



Journey to Judgment

*JOURNEY TO
JUDGMENT*

E.A. Maynard

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CHAPTER ONE

There was no fire, no pearly gates, nothing to indicate if it was heaven or hell. Pain ran down Jeremy's back, but it was nothing like what it was when he had died. There was no question that he was dead and he accepted that. Jeremy accepted his death two decades before he died. There had been many times before when the reaper should have taken him. All the times before, he thought it was amazing to see another day. So, this time was only different because he opened his eyes. Now he sees he was laying on a dirt road with rivers on both sides.

Looking up towards the sky, Jeremy tried to figure out what he was seeing. He could not look away from the ever-changing colors and the clouds and stars that didn't seem to be there. The only thing Jeremy thought about as he looked up, was how it reminded him of Vincent Van Gogh's Starry Night painting. The road that Jeremy laid in the middle of was a familiar feeling. He felt dirt and pebbles as he moved his head around. His pain slowly diminished as he changed his focus on everything around him.

Jeremy sat himself up to see where he was. He hoped that everything would make sense or he would be able to find a sign. Anything to tell him if he was in the good place or the other place. He would have even accepted somewhere in the middle.

For Jeremy, the life he lived was filled with taking out bad people so someone else did not have to. He was good at what he did while in the Army. Once he went back to the public life, he started a construction company that hired vets. He also tries to help other vets start businesses in the trades.

With that said, he knew the chances where he would end up was a fifty-fifty odd.

Finally, he decided that he had to get up and start moving. Staying where he was didn't seem to provide him anything more than the ability to think about his life. He had done enough while alive, but normally after a few drinks or when he let the silence of the night get to him was when the horrors of serving his country haunted him.

Standing up and putting one foot in front of the other, he started his journey. To where, he didn't know, but he knew he had to go somewhere.

Somehow, Jeremy had thought he walked for a full day, but he could not really tell. He had no way of telling time. The sky was changing so fast and looked so oddly, he gave up trying to figure it out.

The road in front of him looked as if it went on forever. Jeremy chuckled thinking about how he had heard there were roads like this in Texas. That thought might have been cause for his first smile since waking up in this strange place.

As he kept thinking about all the thing he heard about Texas, he noticed something flicker, like a mirror getting hit by the sun light. It was also a sign that there was something ahead of him. Now he had hope, but Jeremy didn't know what he hoped to see. It could be just a piece of glass on the ground that someone else dropped as they passed down the road.

The new hope that Jeremy felt as he got closer to

narrowing the gap, increased his adrenal till he was running. He was at his top speed in about a minute and ran for what must have felt like an hour. That was until he tripped onto the road, slid, and rolled till he lay face down.

His muscles had given out leaving him with nothing but exhaustion. He couldn't even get up, and to exert enough energy to roll on his back was challenging. When Jeremy did finally roll onto his back, his entire body screamed out in pain.

It was a shock for Jeremy when he heard a girl clear her throat in order to get someone's attention. When he looked up, he saw a red headed woman in her mid-thirties, if Jeremy had to guess. She sat on a bench playing with her long hair and wore a well-fitting blue dress. She was hard not to look at with a beauty that is not normally seen in person.

Next to her sat an old black man in a brown suit. He must have been in his late eighties. The man was not a heavy guy, but he was not skinny, either. He sat there eating some kind of snack, pulling the snack out of a bag and tossed it into his mouth.

The guy made a small flick of his wrist and his snack seemed to just float to his mouth. Almost as if it went in slow motion. It was mesmerizing to watch.

Finally, there was a teen age boy who sat on the bench just looking at Jeremy while petting a cat. The cat was very happy laying there and purred loudly. The cat focused on Jeremy the most. He felt it was as though the cat was trying to make a judgement of him.

As Jeremy got back to his feet, he was looking around. He

was not sure where these people came from. Before he fell, there was nothing and no one anywhere near him. But after sliding on the ground for three feet, he landed at the feet of three people and a cat staring at him, intensely watching him lay on the ground.

The girl was the first to speak. "So, I have to assume you figured out that you're dead. Before you start asking questions, we have to figure out why you are here with us. You see, most people go straight to where they belong. It is not normal for your kind to be in our realm."

"Realm? So, this is not Hell or Heaven? Then where am I and who are you people?" Jeremy quickly responded before any of the others could say something. The lady was right that Jeremy had a lot of questions.

