

# SILENT ASSASSINATION

**Sriram Krishnan**

To my dearest sis, who got it off  
the ground...

With Love.

**PART 1**

*Those blue silent eyes,  
Benign yet wise...*

# 1

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It was just another normal day. The same morning duel between me and my wife Catherine. Of course the issue here again was of me being a drunkard.

“If your bottles were that important to you, why did you marry me instead of a bartender,” cried Catherine from her belly thinking at least this would reach my plugged ears.

Quite annoyed by the usual lectures, I got hold of a paperweight and threw at her. I went straight for her forehead. In a second, she went down holding her head. I knew I had hurt her.

“Oh my god...” I rushed to her with concern.

I held her face to have a look at her bruise. She let her face off my hands with anger. Blood was oozing out of the bruise.

With little first aid, it was all covered and there she was all set for the second round of the bout. “Injured yet strong”. Now she won’t talk to me. Well this was her secret weapon. I couldn’t handle the dumb silence, which yet spoke so much. I quietly stood by her while she prepared the morning breakfast.

She spread butter on the bread and just when I thought she was giving it to me, she instead had it herself. She was upset and angry still all right. I helped myself with the breakfast.

I knew I was the one to be blamed for all this.

“I am sorry dear. I know its my fault. I do try. But all those memories. They haunt me. I need something to take it out of my head. I am sorry.”

“I will try to stop slowly. I assure you I will. I have already lost an important part of my life. Now I cant lose you. I can’t.”

With tears in her eyes she spoke, “Honey, its been two months. It wasn’t your fault there. You tried your best to save him. What happened otherwise wasn’t because of you,” she paused “Why don’t you understand that? You can’t be like this forever. You have to fight it out.”

‘But he was my best friend...my big brother...’ I sobbed.

Catherine hugged me and tried to console. She knew, what she was asking for wasn't that easy.

## 2

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When I was jobless after my marriage, Chad helped me get a job at his fire station. He was more of an icon there and nobody ever stopped narrating the tales of his heroics as a fire fighter. He was like a big brother with a difference of 10 years in our ages. But he was more like a God to me for what he had done for me.

Chad was one of those guys whom I adored more than myself. He stood by me during my good as well as tough times. He being an important part of my life deserved some thing special for his birthday. I had arranged for a surprise party and I was forcing every cell in my head to think of a good gift.

One whole week, I went through all commercials and special bargains just to get an idea of what to buy for him. But all that effort went in vain. After doing a lot of head scratching, I surrendered and consulted Catherine to suggest one. Oh boy! She was quick.

Catherine suggested me to buy him an electric drill 'cause he was as passionate about carpentry as he was about fire fighting. I could just afford one.

Finally it was the 'D-Day'. But being fire fighters we had to go to the station. I wished him early in the morning and off we went to the fire station. Each second ticked by like an hour. I was so very excited.

At 5 in the evening I thought of keeping Chad busy without letting him know what was happening in the ground floor.

And then as expected, the fire call went up. Chad, of course slipped down the pole just to be taken by surprise.

'Happy Birthday!!!' the air was filled up with birthday jingles and whistles.

Chad hugged and thanked me with tears rolling down his cheeks.

He was short of words when he saw the electric drill. He made a mark of our friendship by drilling the wall near our table to hang a picture of ours gifted by his wife Martha.

Cake cut, champagne opened, gifts unwrapped, never had the fire station been in such a joyous mood.

I thanked god with my eyes closed for making this moment worth remembering.

As if he had listened to my prayers, the fire call rang. I looked up with a frown.

“There is fire at West Bridge Hospital. Degree -Z,” the attendant said keeping the receiver down.

Degree-Z meant the case was severe. Soon everybody forgot about the party. Fire fighters started rushing their way to the fire engines. Family members made way for them and stood spell bound looking at others.

Fire engines were soon at the site. Fire had started due to a cylinder blast in cafeteria. The situation was severe.

We gushed water but the fire gradually grew stronger. The patients were trapped inside and the hospital needed immediate evacuation. Many of them were already helped out but we went in to rescue others trapped inside. A team of ten went in including Chad and me.

It was dark inside and hardly could we see each other. An hour passed by and we brought ten to eleven inmates out of the inferno. Still there seemed to be more inmates. The team went in again. Fire was gradually subsiding but still work was not finished.

Hearing a cry, we followed the sound to reach the strangled person. It was a child of about ten years age. She stood there crying at her peak with nobody to help her out. The girl was buried under her bed. Her hands stretched out, all burnt.

Chad went in to help her out. He pulled her out of her bed in spite of her resistance due to fright and passed her on to me. Just then the ceiling collapsed right over us. All of a sudden, it was we who needed help. I could see Chad’s hands out of the rubble. Just when I got hold of him and tried to pull him out, the remaining part of ceiling also collapsed. What happened then could hardly be recalled.

