

Intruders

1

There were four of us to defend the kitchen, backed up as we were. We did however have one distinct advantage: possessing all kinds of kitchen utensils.

There was the cleaning lady. There was my friend's mother (it was her house). There was me (there was also Bruce). By the way the cleaning lady stood at the back door, with her ear to the wall, her finger to her lips, a steak knife large as a small sword tucked underneath her sweaty armpit, it was clear she'd be the first to die.

I'd recognized the attackers from afar, before we'd taken cover. They were old friends of mine, friends I'd lost touch with. I was innocent. I knew that. Bruce, too. But I couldn't speak for the cleaning lady or my friend's mother. I also knew that, to the attackers, I would be guilty by simple association, by proximity, by my simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

The cleaning lady stood front and center, next to the counter. I was at one end of the kitchen, erect behind the waist-high counter, my friend's mother at the other. Bruce stood between us, but a bit behind us, half the length of the kitchen behind the cleaning lady. He wasn't even looking for a weapon.

I'd gathered a collection of knives. My friend's mother also had a collection of knives she was ready to throw if left to choose between dying alone or with her attackers. There was a side door near me, a second door leading outside, a possible escape route, but I knew I could never in good conscience live with leaving them – two women and one dumb man – there to defend themselves alone.

Voices escalated. The cleaning lady drew the steak knife from her armpit and raised it.

The four of us fleeing together was out of the question. To flee

together would be to leave the advantages of the kitchen; if we were to survive together, we'd have to defend ourselves here. (To all flee and all split up would be to sign the death sentence for one of the two women I knew I had to both, as a man, protect, whichever one of the two women it was these criminals were after, assuming it was one and not both, and assuming, of course, they weren't after Bruce. They couldn't be after Bruce.)

The door burst open. The cleaning lady delivered a blow at the same time she received one. Both she and the first intruder collapsed in the doorway, entangled, into what was fast becoming a pool of blood.

So then there were three of us left. The door had been busted open. One of theirs had fallen. None of us were safe.

Bruce hid beneath the counter, unarmed still, the idiot. Big Bruce. Useless. I hated him, I thought in that moment, almost as much as I hated the attackers.

From the back of the kitchen, through the open front door, I could hear the other intruders yelling to one another about how one of their own had died and that all hell would break loose. So this was not yet all Hell.

An attacker charged through, hopping over the dead enemies (each other's enemy), firing a dagger in mid-air, struck in mid-air by one of our own. My friend's mother had also been struck. With daggers in their necks, Mrs. Weisman and her attacker collapsed into their developing puddles of blood. It was the second woman to die on my watch in the past fifteen seconds. And it was my friend's mother. I looked at poor, oblivious, innocent Bruce. These attackers must have gotten whom they'd come for, whomever it was, whichever of the women, whichever one it was. But Bruce and I, we were still not safe. Our deaths would be retaliatory.

He sat on the floor, unable to – too huge to – cross his legs. He looked down, at the kitchen tiles. The pattern was simple: whitish square feet. He looked sad, the way dogs do during thunderstorms. Retaliatory sounds grew. I let Bruce's life flash before my eyes.

He was the kind of friend who always seemed to be there, and nothing more. He did nothing or said nothing on his own. He never let his actions reveal his feelings, assuming he felt something. He never gave orders, never set forth propositions, never asked any questions, as far as I could remember, and I'd known him my whole life, as far back as I could

remember.

Our Moms met the same time we did, they've told us, when they were out grocery shopping, pushing us in their carts. When first told this story, I believed it; though I was too young to remember any details that, now, I could attribute with certainty to the story, a flickering, moving image of a red can of soup falling off a shelf and exploding onto the aisle floor beneath me passed through my head. After that, I remember playing with Bruce's toys in Bruce's basement while he sat on the carpet and silently watched. I remember Bruce's father yelling at Bruce for burning his hand on the kitchen stove, a series of teachers calling on him in class when he hadn't raised his hand, his black eye from defending himself, the sling with which his attacker returned to school the following Monday, him showing up to school without any lunch or lunch money and everyone at our table donating their snack to him to the point where he would eat more than any of us, him drinking beer and burping and sometimes laughing, the concussion we all thought he'd gotten after his car accident, driving him to school after his license had been suspended, returning home from college to find him where I'd seen him last, asleep on his Mom's couch, his face after following our friend's neighbor's cleaning lady's daughter out of the boiler room after his first sexual encounter, him eating sixteen mini-hamburgers that same night and snoring like a fat, happy dog, everything but the last ten years, during which our old friends had seemingly become our enemies...