The old black guy tried to give an explanation that Jeremy would understand. He told how there are many realms that life exists in. Then he lost Jeremy when he talked about all the different realms and how life comes in many forms. What he did get was how they currently were in what he would call a spirit realm.

The teenaged boy with the cat stood up and offered his seat for Jeremy. As the boy stood there and Jeremy took the seat on the bench, he made it simple.

He said, "You see you are in the area where our kind live. We are known in your time as angels, before we were known as gods, and before that we went by other names. We were talking about the last time we went to your realm, meaning where you lived and existed.

I had not been there since the Minoan civilization. I was

considered the Lord of the Animals. I just found the creatures more interesting than the people. That is where I met Mau.

Mau got most of her attention in Egypt. She has stories to tell and you just can't help to laugh. Then there's Bumba, who has a weird sense of humor. He was known as the creator of vomit. I don't know why, but he found it funny.

You might have heard of Aphrodite. She went with a big group and spent several years there. The last of our kind who went spent the least amount of time there but created a religion that has gone all the way into your lifetime. Of course, he had his dad's help."

Jeremy jumped in, interrupting the Lord of the Animals. "You are telling me you're angels or lower gods with a lower-case g? What am I doing here? Should I not be enjoying or hating my afterlife?"

Aphrodite decided she needed to get this put to rest so they can move forward. She simply told him that the angel of death sometimes puts people outside of Heaven and Hell. Normally a guide is ready for those who are ready.

Animal boy, Aphrodite, and Bumba started to talk between each other. It was annoying to have them going on and on. It seemed like they went on for a long time. Jeremy tried to get their attention, but they had become so engrossed in what was being said between themselves, there was no chance for him to talk.

Then while he was looking at the ground trying to figure out what he would do next, he noticed Mau. Mau stood at his feet and was nudging his head in a follow me motion.

Not sure what was going on, Jeremy decided to hell with it and followed the cat. Considering he was somewhere that is really nowhere, what did he have to lose? Sitting there waiting for those three to finish talking, was the same as a decade in my time of the living.

So, down the road Jeremy went again. This time he was walking with a new friend, even if it is just a cat. They walked down the road together in silence.

CHAPTER TWO

Jeremy and Mau walk for what felt like another day to Jeremy. Then after not a word being spoken, Jeremy finally asked. "I thought that guy said you was full of stories. You cannot even give me a meow? This has been nothing more than a boring walk with a cat."

Mau looked up at Jeremy and stopped, letting him get a head. By the time Jeremy noticed, Mau was about six feet behind him. Not sure why he cared but stopped to apologize. Thinking he hurt the cat's feelings, he turned himself around on his heel.

Instead of seeing a brown and white cat sitting on the road, there was a man. A man who was well built and looked as he was a mixture of Greek and Egyptian. Jeremy wondered where this guy came from and what happened to the cat.

The man took two steps and was by Jeremy's side. Standing about a foot taller than Jeremy, the guy spoke. His hand reaching out and landing on Jeremy's shoulder. He said "I am Mau. I am the cat that bored you.

In that form, I could move with more ease and most people do not bother me much. That is nice, but as a cat, I cannot talk. I will stay as a man while I am with you."

That might have made sense to Mau and in this type of existing. It took a sort time before Jeremy responded to what Mau said. When Jeremy did find his voice, Mau was standing next to him and pushing him with a hand on his back.

"How did you do that? You were a cat and I took my eyes off of you, then you became a man. How?"

Mau with a smile answered his new companion. "There is a lot I need to explain to you on our way. Let me start with the most basic. You see, feel, smell, and even taste the environment around you. What you do not realize is this all looks different to me and to each person that walks here.

This is all a type of energy and particles. You see me as I project myself to you. How I want you to see me. I put all the limits on myself by my consciousness. As a cat, I know what they can and cannot do. I know they cannot form words you would understand. If I had a strong enough consciousness, I could get past that. But I do not.

I do have the strength to remember who I am and how to change form. You remember what you looked like when you lived on the other place. So now you project that image of yourself for everyone to see.

Do you think what you see is what is really here? This is not a physical plan of existing, but as I said, one of energy. You could also say a place of consciousness.

In the other place, you had your body hold what you called a soul. Once that body stop working, everything you are came here."

