. I am a monstrous disease of nature, and I will stay that way. You, you're deluded, deluded by words, by the bible, by your mother, by your name, by your opinions, by your wife, by – that's the way it goes, Pal. You, too, are a fucking epidemic."

What does a person do now? How does one die? What can you do in the face of Absolute Reality? You must, as the Muslims say, surrender. You must give the routine illusions up and pack it in. Such are my thoughts, shivering and wet in back of a cabin off Lake Shore Ave, Echo Park, Los Angeles, now.

The Gentile sonofabitch gets a hold on me and raises the sword over my neck, and I can't do nothing. "I'll see you in Hell," he says, "bow your head." I bow. "*Shema Yisrael* – "

Murray Mednick
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