I regained consciousness and I saw people gathered around me. I mumbled and my wife told me the girl was out of danger.

“Where is Chad?”

“He is hurt. The doctors are with him,” said she with tears rolling down her cheeks.

I knew there was more to that. "How is he?"

She kept weeping. "How is he?" I shouted.

I was taken to his bed. He was badly burnt. He was conscious though.

"How are you, buddy?"

He passed a smile, "I am OK. How's the kiddo?"

"She is fine. Thanks to you"

"Oh no. We did it." He gave a pause, "Robert, please assure me you'll take care of my family. Please."

"Don't say that. You'll be fine. Doctors are there. You'll make it..."

He held my hands and slowly the grip loosened. He lay still without any movement. Eyes wide open yet shut.

Martha broke down and so did I.

# 3

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Two months after Chad's demise, trouble crept in. Martha got seriously ill with oral cancer. Doctors told us that she should be immediately operated. Catherine and I tried every bit possible but it was becoming hard for us too as we had a 2 year old baby to take care.

We gathered every single penny but it wouldn't suffice for the operation. Hospital agreed to take money in two installments. I had promised Chad to take care of his family.

Catherine could see the tension creeping into my head. She knew how important it was for me. But even she couldn't figure out a way to pay the second installment.

We had to arrange for \$30,000 within a month. Only a miracle could save her now. I felt sorry for Martha and Chad. "I failed...I failed as a friend..." I thought.

Every morning I would get up with a glimmer of hope that some miracle would happen but sun rises and sun sets without even showing us light. I sometimes wish sun never rose.

Treatment continued and we paid the first installment. Now we didn't have enough money for ourselves. We tried to survive on whatever we had. It was becoming tough.

One day I got up and saw ray of hope. I suddenly remembered a person who was close to Chad, Mr. Dyer who owned a bar.

"Catherine, do you remember Mr. Dyer?" shouted I with excitement all over my face.

"Yeah. You think he will help?"

"Oh yes. I do. You bet he will. He loved Chad like his son."

I immediately rushed out to take a cab. The Shine Star Bar was 10 miles away from the town and it had been a long time since I last met him. Two months back he was at Chad's birthday party. Miracle was about to happen. "It had to" I thought.

Twenty-Five minutes drive and I was there standing in front of the bar. It seemed as if it was still doing great business. I went in the expectation of being greeted by Mr. Dyer but nothing of that sort happened.

With concern I asked a bartender about Mr. Dyer.

“I am sorry sir. He sold this bar to Mr. Tim a month back.” The bartender replied back.

Slowly my smile fell flat, “Can I see Mr. Tim?”

“Sure sir. I’ll call him in a second” said the bartender, “Hey Rick, tell Mr. Tim there is someone to see him.”

After a minute, a stout guy in his early forties came and stood near me. “Hello sir. How can I help you?”

“Hello, I am Robert. Robert Nash. Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Dyer?”

“Oh I am sorry sir. I have his old address. But it seems he moved out from there a week back and now I have not seen him since then.”

Last ray of hope also died. “Mr. Tim. Could you do me a favor?”

“Yeah..Go on.”

“Chad and I were close to Mr. Dyer. Chad is no more. His wife is suffering from cancer. I require thirty thousand dollars within one month for her treatment. Could you please ask him to contact me at this number in case he can help us with this?” I wrote the phone number on a piece of paper and handed it to him.

“I am sorry about Chad, sir. I’ll ask M r. Dyer to get back to you whenever I see him again.”

“Thank you” I came out of the bar with disappointment written all over my face.

Just when I was about to hire a cab, a man patted me on the back. I looked back. He was lean, tall with a well-trimmed moustache and he looked through his glasses as if he was scrutinizing something.

“Mr. Robert, How are you?” he had a very funny accent. I wondered how he knew my name.

I hesitated to reply, “Umm..Fine thank you.” I ignored him and tried to sit inside the c ab.

The man got hold of me and signaled the cab driver to move on. Cab driver, confused, did so.

“Mr. Robert, I think I can help you with this.”

My eyes lit up. Was this miracle or what? But wait. Why would he help..why?

“Excuse Me..” said I with disbelief.

“I am sorry. But I overheard your conversation with Mr. Tim. I think I can help you.”

“And why would you do so?”

“Mr. Robert. You need money and I don’t see any problem if somebody is trying to help you out.”

“Why would you give money to a stranger? And that too thirty thousand dollars,” said I although I didn’t want to shoo him off.

“Here’s my address and telephone number. Be my guest tomorrow and I’ll let you know everything,” said the stranger writing his address on a piece of paper.

I looked at it reading each alphabet because of the excitement. But yet I lay mum not knowing what to say.

“Give it a thought. I’d be expecting your call. Have a good day,” off he went in his limo.