That was a lot for Jeremy to grasp, but after a few questions left unanswered by Mau; the explanation started back up. "What you see is everything and nothing. It is the nothing more than where control and chaos come together.

Me and mine have been keeping the balance long before man walked on the earth. We kept the balance even during the great war against the one who wanted chaos to be what drives all. We have been here from the being of all beings and will be here after all the ends have passed."

Before Mau got another word out, Jeremy jumped in. He stops them and looked Mau in the eyes. Then it all came to him. Jeremy understood that his feet was walking on the path of who

he would call angels. It also came to him that these are the ones that have been seen as gods and goddess or gone by so many different names throughout the history of mankind.

Now the weight of the truth landed on his shoulders, he fell to the ground. A small cloud of dust lifted off the ground around him. Jeremy noticed how slow the dust return to the ground. He was able to see every particle sway in the air. When he reached out to grab one, his hand was taken by Mau. Then pulled up to his feet.

Back on his feet, Mau asked if Jeremy had thought of any reason, he would have been placed on what he had referred to as the road of lost souls. Jeremy swore that it was the first time he hears that, but Mau said it as if he had been saying it the whole time.

With a few shrugs of the shoulders and a I do not know type of remark, Mau started yelling.

“Simon come out; I know you’re able to hear me. Show yourself and answer my questions.” Just then a black shade appeared from now where. Mau in an angry voice asked the shade, “Where is Simon? Does your king not answer to my kind anymore? Does Simon the King of the Death not come to those who brought him from the first void?”

Then without anything being said, the shade vanished into the river on the side of the road. Seconds later, a monster showed up seeming to be as large as a three-story house. There was nothing to focus on as it was a black floating blob of nothingness. The King of Death made a screeching noise. It put a chill down Jeremy’s back.

“Simon, why did you have this guy on our road? What has he done to not be sent to his final place?” Simon the King of Death looked as he shrugged, but it was hard to tell from a moving blob of black nothingness.

Mau got more frustrated and walked up to what would be assumed to be Simon's feet. Then in a creepy but mellow tone, ask Simon one question that put utter fear in him.

"You remember that it was not only my kind that released you, but it was my hand that grabbed you and pulled you into existence. Do you remember why I out of all of my kind, I and the One are the only one able to put you back into the void?"

Mau stood there for less than a minute when Simon reached out and looked as he put a flat hand out. Mau stepped onto the hand type of what every you would call it.

Simon lifted Mau up and they spoke in a language that Jeremy didn't know or ever heard. It sounded like a song like no other. The beauty of it almost made Jeremy cry, but it stopped before a tear fell.

Then as if Simon was melting away, he went down into the ground he stood on. A black and grey smoke came up around the blob. He shrunk down and the hand like platform that Mau stood on hit the ground making a loud crashing sound. A gust of wind pushed Jeremy back a step or two.

When all the smoke and the blob was gone, only Mau stood. He was walked back to join Jeremy and then past him. Waving his hand to indicate Jeremy need to follow him, Jeremy walked at a fast pace to catch up.

"What was said by that blob? Did he know anything?" Jeremy asked along with other questions to Mau. There was nothing said from Mau until the battery of questions ended.

"First you should not call Simon a blob. He is the King of Death and is the one who maintains the bridge to allow your kind and others to come and enter their afterlife.

Simon has the ability to take many forms but shows his true self here. He also knows what has happen, what is happening, and what will happen in all of existence. That is a hard to endure and

there is only one of my kind who has that ability. He is the first of us and sits with Simon on a regular bae.

I might have been part of those that pulled Simon out of the Void, but I think he is well aware that I don't have the strength to put him back in.

As for what he told me. He told me what I needed to know. Now I know where you need to go and the path we must go to get there. So be ready, our first destination is the gates of Hell."

CHAPTER THREE

“The Gates are only the start of your journey. The gate we are going to is one of many gates in my world. The gate I am taking you to is the doorway between this place and what you would call Hell.

Don't worry, I am not going to leave you there, unless you choose to stay. We need to go through that place to reach your final home.”

Mau smiled at Jeremy as if what he said was meant to make him feel better. Instead, Jeremy could only look back at him with a halfhearted smirk.

Mau didn't know what to say or to do to make Jeremy feel better. He decided to start a new topic to get Jeremy's mind off the gate of Hell. So, he blurted out “Tell me about you, tell me all about your life back on Earth.”