My thoughts emigrated into survival mode. They'd already become our enemies whether they were aware of it or not, whether or not they knew it was us, their old friends, in the kitchen. The only ones to have definitely seen us were dead. And these intruders, they couldn't have been after Bruce or myself. We used to be friends. These intruders – these old friends of ours – didn't know it was us in here. Or might not know. I guess I couldn't be sure they hadn't seen us. But could only guess.

And regardless if they'd seen us, to remain in the kitchen now under these certainly retaliatory conditions would be to die, to die next or die several dead bodies from now. Even if we tried to reason with them, there would be no time, considering how quickly four just died. I thought of yelling for a truce, but hesitated. With no more women to defend, Bruce and I had nothing, no one left to lose. "Let's go," I said to Bruce, taking

him by the arm, pulling him up, leading him out the side door and up the hill away from the ruckus that of course refused and would continue to refuse to die out.

Because of course they were following us up the hill. Of course they were. Two of them. Probably aware or simply by now aware there had to have been more people in the kitchen with the two women. They'd be looking for someone – probably a man – conspicuously trying to escape. So I pulled Bruce's arm again, slowing him as if he were a horse, so that together we could walk, now inconspicuously, up the hill, towards town.

2

The Patriarch sat facing the fire. He didn't turn to look at me when they escorted me in, his way of inviting me to sit.

They stood around us. He turned a log with a poker.

"We got it," I said, beginning with the good news.

The Patriarch faced me, pointing his poker at me and then at one of the men around us. The man nodded.

The Patriarch nodded and turned back towards the fire.

"Bobby," I said, feeling my blood flow no further than my stomach, my blood just die there. "And Steve."

The Patriarch eyed me without turning his head.

"They were holed up in the kitchen," I explained. "Right by the backdoor. Ready for us."

The man to whom I'd given the bag presented it to The Patriarch.

The Patriarch looked inside and then handed it to me.

I didn't know what to say, what it meant.

"Ready for you," The Patriarch said. "They were ready for you..."

Still wasn't sure what The Patriarch meant, what he was thinking.

He turned to face me. "Finish your story, and then, don't give... offer it to me." Talking about the bag we'd recovered, the bag he'd called essential, whatever that meant, whatever was in it...

"Bob and Stevie," I said, unprepared beyond anything I've... "It wasn't how you said..."

"So they were ready," The Patriarch said again.

I said nothing.

“Where are they now?” he said, coolly.

I lowered my head.

“Where are they?” he said. Now swinging his poker at the hardwood, watching everything in the room. “Where!”

I watched and heard him exhale. Never had I seen him react like that, never seen him exclaim.

“Two women,” I said. Then I thought about Bob and Stevie’s mothers, mourning whenever it was it all went wrong. “They were two women, Mrs. Weisman and... someone...”

“Another woman with Weisman...” he said. “A cleaning lady? Speak, son.”

“They were ready,” I said, struggling. “Bob and Stevie...” But they died as soldiers. I’d tell their mothers that. Not criminals. Soldiers. But I couldn’t.

“Bob and Stevie...” he said. “OK, we’ll start there. Where are they?”

I hesitated. The men were listening, guns holstered.

“We were lined up against the outside of the house, by the backdoor,” I said. Cracking. “Bobby, the brave fucker, opens and is immediately struck.” Crying like a fucking baby. “And this all happens in like two fucking seconds. And then Stevie... he goes... there’s this fucking sound, and then another. I’m outside the door, haven’t had a look inside yet, think, OK, be smart, someone’s there that shouldn’t be, collect my... And I just say fuck it and go but the kitchen’s empty, no one left, just four dead bodies, the two women with them. Then it was easy to notice a side door swinging. So I run back out the back door, not wanting to touch anything, you know. Keith’s standing there and tell him to follow me, Weisman was here and got away. We run up the hill, but he’s nowhere... And Keith suggested we go back, see if the bag’s there, where you said it’d be, and that’s Keith for you, always hedging...” Trying to save Keith’s ass. “... Always getting something out of nothing. He’s a smart one.”

The Patriarch used the poker to lift the bag out of my lap and into the fire.

For a while, we watched it burn.

After which he said: “Find Weisman... Find him and kill him, or disappear. Son of a bitch deserves it... But you don’t find him by sundown, you disappear, you got that?”