I stood there glued to the ground, deep in my thoughts. I hired a cab and kept looking out of the window and suddenly the world seemed a lot better place to live in. More color and more happiness all around. But there was a shade that seemed to be missing and even I had no idea. I knew there was some thing hidden beneath those colors that seemed to be brighter than usual.

Curious to know yet happy, I gave the cab driver more money and asked him to keep the change.

Well the only question that circled around my head was whether to tell Catherine or not. I decided not to.

I tried hard to hide my excitement when I got in.

“I hope you’ve got good news,” said Catherine with great expectation, which was visible in her glowing eyes.

‘Umm..?’ mumbled I, ‘He is out of town. Would be coming tomorrow. I have left a note for him with the bartender.’ I was quick to cook up a story. Hardly I let her doubt me.

‘I just hope he helps us. I am sure he will.’

‘Oh yes. He will,’ I thought passing a dry smile.

Whole night I could hardly sleep without thinking of what would happen the next day. I was being torn apart into two halves. One asking me to go for it and the other still a bit skeptical, for no one knew what was there in the Pandora’s box.

I hadn’t even asked the man his name. Who was he..why he wants to help me..why..why?

# 4

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Next day, I got up to be greeted by my wife with a morning bed tea. She had that glow in her face, which I had been dying to see since the last two months.

My heart started pounding hard as time ticked by. I had breakfast and got ready. I took the piece of paper out of my jacket's pocket. I glared at the address written in bold. I gathered all my strength and thought of calling him. After all he was like a messiah sent by god.

‘Going to meet Mr. Dyer. Will take some time,’ shouted I.

‘OK dear. Hope everything goes on well. Wish him on my behalf.’

‘Yeah I’ll do that.’

Walked out and hired a cab. ‘Starkville’ I said to the driver.

‘Right, sir.’

In forty-five minutes, I was there. ‘He can afford thirty thousand all right,’ I thought looking at a bungalow fifty times as big as mine. I could count nearly five limos standing inside the gigantic gate. ‘Is this to stop giants from getting in?’ I joked to myself. Security guards all around.

‘Must be some big personality. I had caught a big fish,’ I thought, ‘But then, why wasn’t he surrounded by guards if he was that big a personality?’

Well why should that bother me? He was ready to help me and I was in need.

‘Yes. Whom do you want to meet?’ asked a guard.

‘Umm..’ I scratched my head, ‘well..I don’t know his name. But he gave me this address and asked me to meet him.’ I showed him the piece of paper with the address.

He had a look at the address. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Robert..Robert Nash.’

He made a call to get it confirmed I was shown the way to his drawing room. It was as huge and beautiful from inside as it was from outside.

“He’ll be there in a minute,” I was told.

Meanwhile I treated my eyes with some splendid beauty. I saw a glass of what seemed to be an orange drink on the table.

“Its for you, Mr. Robert. Help yourself,” I heard some one speak out. I turned to have a look at him. It was the same man I had met outside the bar. “Have it.”

“I..I..uh..” I hesitated.

“Don’t hesitate. It is for you,” he patted me on my back.

I sat down on the couch, which was so soft that I felt like going into it like quick sand. I sipped the orange juice as the man looked at me with his notorious smile on.

“Sorry for not introducing myself yesterday. I am Sam Luther. I am a businessman. Felt nice to see you here. It seems your friend was very close to you.”

“Yeah. He was. He was like big brother to me.”

“What do you do for a living?”

“I..I am a fire fighter.”

“Oh..that’s nice.”

“How can you help me sir?” I asked without wasting much time.

“Oh yes. Lets get to business. Come let s go to my study.” He guided me to his study where a man dressed in casuals with a good muscular body stood. “Charles, meet Robert. He is the one I was talking about.”

“I see. Nice to meet you, Mr. Robert,” we shook hands.

“Cigarette?” Mr. Luther offered me.

“No, sir. Thanks. I don’t smoke.” Mr. Luther was impressed.

“Robert, as you know I am willing to help you. But I need you as much as you need me.”

“How can I help you?” it came as a surprise to me.

“Well, you didn’t think I would help you without a cause. Did you?” he continued, “I need a very small favor from you. It is very special and you can’t even imagine the reward you get.”

“And what would that be?”

“Before I let you know the favor I want, I’ll tell you what you’ll get in return. You’ll get thirty thousand dollars before the task and ten thousand every month for a year. How’s that?”

Well, It was a tempting offer. But I was afraid of what the task would be, for it gave a heavy return. “I need to know the task.”

“You would have to kill a person for me.”

Finding it hard to breathe, I shouted “What? And who would it be?”

“Mr. Robert, you’ll come to know of it when you are required to.”

“But..But..how can I? Why on earth do you want me to kill?”

“You ask too many questions, Mr. Robert. Will you or not?”

“I..I..I can’t do this. I am a fire fighter. I save lives. I can’t kill any one. I am sorry,” I stood up.