Jeremy thought for a moment and asked if Mau knew anything about a place called West Virginia in the United States of America.

With a nod of his head, Jeremy started into his life story. “I grew up in the countryside. It was a nice place to grow up. I was taught the sciences, math, and history from a group of people around my town.

My mom taught me and other kids' math. My favorite class was history taught by the farmer Norris. He taught us about the wars and the men who fought against evil. I learned that some would fight with words and lead others to stand for peace to change the world.

Then there were men who found themselves facing evil with a weapon and in hand. Mr. Norris once said that those take up a weapon to fight evil should be remembered and honored.

They are the ones who give up their chance to enter heaven. A true warrior will do things that would make most people become sick.

I knew I wanted to fight for the better good and I was not one to find the words causing people to follow me. I was taught by my dad how to fight with my fist and hand weapons. I also was a hunter with a good shot.

That is why I went into the Army. I needed to do more. What I learned from history is evil never goes away.”

Mau interrupted Jeremy as he took a breath. “Jeremy, what do you consider evil? Not that I am saying it doesn’t exist, but it seems your kind believes if you don’t agree with the values they hold, you are evil. So, what evil did you face?”

It didn’t take Jeremy long to reply. He had known people who did nothing but site on a base. There were people who joined to fight anyone, it didn’t matter who. Jeremy always thought those people would follow Hitler if they could inflict pain on someone.

Jeremy thought about the missions he went on. The mission that came to his mind was where he took out a warlord. The warlord was taking children from local villages and selling them off. The little boys were sold or used as slaves and soldiers.

The little girls thought we sold off to older men or a trafficking group. Jeremy smiled as he thought about him and his team going into the guy’s house. Most the guards gave up without a fight. One tried to fight but was permanently silenced.

When they entered the bedroom, the guy was in. He had a little ten year old girl chained to his bed and laying on the floor.

A team member of Jeremy’s shot the guy in the shoulder as he went for a gun. The whole team wanted to put a bullet in the guy’s head, but they needed information as well as take him out of play.

Once the warlord was detained, half the team checked the rest of the house and found a bunch of children locked in large rooms made of plexiglass walls. Everyone was happy to free the children and the children was happy to be free.

The other half of the team gathered up the guards and left Jeremy with the warlord alone.

Jeremy answered the question. “I stopped an evil man where I could. I stopped a warlord selling children and doing

things I don't want to think about. I only killed when I had to, I always thought God would sort them out in the end."

Mau smiled and told Jeremy that God doesn't sort them. "The one you call God made the rules and choose the guards to handle those who don't live by the rules. It is Simon and his kind that sorts them out. Sometimes my kind has to be a guide and help those like you to their final stop.

"I figured you know where I am going. I also figured since I killed people to achieve my goals, I will be going to Hell. I accept it, but I will also fight against what you put in front of me. I will...."

Mau stopped Jeremy by telling him to shut up. Then went on with saying "It's your bible that says you should not murder. It does say there is a time to kill. There was no time in your history that you murdered someone."

As happy Jeremy was about the evil he removed from the world, he still felt a pain for the lives he ended. The thought about what Mau had said made him think deeply.

It did not help Jeremy with the weight he carried. It did make him feel better that he was not doomed to Hell for the lives he took. He only did what he did to save lives.

"Mau, why do you care about humanity? You seem to be a being of power, wisdom, and knowledge. Humans are only alive in a short term period while it should as you have been around what sounds like the beginning of time. So, what is it?"

Mau didn't need any time to think of Jeremy's question. He explained how him and his kind watched as humans were created and watched as humans travel through history one day to the next.

Jeremy listen when Mau said it. "You know when we watched your world and your ancestors, we all got involved in the creation of the life. It was exciting to watch what happens. I will also say that the humankind has brought us lots of joy and lots of sadness. Worse of all, you have broken our hearts over and over.

I am one of the few that still have hope for humans and the world your kind live on. There is a reason Hell has grown so much. Your kind has found new sins that we didn't know about and ways to commit those sins."

CHAPTER FOUR

“You humans have fought wars as small as two families ending each others line. Then you had wars that had engulfed your world not once but serval times. The sadness you brought to those of us watching is hard to explain.

Then there are those of you who find your way through the chaos and all the things that create nightmares, those luckily few find love. Not all is the love of someone to hold. But it is a driving love to create something great.