I nodded. I thought he was crying. The Patriarch, crying.

“Just for a few days at least,” he said, but I wasn’t reassured.

“OK,” I said.

“Did they recognize you,” he said.

They might have. It had been a long time since I’d been to the Weisman’s. I just shrugged.

“Or they thought you were intruders...” he said. “Of course...”

“Weren’t we?” I said.

The Patriarch dismissed me, deploying me to complete my assignment. I put my shoes on by the front door and left.

Walking up the hill, after another smoke, I thought about the door that made the sound, about how Weisman fled and had gotten away. But I knew Weisman wouldn’t flee. Not after his wife died would he flee the killers’ accomplices outside. No way. Not Weisman. But then who? Was I just hearing things, or could there have been another... a witness? A coward? Weisman wouldn’t go to the police, but another...? Another might.

The burning of the bag I tried not to think about. It made no sense. Four died to retrieve it. I hadn’t dared look inside, hadn’t dared. But as I watched it burn, I could see that inside was just paper, like documents. So instead, I thought about how fleeing the battleground earlier this afternoon, I’d run into two of my friends from growing up. I hadn’t realized they’d stayed friends, all this time. I hadn’t seen Henry since high school, or maybe once since high school, and definitely hadn’t seen Bruce since high school. We used to be close, Henry and I. Used to play sports, video games together. Even had a joint birthday party together, once. Went to summer camp together. Got in trouble at school for bullying together, though I don’t know if you can really call it bullying since he and Bruce stayed friends. I never told him how once I walked in on our Dads smoking weed together. It was at one of those big barbecues our parents put together. Henry was there, actually. Only he definitely couldn’t tell it was weed they were smoking.

But it was good to see he and Bruce were still chilling. It’s so easy to lose touch with people you have history with. All you have to do is stop making the effort.

The edge of town was where I met Keith. I told him about how The

Patriarch burned the bag. I told him how he threw it into the fire, how in a rare betrayal of emotion he showed concern over where Bob and Stevie were.

Keith seemed pretty affected, too.

“So what now?” he said.

“Find Weisman,” I said.

“And what? Not *kill* him...” he said.

I shook my head. No.

“Just find out if he was there,” I said.

I don’t know if I’d call Henry a quiet kid, but he wasn’t ever what you might call a dominant personality. He had his moments. Bruce, on the other hand, I’d say he was more of what you would call a quiet kid. Maybe that’s why Henry liked keeping him around, as it would seem he were doing. Maybe it made him feel more important, hanging out with such an agreeable, quiet guy like that.

3

In 3rd grade, I did a report on Mahatma Ghandi. I found on the Internet that Ghandi said: “Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.” Since then, I’ve tried to live my life by this ideal the best I can.

The worse conditions get, the more I must exert myself towards this ideal. In the kitchen, things got so bad that my only chance at happiness at that moment was to think nothing, say nothing, and do nothing. That’s why I just sat down, head tilted down eyes along the floor, trying not to look at my dead friends, Robert, Stephen, Mrs. Weisman, and Attie, the greatest cleaning lady ever, who looked so much like her daughter, Agape, mindlessly counting the clean kitchen tiles, you might think. But never had I had such a hard time with staying happy. I had had some tough times, but never had I experienced anything quite like that.

I’d met Bobby and Stevie before I discovered Ghandi, back when I was active and miserable. We played all the sports and video games together, went to all the birthday parties, our Dads smoked weed together. I bet they wouldn’t even remember how much like them I was back then, back when I was skinny and fast and could still kick or hit a ball off a tee

further than anyone. And I wouldn't say everything changed suddenly in 3rd grade. We remained friends. We kept playing together, our Dads kept hanging out. I just had learned a secret I wouldn't share with anyone else. And so gradually, very gradually, I let this secret envelope me. I let this secret become who I was, without any of them noticing. But maybe I should have told them. Maybe I should have told Robert and Stephen why I liked to hang out with them even if I never participated in any of their conversations, even if I wasn't even listening, if I didn't even care what they thought or said or did, as long as they were happy.

Henry told me to wait outside while he ran in to use the ATM.

He'd told me he was torn as to whether or not we should go to the police. I didn't offer any opinion; I had none. He said that it might be dangerous people we were dealing with. He said that considering we had just crossed paths with them, and that they hadn't realized it was us in that kitchen, us they were after, we'd be safe if we just kept our mouths shut, if we just acted as if nothing had ever happened, as if we were never there, and thought nothing more of it.