“You need not worry. We’ll sign a contract where if any problem, you can always show that you were forced to kill by me.”

I kept nodding my head in disagreement. I could not believe my ears.

“I’ll give you a day’s time, Mr. Robert. You can give me a call any time in case you change your mind. Charles, please show him the way to the door.”

I slowly walked out finding it hard to stand on two legs.

I got back home to be greeted by Catherine. “What happened? You seem a little confused. Did you talk to Mr. Dyer? What did he say?”

“He..he asked me to call him tomorrow. He’ll let me know,” said I not looking into Catherine’s eyes, “I am tired. I am going to take a nap. Please don’t wake me up for two hours.”

Catherine was all but worried. She thought I was disturbed because of no positive response from Mr. Dyer.

Thirty thousand and a ten monthly. I could hardly stop thinking about it. I took the paper out of my pocket and place it safely inside the drawer.

The generous man wasn’t benign after all. Should I kill some one to keep a promise? Should I? I kept thinking of Mr. Luther’s words.

There was something more to it. *Those eyes were benign yet wise.*

**PART 2**

*...Silently we walk,  
Silently we talk...*

# 5

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I got up the next day and no; it wasn't Catherine who woke me up unlike the previous day. I went to the drawing room hearing the doorbell ring. Catherine was at the door to receive a letter.

“What's it, dear?”

“Letter from the hospital,” she paused, opened the letter and read it loud.

It was a notice from the hospital reminding us of the second installment. Catherine gave the letter to me and gave a look into my eyes, which almost ate half my heart away. She had so much expectation the other day and now she seemed to have left everything to the lord almighty.

“And here the lord has shown me a rough way..a really rough one to choose. Should I do it if this is what he wants?” I thought.

I wanted to color my world again. Wanted to see Catherine smile again. Wanted to keep my promise. Wanted to let my dear friend rest in peace. But, should that come at the expense of a life? I left that question unanswered.

I hired a cab and left for the fire station. Kept viewing out of the window hoping to get an answer.

Suddenly, scenes from life flashed in front of me - Hospital declaring Martha as dead, Catherine and I getting separated, Catherine taking my son away from me, a man dressed in white appearing from distance. It was Chad cursing and abusing me for Martha's death. “Robert, why did you do this to me for all I've done for you..why..why?” the sound kept growing stronger and stronger until I was awakened by a screech.

The cab came to a halt. A boy playing with his ball had suddenly come before the cab. By god's grace, the cab missed him by inches. I was perspiring gallons of sweat. I saw the child walk away terrified by the incident. Figures started appearing in front of me - Martha, her child, Catherine, our son and Chad. “No..no I cant let them down..NO..” I cried.

The cab driver was terrified and brought the car to a halt. “What happened, sir? Is there any problem?”

Wiping the sweat off my forehead, I asked him to keep going. I reached the fire station in a very gloomy mood.

My co-workers kept asking me what the problem was. I had not been regular since Chad's death. Every body knew about Martha. The concern they showed towards me and their enquiry about Martha's condition added to the tension in the air.

My inner self urged me to call and I thought to myself and said, "That's it! I will do whatever I can to help Martha."

I went to Jack, the station in charge and told him that I had to arrange for money today and asked for another day's leave. He reluctantly accepted.

I left for Mr. Luther's place. On reaching there, I was guided inside without being asked a single question. Charles greeted me in the lobby, "Mr. Robert, How are you? Nice to see you."

"I..I am ready."

"Good! We knew you'd come back. Mr. Luther is at the pool. Let's go."

He took me to the pool where Mr. Luther was playing with his Alsatian. I wondered, "The dog is lucky to have such an owner."

"Sir, Robert is here. He says he is ready for the task.."

Mr. Luther gave a glance towards me and gave a notorious smile. Then ignoring me he threw a baton into the pool. The dog jumped into the pool and got the baton back to its master.

"Good Boy..Good Boy.."

said Mr. Luther patting the dog.

"See Mr. Robert. Dogs would do anything for their master," he smiled.

I knew he was talking about me sarcastically. The only difference being I was the dog in this case and money was the baton.

‘I’ll tell you Mr. Robert. You’ve made a wise decision,’ said he pointing the baton towards me, ‘You must grab the opportunity when it comes knocking your door. Never had you dreamt in your life. Had you, Mr. Robert?’

I stayed mum. He continued, ‘Charles, give him thirty thousand dollars..’ Mr. Charles obeyed his order, ‘Mr. Robert, you will come for the next four days in the evening after five. And as you said, I’ll let you save lives in the morning. Is that all right Mr. Robert?’

‘Yes, Mr. Luther. I am very thankful to you. But, I hope no one will know about this. My wife, my children, no body..’ I was cut abrupt.

‘Mr. Robert, don’t worry. I have given you my word. Even my guards are clueless about this. Moreover, we will sign a contract where it says that this is being done with my consent.’