Even those who fail has a passion that carries on through to several people. Those people find the love passed on and create something amazing.

Lets look at before your species was even able to talk. There was a group that found a stick and figured out how to use it to get food out of a nut. Then they shared that discovery. Next thing you know, your kind shoot off and discover all sorts of things.”

Jeremy interrupted Mau. There was so many questions he had. The fact that Mau had seen everything man has done from the start. There was so much history packed into a short time.

As Jeremy thought about all he wanted to know, he asked one questions. “What would you say was the best of humanity you have seen? There has been so much that has happened and you have even interacted with us on Earth. So what is it?”

With a big smile and a laugh that could of shake a house, Mau needed to sit down. He found a large rock that seemed just right for him. Once the laughing was done, Mau patted a space next to him on the rock. It was meant for Jeremy to sit down. That is what he did too.

As Jeremy took his seat, he said, “I didn’t know that would be so funny to you. I am sorry if my question was so pathetic that you had to laugh.”

Mau didn’t wait for anything more to be said from Jeremy.

“No, you miss understand me. I was laughing as this was a debate I had with a few friends.

You see, they talked about times of empires and wars. They would point out the tribal wars before your kind could write. Your world has took murder and made it into an art form.

I point out the great things humans have done. They could have keep attacking, hunting, and gathering food. Instead, humans figured out how to grow food. Then you guys went on to creating things like the wheel.

I was very impressed to see the pyramids being build with the simplest of tools. I spent years in Egypt to watching it. There are great stories I could tell you. Maybe some time I will.

Not now though. I will say seeing the Greek empire also was exciting. There was some guys named Plato and Aristotle who had some interesting thoughts. I do find it funny that your history doesn't talk about how they love to talk to a cat that just happened to be around them.”

Jeremy then jumped in again. “You knew Plato and Aristotle? What were they like? I just could not imagine being able to talk with them

CHAPTER FIVE

Some days had passed and I had been working on a plan with a guy named Steve. He was a senior and most likely the smartest person in our school. He would talk with me because he didn't think he'd get to go to college after high school. Steve wanted to, but his dad was hooked on pain killers and drank like a fish since he had gotten hurt at the forgery. Steve refused to leave his younger sister alone with his father, so he chose to stay close. From what Steve said, he would like to take classes at Bowling Green State University since he could drive there daily. He just needed to come up with the money to pay for it. That is why we were making a plan to benefit both of us.

During his lunch period, I met with him to see what we could do. I don't know how he knew what he did about drugs and how to push them, but I was impressed. He must have spent some time figuring out what he wanted to do. What he needed from me was an advance of the product. He made a comment about how he heard what I do to people that cross me, and it made me chuckle. From what he told me, he would make us both good money. I agreed and told him that I would get him everything he needed in two days.

Steve was happy that I was advancing him three thousand dollars' worth of product. After that, he pointed out that my book bag was making some sounds. I did not even notice until he said something, but it was the pager Deatz had given me and I guessed it was Deatz calling. My problem was, I did not know if it was or not. I just saw a number on the screen and I had no idea what his phone number was. There was only one way to find out. I called the number from the payphone outside the lunchroom in the hallway.

It was not Deatz's home number, but it was Deatz. He sounded like he was at a payphone too. Once he knew it was me, he told me he had something I had to do. When I asked what

benefit I got from running his errands, he clearly said, "First you will come to my place and pick up money from me. Then you will get to Fremont to meet someone. I will give you more details when you get here. As for what you get out of it, you should feel lucky. You get two things, the first is that I am not going to break any of your bones for being an ass hole. The other is your pricing. I will give you a better cut on your price, but don't you ever talk to me again like that. Do you understand?"

I realized I had overstepped my boundaries for the last time and I always kept that in mind. Before we hung up, Deatz told me that I had to come right after I got out of school. Just as I grabbed my bag off the floor to get to class, I remembered I had to work my real job. It seemed pointless to keep doing it. I was making more in one or two deals than I made in a month punching out the copper from a small, dirty motor. This made it a clear choice of what I had to do. I dug in my bag looking for a quarter.