"Let's go eat," he said.

He led me to a diner. He loves diners. He loves diners like he'd rather be stuck in a diner for the rest of his life than a private island.

It was noisy in the diner.

He ordered a bacon cheeseburger. He insisted I order one too. I shrugged. He ordered me a three-egged omelet.

He told me he thought bacon cheeseburgers were interesting because two different kinds of animals had to die to make them. I couldn't help thinking he was sick, but I just nodded. He told me that three-egged omelets were interesting because up to three chickens could have died, but most likely, no chickens died. I don't know a lot about chicken farming. I nodded. Anyway, I thought he was just trying to be funny, trying as he may to take our mind off things.

Then he said that he thought it had to have been Mrs. Weisman they'd been after. He couldn't help it, he said. He couldn't help thinking about it, because we were involved in it now whether we liked it or not. There would be evidence of us at the scene, and if they found evidence of us there, and we hadn't reported anything – two women dying, especially – then we'd have to be considered the prime suspects.

That's when Henry gave me that look, that annoying look my Mom gives me sometimes. That look that says, Bruce, you know what I'm thinking and you haven't said anything yet so now you should totally just save me the trouble of saying it and say it for me already. Show you've been listening. Show yourself capable of human thought.

"Find Weisman?" I said, miserably.

We knew where he worked.

4

The Patriarch called me at work.

"So you're at work," he said. "How long you been there?"

I didn't understand.

"Leave now and come over," he said.

I didn't ask any questions. I had no choice but to do as he said. He was The Patriarch. I hurried over.

They had their guns drawn when they let me in. They frisked me, made me take off my shoes, and then led me to the living room. The Patriarch had a fire going.

"The fuck is this?" I said. "Guns?"

"Sit the fuck down, Weisman," he said.

"Did she have it?" I said.

The Patriarch nodded. "She had it all right. And now she's dead cause of you."

"What?"

"My guy says she put up a hell of a fight," he said.

No...

"Buck up, Bronco," he said, with sarcasm coming from a place I didn't understand. "She had it. You were right."

"Dead, what?" I said. "No..." Crying in front of The Patriarch and no longer afraid. "No..."

The Patriarch nodded.

"Why'd you do it?" he said.

"No..."

"Why'd you do it?" he repeated.

I shook my head, unable...

“Who the fuck!” he said. “Who the fuck watches their wife die and goes to work?”

“You killed her...” I said. It had registered. “You killed her.” Walking towards him and stopped by a gun steady as a traffic gate. “Fuuuccckkkk!”

The Patriarch shook his head. “No,” he said. “No. You say that again... don’t you say that again. Only thing still keeping you alive is you told me the truth once before.”

“The fuck you talking about...”

“You were right about your wife, Weisman. She took it. Took everything. Everything anyone would ever need to know in order to know everything there is to know about me. Everything in those papers. Papers worth everything to me in my hands, and everything to everyone but me in anyone else’s. And lucky for you, it was under the kitchen sink, God knows why, just as you said... My, oh my... You know it was a mistake believing you, even if you were right...”

Was he crying? No. God no, not now...

“But she put up a hell of a fight, ain’t that right Glen...” he said. “You saw it! Fucking coward.”

“The fuck you talking about!” I said. He never called me Glen. “I was at work!”

“Whole time?” he said. “Coward...”

“All morning,” I said. “Fuck you, asshole.”

“Don’t talk to me like that,” he said. “Not today. Not ever, but especially not today. Not the day we lose Linda.”

Linda, my wife. I shook my head.

“She killed two of my guys,” he said. “Two kids.”

So that’s what he was crying about.

“Sorry,” I said, surprising myself. The fuck was I apologizing for again?

“I had another guy at the scene,” he said. “Told me what happened. Sent him to kill you. Thought you were there so he thinks you’re the difference between getting off and getting caught. But he listens, almost too well. ‘Impressionable’s’ the word I think they use these days, they, whoever the hell they are...”

“He won’t talk?” I said.

“You won’t talk,” he said. “You don’t talk and he doesn’t have to.”

“So then what about me?” I said. “When the police come, what do I say? When they question me... they will... the fuck I tell them?”

“You tell them the truth, that you were at work, right? The truth? Remember the truth, it’s what you do best?”

I rubbed my right temple hard. Feel something.

“My guy also said there was another woman...”

“God,” I said. “Attie? Attie...”