Charles brought thirty thousand dollars and contract papers. I went through the paper thoroughly and signed on it and so did Mr. Luther.

Miracle started taking its shape.

I was so very excited that I couldn’t even wait to get home. I called up Catherine. I told her about the arrangement of thirty thousand dollars, hiding the truth. She still thought that Mr. Dyer had helped us with it. I asked her to be at the hospital. She was over the moon with joy.

At noon, I was at the hospital and Catherine stood there at the gates. She hugged me as soon as I got off the cab.

Is this what I wanted to see? My world still seemed colorless. I have to fill it by coloring others’ lives. And I will...I will.

We went inside and paid the remaining amount to the hospital for continuation of Martha’ s treatment.

Doctors guided us to the ICU where Martha was recovering. She was not advised radiation therapy. Thankfully the disease was detected in the early stages. She was sleeping. Doctors said she was recovering quickly but she’d be requiring routine checkups.

Martha’s daughter and mother were sitting beside Martha eagerly waiting for a miracle to happen. Doctors went in to give them the good news.

All of a sudden, their lips split which had gone so dry and chapped. Tears rolled down their cheeks taking all the hardships, they had gone through, outside with them.

# 6

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I finished off my day shift at the fire station the next day and headed for Mr. Luther's mansion. He was nowhere to be seen.

"Mr. Robert, Sam won't be joining us today. Today you'd be taught to shoot," Charles walked into the lounge.

"O.K. I hope you teach me well enough. Never held a gun before."

"Don't worry. It is easy. Take my word Mr. Robert. It is easier to take a life than to give birth," he gave a wicked smile.

Mr. Charles pointed towards a guitar case and said, "Here is your weapon," he opened up the case, "it's a sniper. A M107 Long Range Sniper Rifle."

"What a beauty..long range? Am I supposed to kill some one from a long range?"

"You are a quick learner, Mr. Robert. It can kill some one within a distance of 6800 meters."

"Goodness gracious me. I think I am getting the picture."

"Now let me tell you about how to assemble the rifle. An assembled sniper is of 57 inches. So after taking your shot you need to disassemble the rifle to keep it inside the case."

I kept listening to what ever he said. "This gun can do serious injuries to you. Hence, a good lot of practice is required and that's what I am here for."

He taught me everything about adjusting range using front and rear sights as well although lenses were there to be mounted. I just pretended to understand everything, but he knew it was a tough ask.

"So Mr. Robert, I've taught you the basics of this rifle. You'll be practicing shooting with this tomorrow."

I gave a nervous smile.

It was nine in the evening and rushed back to my home. I had lied to my dear wife that I was doing some part time work at Mr. Dyer's place to earn some extra money and to repay Mr. Dyer for his generous help.

Days went by and I was no more a novice. I was very close to a pro. I somehow started enjoying this. Afraid to accept, but it sure was becoming my new profession.

A day before, I was taken to the site. "This is Piraeus Museum. Here the person whom you are going to kill will deliver a speech," said Charles.

I listened to him carefully. "Robert, you can see the sky scrapers surrounding this site. You can take your shot from any one of those buildings. Which one do you prefer?"

I thought for a while and said, "That one will be perfect. It'll give me a left side view of the stage. I can get a clear shot at the person's temple."

"No Mr. Robert. You wont go for the temple. You are not professional enough to aim at such a small part of body. You have to shoot at the chest. Do you get it?"

"OK. But..."

"No buts, Mr. Robert. You'll do as you are told. Here is your earphone. We'll converse through it," he handed me one.

I slowly went to the top of the building carrying the telescope alone to have a view at the stage. "Are you able to get a clear shot?" asked Charles standing on the stage.

"Yes, I am."

"Fine come down and join me."

We went back to Mr. Luther's place where Mr. Luther was busy scribbling on some papers.

"Welcome Mr. Robert, I was told you are a quick learner. So have you been to the site?"

"Yes. I have."

"Tomorrow you'll go to the same site at eleven and without wasting time, go to the top of a building to take your shot. Charles will be there to help you. He'll let you know when to shoot."

“But, Mr. Luther, whom do I shoot?”

“Don’t worry. Tomorrow early morning, you’ll receive an envelope. It’ll have the person’s photograph. So it’s a cakewalk. You know the place and you’ll know the person. Do the job and get rewarded. That’s it.”

“Yeah. It sure seems easy.”

“But, I should tell you this Mr. Robert. We won’t interfere in your business thereon and you mustn’t interfere in ours. If there is any breach, you will be on the receiving end. I hope you understand Mr. Robert.”

I simply nodded and wondered who the person could be.

# 7

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Chad and Martha playing with their daughter. I and Catherine out on a Hawaiian trip. My son growing into a businessman owning a farmhouse. My dream was interrupted by the ring of the alarm. It was six in the morning. Catherine was surprised to see me wake up so early.