While I was kneeling and my head almost inside my book bag, Sara came up and put her foot in the center of my butt cheeks. She laughed so damn hard when I jumped, I hit my shoulder on the payphone and tripped over my bag. "What the hell are you doing? You scared the shit out of me." As I yelled that to Sara, a teacher that I always called Boogie happened by and was the same teacher who hated me. He gave me a line about watching my language or I would be sent to the principal's office. The idiot did not notice that the principal was right there trying not to laugh at me.

When Sara stop laughing and I had everything picked up from my bag, we gave each other a little kiss. I explained to Sara that I needed a quarter to call off work. I noticed that Sara was feeling around in her purse while she was asking questions about why I was calling off. I tried to let her know that I had to meet up with Deatz. Then Sara got me excited when she pulled her hand out of her purse and looked at her palm smiling.

It did not make me as happy as she was when she showed me an earring she held in her hand. She told me how she thought she lost it in my car, but now she was happy to have the pair again. My face must have told her that I was not impressed and she turned where the principal was. "Principal Simmons, do you have a quarter? Scott needs to call his job and I want to see if his boss

yells at him." That made the principal laugh and she walked over while reaching in her pocket. When Principal Simmons got to us, I was standing and had slung my bag onto my back.

With a hand held out that was full of change, Principal Simmons put her arm around Sara and gave her a little squeeze. While they stood there being buddies, the principal told Sara that guys like me need to have a good woman. She added "Guys like Scott are smart but will get themselves in trouble. A good girl like you will help him on the right track." Sara being the girl she was, made comments about that is why she gives me a hard time. They had a few good quips at my expense, but I let them have their fun. As I dialed the scrap yard, I heard them going on making jokes.

On the second ring, the owner answered the phone. First, there was a loud cough followed with the sound of the person taking a puff off a cigar. I knew that moment it was Mr. Kissiner the owner of the scrap yard. He was a tough guy with a sense of humor that made most people cringe. If you did not know this before calling, you would know when he answered the phone. Mr. Kissiner exhaled heavily into the phone while saying "Who the hell is this?"

I learned quickly when working at the scrapyard not to answer him weakly. It took one day of work to learn that and from there on, I talked to Mr. Kissiner as if I'd known him for years, and you just did not curse unless it was fitting. I guess that is why when I started to talk, my principal got a strange look on her face.

It was a simple conversation. I started with "Sir; this is Scott. I can't come in today and this time it has nothing to do with the pretty little thing I am seeing. I just have a last-minute engagement to deal with." At first, I thought Mr. Kissiner was fine with it. He changed my mind with his response. He said "That is fine, I was going to invite you for dinner anyways to tell you this, but I will save you the time. The daytime guy is looking for more hours and he gives us a higher output. So, if you need a reference, let us know, other than that, good luck." I did not get a chance to answer him when he hung up the phone.

By this time Principal Simmons was walking away and Sara stood there looking at me. When I hung up the phone, I told Sara that I don't have to worry about stripping copper anymore. I think she felt worse about it than I did. That was till I explained

that it was between me and a grown man trying to pay bills. We both knew how hard it was for some people, so I didn't take it personally. On top of that, I was making more in a few deals than if I worked for a month at the scrap yard.

With everything handled, I started to walk Sara to her next class. While we walked down the hallway, Sara said she wanted to come with me after school to wherever I was going. Normally I would love that, but I did not want Deatz to see her. I could also tell that she did not want to go home.

Sara gave me a kiss when we got to her class as she headed in. Hating to see her feeling down, I grabbed her hip to stop her. When Sara turned back to me, I told her that I will figure out something. That is all it took to make her cheer up and I had a couple of hours to figure it out. It was not until I got to my car and Sara was standing there when I figured out how I could make sure Deatz did not see her. When we got in my car, Sara asked what we are doing.

It was about time that I explained how far I was in with the drug trade so she would understand what was going on. By the time I finished, she said that she is OK with everything, as long as I did not do the drugs I was pushing. I agreed except for smoking weed, since I enjoyed that and it didn't hurt anything. Now that I did not have to worry about hiding anything from Sara, I told her that I had to meet with Deatz. She told me she would wait at the pizza shop at his house while I was at his place. From that point, we joked about my criminal emperor and how she was a mob princess. These jokes went all the way to Fostoria. Then Sara asked a serious question about the dangers I might face. I honestly did not think about being in any danger, but then again, I did not know what Deatz wanted me to do.

Of course, I told her that I was in no danger, but I had faced a little with that Dan guy. Now Deatz had Mark and me on call and we did not know what for. Sara did not need to know any of these things. I could see that she was worried that I possibly could be in danger.