“Attie, the cleaning lady? That’s what I thought. Yeah, well, she went out with a fight, too, apparently...”

“But so what about the cops?” I said again. “They’re not gonna find your guy’s prints or nothing?”

“No.”

“OK but then so how do they save face, the fucking police! A neighborhood like this, four dead... my wife! Damn you...” Deep breath.

The Patriarch cocked his head. He wanted me to figure this out on my own. It took a minute.

“They’re all dead,” I said. Deep breath. “They all killed each other.”

The Patriarch tossed a new log onto the fire.

“It’s the truth, ain’t it?” he said.

I nodded, considering.

“You tell them nothing,” The Patriarch said.

“I don’t know,” I said. “They’re gonna come after us.”

The Patriarch shook his head.

“Not us,” he said. “Not you, not us. Like I said, my guy’s what’s known to smarter men than us as an impressionable young man. He says soldier, even says soldier, if you could believe it.”

“My wife,” I said.

“My guy,” he said again. “Is very impressionable. A fucking soldier.”
Laughed, psychopathically, I thought.

“My fucking wife.”

“Your wife’s a thief,” he reminded me. “She’s a thief and a liar and you’re an honest man.”

Keith and I ran into Henry again in the heart of town. He was still

with Bruce. I didn't know what to say. It was weird running into him twice in one day, after years of not seeing him.

I asked them what they'd been up to.

Henry looked at Bruce.

"We're looking for Glen Weisman," the big guy said.

The town was pretty packed in the middle of the day.

I looked at Keith.

"Us too," Keith said.

Henry and I looked at each other. It seemed to me that we were thinking the same thing, that this was one hell of a coincidence.

"She's dead," Bruce said. "His wife. She's dead. We saw it."

I stared at him and could tell Keith was trying hard not to look at me.

"Really?" I said, immediately regretting I'd said anything, really regretting everything I'd done in my life up to this point now. I can't say I remember ever being this uncomfortable. Not with The Patriarch. Not at the bloody scene itself. This moment right here, this moment with Bruce seemingly knowing something I couldn't fathom, something seemingly so effortless and obvious to him, felt like my worst nightmare, that my worst nightmare, which began this afternoon, would go on forever.

"Yes, we were there," Bruce said. "Agape's mom, too, they killed. The killers. But they are dead, too, now. The killers. Those fuckers."

"You were there," I said. I spoke without thinking. I was done thinking. I was just ready to speak, like Bruce was. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know what to do, think, say.

"We were there," Bruce deadpanned, as always, and I knew he was serious. He didn't talk a lot, but when he did, he usually just echoed what everybody already knew, from what I could remember of him. "It happened real fast. They all died at once, basically, and then we just ran, like somehow we'd be next, that there might be more of them outside ready to come in, ready to kill. So we left, because we weren't ready for any of that."

I let a family eating ice cream pass us on the sidewalk.

"Nobody was supposed to die," I said.

I was beginning to think how terrible I was at this. Weisman was here and his car was right outside. His co-workers would remember him leaving early on the day his wife was found dead with three others.

They would ask questions that he wouldn't know how to answer. I could imagine it all. Why'd you leave early, Weisman? You never leave early. Oh, what, you called and sensed something was wrong, was that it? Because you didn't call. And when you left, where did you go? If you went home, why did you not call the police? And if not home, where?

"Weisman," I said.

He opened his eyes.

"This was a mistake," I said. "I'm sorry."

He sat up.

"You should've stayed at work," I said. "I should've sent someone."

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I have to think," I said.

Weisman didn't know the whole truth. For one, he didn't know the first thing about his wife. At least until today I didn't think he did. But whether or not he did he never would've believed the things she and I did while he and everybody else were at work.

"Weisman, you've got to go home right now," I said. "You've got to go home and call this in, say you left work early and just got home. Or say you stopped at the hardware store or something and then just got home. Actually, not the hardware store." Surveillance. "Just say you came right home, that you left early because business was slow, or whatever."

Weisman nodded. He stood. Except that how could business have been slow if he had to go in on a Saturday?

"Why'd you tell on her?" I said.

"Excuse me?" he said.

I shook my head, dismissing the thought.

Linda, Linda...

"You never work on Saturdays," I said, changing my mind again.

He sat back down.

Good, I thought. Deal with Weisman myself... Mexico my ass...

"I knew about you and Linda," he said, the nerve. "You want to know why she took everything from you, all there was to know?"