“Honey, you never set the alarm. Is it an important day today?”

I had to think of something quick, “Hmm..I thought of going to Mr. Dyer’s place.” Catherine knew I had taken an off today from the fire station.

I went out to check for any envelope in the letterbox but there was none. I was getting very impatient. Who can be the person I have to kill? Must be some person of a high stature. Else why would Mr. Luther want to kill him?

I thought of switching on the television. I just might come to know of the person if he is of a high stature. I watched the news channel for about half an hour and there it was.

“Today the French business tycoon Mr. Sam Luther would be meeting the town’s billionaire Mr. Arthur Brune at the Piraeus Museum in Starkville. Amidst high security, they will be discussing the issue of project condor and the reason why the much-hyped issue came to a stand still despite Mr. Luther’s agreement to invest heavily as per Mr. Brune’s demand,” I was hearing to the news more keenly than ever. Was it going to be Arthur Brune? Am I supposed to kill the town’s billionaire?

I thought for a while with dumb silence. Then I relaxed myself. It makes no difference to me. I have to kill somebody or the other, be it an ordinary man or a billionaire. I took a deep breath and filled myself with the air of confidence.

“Honey, you are acting quite strange today,” Catherine walked out of the kitchen, “First you got up early and now news. What’s the matter?”

“Na..Nothing..I just felt like...”

“Anyways, there was a letter in the post box for you. I wonder who it is from. Shall I open it and read it out for you?”

My eyes opened wide and I shouted, "No..I'll check it. Give it to me. It is for a friend of mine. I have to give it to him. Don't open it."

Catherine handed it out to me without even doubting me for a single second. I slipped the photograph into my trouser pocket.

At half past nine, I got dressed up and had breakfast. With the envelope inside my pocket, kissed my wife goodbye and hired a taxi for Piraeus Museum. I was there at half past ten. With an hour left for Charles to come, I waited in front of the Skyway Apartments from where I was supposed to shoot. Twenty minutes later Mr. Charles joined me.

"Good that you are early. I like that," he complimented, "Here is your earphone and here is your gun." He handed me a guitar case. It was quite heavy. "I'll wait near the stadium but do keep in touch through this microphone. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I think I should get going." Crowd had started gathering.

I went inside the building and got inside the elevator. An old lady kept staring at me.

"Hello..." she had an Italian accent, "Are you a musician? So silly of me. You of course are. You are a guitarist. Eh...?" the old lady started annoying me.

"Get rid of her..get rid of her..." Charles kept shouting through the microphone. I slowly removed the earphone and stayed quite.

"You know I have a grand son. He is interested in guitar. If its ok with you, can you please come to my house? My grandson will be very happy."

I kept nodding and gave a gentle smile. But I could hardly stand there and listen to her blabber.

"I live in ninth floor. House number 902. Please do come after you work."

The lift stopped at eighth floor. I got out and waved at her.

"I hope you wont forget. 902..." she shouted.

I was happy to have got rid of her. I waited in the eighth floor for a while and climbed up the stairs. I slowly had a look in the corridor to see if the old lady had gone. She had. I quickly put the earphone back on and said, "She is gone..."

“Good, now get ready with your gun.”

I climbed the stairs and reached the terrace. Opened the case and assembled the sniper. I mounted the telescope and had a look through it at the stage. Charles stood there looking up the building. “Done...” I said waving at Charles.

“OK. Now listen. The function will begin at half past noon. Wait until you get a clear shot and then shoot at his chest. I hope you know whom to aim at.”

I then realized I never had a look at the photograph in the envelope. But confident about the person to be killed, I said, “Yeah, I do know.”

I then took the envelope out and opened it. I slipped the photograph out to be spell bound. My jaws dropped down and I couldn't believe my eyes. Perspiration started heavily despite the weather being pleasant.

It was Mr. Luther himself. But why..why would he want to kill himself? My heart started beating fast. I could almost hear it pounding.

“Charles, I..I think there has been a mistake.”

“What is it, Robert? What's the matter?”

“I have got a photograph of Mr. Luther himself. I thought I was supposed to kill...” I was interrupted.

“Mr. Robert, don't think too much. There has been no mistake. You do as you were told. Understood?”

“Ye...Yeah,” my mouth had gone dry, “But why does he want to kill himself?”

“Mr. Robert, I think you were told not to interfere in our process. You better not.”

I stayed silent. I started perspiring to such an extent that I couldn't even get a hold of the pistol grip.

I somehow fought my inner fear and got ready. I had to do it. I had to do it for Chad.

A big mob gathered. First Mr. Brune came and addressed to the audience. Then came Mr. Luther.

‘Now take a clear shot at him. He will be there for five minutes,’ spoke Charles.

I pointed the crosswire at his chest.

Closed my eyes for a while and prayed to god asking him to forgive me for what I was about to do with the only hope that he hears my confession.