If she knew what had happened with Dan, and my own concern with whatever Deatz had me doing, she would be freaking out. It was a quiet drive for the last few city blocks to the pizza shop. When we got there, Sara jumped out of the car saying how

hungry she was. I gave her a fifty and told her I would be a quick as I could.

Not having a single concern, Sara went in for pizza and to wait for me. I wish I could have been able to stay with her. Instead, I pulled my car in front of Deatz's house and went in. Of course, Deatz got a good laugh when his dogs tackled me. After he got his dogs off me and stopped laughing at me, we got to why he wanted me to come over. He dropped a paper grocery bag in my lap and handed me a Colt .380 ACP.

Looking into the bag, it was full of twenties and tens. Before I was able to ask a question, Deatz told me about a guy who was coming through from New York. The sack of cash was for me to exchange for two large duffel bags full of drugs. The gun was in case the guy tried to cross me or did anything out of line. This did not lessen the concerns I was having with needing a gun. I was always taught that you only point a gun at what you plan to shoot and you better be ready to shoot.

To add to all the odd events I felt I was in, Deatz gave me his house key. As he put the key in my hand, he told me the command to have his dogs not attack when entering. I could just picture the headline on the paper. It would say "Teen mauled to death as entering a house carrying drugs." I am sure my mom and stepdad would love that.

I had enough and did not want to add to this, so I began to leave. Deatz stopped me as I reached for the door and told me two things. The first was he would be going to Chicago with Mark after I left, but they would be back in the morning. The second item was that the next time I come around, I better not bring a girl, even if I was dropping her off at the pizza shop. He let me know that I would suffer a lot of pain if I did not listen to him about my girlfriend. With that, I was out the door carrying the bag with the gun hidden in the back of the waistband of my pants.

I did not waste any time and got back to the pizza shop parking lot. I told her not to walk over to my car because I didn't want Deatz to see her. I guess that was stupid of me.

As I backed out from moving my car from the street to the parking lot, a total of maybe ten yards, Mark pulled up and parked where my car sat a moment ago. Mark saw me and yelled to me for my attention. We met each other halfway and talked about

what was going on.

I gave a quick rundown of what I had to do and how it sounded like he was going to Chicago. Mark said he already knew about Chicago. He was told that they were going to get our weekly orders filled by some guy there. From the little I knew about the guy in New York, I didn't think he would be forgiving if he found out about the Chicago connection. That's why I stressed to Mark that he didn't give his name out unless he has to. Not knowing what game Deatz was playing, I didn't want Mark to get wrapped up and hurt. Plus, Mark and I were just getting our business going, as I had hoped. We were making enough money that I was close to being able to buy a new car. Mark nodded and we went our ways with a final "be safe, talk with you later."

Sara was already next to my car waving to Mark and smiling. When Sara and I got in the car, she said that she called her mom and things were better, so she could go home. I figured it was a short distance out of the way, but it's better than having her with me at the exchange. If this guy beat me there, it would be OK. On our way, she reached to the back seat and grabbed a slice of pizza she had put back there and gave it to me.

"So, I guessing that I am not supposed to know about the bag of money back there?" She followed that comment up with a cocky smile. I told her that I had to buy this time instead of sell. That was all she needed to know. It was another ten minutes of her making jokes again about how I am part of the drug cartel. Sara jokingly tried to figure out how low I was on the chain. When we got to her house, it was a kiss and a goodbye with her taking the pizza with her.

Now I had to get to the exchange and hope that everything went smoothly. I drove down country roads going as fast as I could with my beat-up Firebird. I made good time when I got on Route twenty outside of Fremont. From there it was only a few minutes till I got off on fifty-three. After that, I only had to find the trucker parking area that was across the street from a motel called Deluxe Motel. I understood why this guy wanted to meet there, it was hidden and off the main road.

I had to go to a gas station and ask where it was. Oddly enough, Mick was there filling up his car. When I told him that I was looking for the motel, he knew right where it was and told me

that I was only one turn away. I had to go back towards Fremont and make a right at the first turn. The motel was down the street and Mick said I couldn't miss it. He stopped me before driving off and asked if he could add a few ounces to his last request. Since I didn't see an issue, I told him that it would be taken care of. Then I was back on the road.