Yes, deal with Weisman myself. The kid, unable to find and kill

Weisman as ordered to do so by mighty me, will flee at sundown, scared to death, I've no doubt, especially after what happened today. Where was the kid, now? Could he have showed up at Weisman's work? What tracks was he leaving? I was out of control... Not my day... Linda, Linda...

"She thought Diane was back in the picture," he said. "Can you believe it?"

Diane, my ex-wife. Not a chance. Haven't heard from her in ten years.

"Get up," I said.

7

It was difficult for me to trust our old friends again entirely, though I couldn't say the same for Bruce. On one hand, on the surface, they seemed pretty remorseful and apologetic, but on the other hand, it was really tough for me to get inside their heads.

They had just lost two of their best friends and watched two women die, whereas we had just lost two old friends and watched two women die. They hadn't killed anybody or meant to kill anybody; the same went for us. They'd been looking for Weisman because they thought it was he at the scene, he who helped kill their two friends. I forgot why we'd been looking for Weisman. It was a bad idea to be looking for Weisman. We should've gone home right away.

Which is why it felt like a dream when I realized we were following our old friends. What did we expect to solve together? They were our friends yes, but criminals, still criminals if not murderers, accomplices to women's murderers, real murderers with whom we also used to be friends. Now we all knew it wasn't Weisman they needed to find anymore, but us, Bruce and I, whom already they'd found without realizing it was us whom they'd been looking for all along, us, the real witnesses, but, intensifying the dreamlike complexity, witnesses technically but who at heart were old friends who, in a heartbeat for their friends, would pledge their allegiance to the fifth alone. So we followed, with nowhere else to go and no shaking the feeling that this was merely the calm between two nightmares.

Weisman's car was parked on one of the first streets we walked down, as if they knew exactly where to find it. I looked at them skeptically,

and looked at Bruce, wondering what he was thinking, considering flight.

“That’s his car,” I said, trembling, and then realized we’d started looking for Weisman to save his life. How’d we find his car so quickly? Where were we? To where have our old friends taken us?

They looked at one another.

“This is Weisman’s car?” Keith said.

I nodded. “Yeah,” I said, for emphasis. “It is.”

Bruce scratched his head. I’d never seen him scratch his head before; he looked like he was thinking. Suddenly, he started walking towards someone’s front door.

“Hey!” Keith called after Bruce, but tentatively, not loud enough for Bruce or anyone indoors to hear. Our old friends looked at one another again, and then back at Bruce.

He rang the doorbell. I hid behind Weisman’s car with my old friends. We all waited, but then Bruce turned and shook his head. Nobody was home.

But then Bruce went to the next door. What the hell? What’s gotten into Bruce? I could tell my old friends were thinking the same thing.

8

Find Weisman, I thought. That would make me happiest. For Ghandi. For harmony. For the whole truth.

I waited by the door. I had a good feeling about this one. I didn’t understand what Henry and the rest of the guys were so scared of all of a sudden. Especially when we had all already just witnessed the horror of four people we knew dying horrible deaths.

I waited a good half-minute before I, as a last resort, tried the door anyway. Surprisingly, it was unlocked.

I opened slowly, quietly. I saw so many shoes at the door that I figured someone must be home.

“Hello?” I called.

I heard something but I didn’t know what it was. It sounded like people hushing one another. Then I thought I heard fire, its quiet breath and quirky cackle.

Then I heard footsteps coming up from behind me, in from outside.

It was my friends. It felt good that they hadn't abandoned me or abandoned our plans. Henry was there too, right behind them.

Then there were the men with guns. They led us right to Weisman.

Weisman stood. His face looked like shit. A man I've never seen before swiveled his rocking chair to face us.

I expected one of them to speak, especially Weisman, at least, who I've known for as long as I can remember. But neither he nor the guy sitting down said anything. They seemed confused.

"Your wife's dead," I told Weisman.

Weisman had no reaction.

The guy sitting down stood.

My friends were behind me, doing, saying nothing. I don't know what they were thinking.

The guy I didn't know came up to me, looked me in the eye, put a hand on my shoulder.

"What's your name, son?" he said. "What do you need?"

"Nothing more," I said.

He nodded.

"Can you do me a favor?" he said. I could feel my friends behind me doing nothing. What could they do?

I nodded.

"Go home," he said. "Forget everything that happened today, and I will forget your face. Understand?"

I shook my head. I didn't really understand.

"Go home," he said.

And so I did. I went home, and that was the last I saw of Henry.