‘This is for you Chad,’ I said to myself and went straight for Mr. Luther’s heart. Two shots and there he lay mum on the ground. All I could hear were noises of the mob due to the terror.

‘Robert, quick. Leave the building immediately,’ cried Charles.

I got into the elevator and left the building as quickly as I could. I was received by Charles himself downstairs in a car and off we fled.

*Silently we walked and silently we talked for even I did not know what I just did.*

**PART 3**

*..yet we get caught,  
in the masse shot.*

# 8

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I was dropped about hundred meters away from my home. I rushed inside and switched on the television. Almost all news channels had just one breaking news. Catherine was delighted to see me so early.

‘How is Mr. Dyer doing, Honey?’

I just showed my palm at Catherine with my eyes glued to the television asking Catherine to stop speaking. ‘What the...’ she was stunned too.

‘The French business tycoon Mr. Sam Luther was killed today in broad day light. He was here to initiate talks on project condor with the American multi millionaire Mr. Arthur Brune. Mr. Luther was shot at half past eleven in the morning. Cops are still on the lookout for clues so as to find out who was behind this. Mr. Luther rather was fighting for life after being shot. He was being taken to the Stark medical research center when the ambulance exploded resulting in the death of twenty-three people including Mr. Sam Luther. Ten cops, five hospital staff members, Mr. Sam’s personal body guard and six civilians are among the dead...’

I was taken aback by the news. I couldn’t believe my eyes and ears. Wasn’t he supposed to die after being shot? And what was that bombing all about? Had I committed a crime that was much bigger than what I thought I had? Questions started to cloud my head. But for none could I find an answer.

‘Dear, did you know him?’

‘Na..Nope,’ I said. I had started to find it hard hiding the truth. But I had to, for the reality was a bigger than the truth.

‘Then...’ she paused, ‘I hope you don’t take me wrong.’

‘What?’ my tension was speaking for me.

‘Honey, you were watching the news about the same event in the morning too.’

She took me by surprise. I struggled to utter a single word.

“Ya...Yeah, a friend of mine had gone to see this event.”

“Good gracious me. Is he alright?” she looked concerned. Million lies to hide one. It is tough to hide one lie. Then how do we manage to bear millions?

I decided to forget the incident thinking of it as a bad dream. I just hoped cops didn't get any trails leading to me. Rather, everybody started doubting Mr. Arthur himself because of the recent duels between the two business tycoons over the much-hyped project and the evidences police found against him.

Months passed and my work had kept me consumed most of the time. The only time I was made to remember that forgetful event was when I used to receive ten thousand dollars monthly.

Martha had been discharged from the hospital and was administered regularly. I lied to Catherine about winning a lottery and we decided to visit Canada.

I took a week off from my work and we prepared to leave.

# 9

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At half past eight in the morning, we boarded the train to Canada. Our son Jimmy could not understand the excitement. He was just too young for that. I thanked god for making my dream come true no matter how it became possible.

The train slowly picked up pace and within few hours we were passing through the valleys and mountains of Canada. It seemed like a blanket of green and white buds all ready to bloom. The wonderful landscape was so captivating that Catherine could hardly keep her eyes off that.

Few more hours went by and we were in the Kicking Horse Pass. It was like a vast depression rimmed by mountains.

We got down at Vancouver. It is more of a scenic road and beaches.

We reached there by night. The streets were all lighted up as if the town were welcoming us with delight. We booked a room for two and decided to doze off.

The next day, we went shopping and Catherine was busy gazing through all the jewelries. Beaches, parks and marine beauty all made the day worth remembering. It was like a place with priceless beauty.

Vancouver seemed to have that never-ending supply of surprises. It had almost all varieties of food and cork and that too at the most affordable price.

Very first day we realized that just a week's trip would not be sufficient to relish the beauty.

Four days later I went to call up Jack, the fire department in charge.

‘Hi, Jack. How’s everything going out there?’

‘Hey, fighting the same old fire. How’s the story at your end?’

‘Great. I have a lot to tell man. A lot..’

‘Good. I hope you are having a good time Robert.’

“Yeah. See ya.”

What I saw while coming out of the booth was like a nightmare turned into reality. Charles stood a few meters away not aware of me. I slowly walked towards a newsstand and pretended to buy one but I wasn't able to keep my eyes off him.

Charles started walking in the opposite direction and I followed him out of curiosity. What was he doing there? This was the time to find the answers for all the questions hovering my head.

Walking towards a big house, he knocked at the door. I gazed at him. I slowly made for the window beside the house. It didn't give me a clear view. But I was able to see Charles standing near a couch. In a moment a tall man with grayish hair greeted him. I couldn't see the man's face for the drapers hid him partly.

I could see another window opposite to me and I slowly crouched for it. On getting there I got the shock of my life. It was Sam Luther. He was alive!

I gulped and wiped off the perspiration from my forehead. I couldn't even wink once. So shocked was I.

I slowly walked away for my hotel. I had no idea of what was going on. How was Sam Luther alive after having been killed? Who was the person I had shot at? But showing no curiosity to find it out, I decided to continue with my trip and enjoy the vacation with my near and dear ones.

Days went by and it was the day for departing although we didn't want to. This was the pun of life; only the good days end soon.

We packed our bags and got ready for leaving. Our luggages were carried downstairs. While paying the rent, we were deafened by a blast upstairs. There was chaos all over the place. I immediately rushed out of the hotel with my wife and son. I just hoped Charles wasn't behind this. I could not afford to take any chances.

We hired a cab and left for the station. The cab driver kept looking at me through his rear view mirror. Nervously I got down at the station. The cab driver helped us with our luggage. At the platform he stood with us. I thanked him and asked him to leave but he insisted.

Within a few minutes, the train arrived. The cab driver came close to me and slipped a mobile phone into my pocket and fled off.

I helped my wife and son board the train with the luggage. Just then the mobile rang. Catherine was surprised to see a mobile with me. Before she could fire me with her questions, I got down the train.

‘Mr. Robert, How are you?’ It was a familiar voice.

‘Mr. Lu..Luther?’ I gulped.

He laughed, ‘You seem to have become quite intelligent, Mr. Robert. Can you see that candy man, Mr. Robert?’

I kept silent. ‘He has a gun. You make any move; you are going to miss your family. Is that clear?’

‘Now what do you want? Leave my family.’

‘Oh yes, Mr. Robert. I have a big heart. I wont hurt your family. You tell them you’d stay here and ask them to leave.’

‘How do I do that? Catherine wont leave without me.’

‘You do it or I will.’

‘No,’ shouted I, ‘I’ll try.’

I walked towards the bogie. ‘Cathy, you need to leave without me.’

‘What...’ she was surprised, ‘Why? What’s the matter?’

‘I’ll let you know everything afterwards. But now you have to return.’ Tears rolled down my cheeks.

She got intensely worried. ‘Honey, what’s the matter? Can I help you?’

‘No dear. Please listen to me,’ I pleaded, ‘I am OK. You must leave.’

‘But, I can’t leave without you.’

‘You have to do it for me.’ As I said these last words, the train moved. I grabbed her hands. ‘I’ll be back. I’ll tell you everything.’

Slowly the train picked up speed and she gazed at me till the train left the station.

The mobile again rang. "Good. Now the person in black will assist you out of the station."

I followed him and sat inside a car. "Mr. Robert. I'll join you at my house which you very well know." I was taken aback.

# 10

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We reached Luther's house. Charles stood outside. "Greetings, Mr. Robert."

I walked in. Sam Luther was smoking his cigar. "Mr. Robert, so how did you find Vancouver?"

"Mr. Luther, please come to the point."

"Hmmm..OK. So you offended our agreement."

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't act so innocent, Mr. Robert. Do you think no one spotted you when you were spying on us that day?"

"I was a bit curious. But I meant no harm. I was about to leave with my family without even leaking a word to anybody."

"No..No.." he suddenly turned furious, "I told you before. You interfere in our business, you suffer the consequences. Mr. Robert, you were a good boy until now. But what you've done needs to be punished."

I stood dumb with silence.

"You must be wondering how I am alive. People are so easy to fool. You believe whatever you see and listen. Your two senses blocks the most important one – your ability to think."

"But I did kill you and those news.."

"Ha..that's what is magic my dear friend. You did shoot me. I didn't die."

"But, what about the bomb explosion?"

"Well, I got out of the ambulance through the base into the drainage. The security thought I was still there when it exploded."

While he kept speaking, I switched on the camera in the mobile. I just hoped it captured him.

‘But, why did you do this? Why me?’

‘You needed money desperately. I knew you would go to any extent. And I had a task of my own to achieve. Mr. Arthur and I were supposed to carry out project condor. It was a dream project for me. It could have turned me into the richest man on earth. Mr. Arthur came to know of its darker side. He was going to blabber it out in public. Before he could, I arranged for the assassination. Then we had this assassination story and Arthur got severely trapped because of the evidences against him. Once he was imprisoned, I had the plan of coming out in public and fool them with a false story saying that I knew about Arthur' s cruel intentions. Then no body can stop me from carrying out the project. No body.’

‘Bloody hell, I have a proof against you. I have a signed document with your consent to whatever has happened.’

He gave a hearty laugh, ‘You are such a novice. Do you really think it is a valid document?’

My face went pale.

‘I am sorry, Mr. Robert. I didn't want to do this. But, you have broken the rule. Charles, please show him the French way of adios.’

He pointed the gun towards me and asked me to walk towards the car outside. Charles casually escorted me to his car. I dropped the mobile in the shrubs but none were aware of it.

I was asked to drive and so did I. We drove to an isolated place. We then made way into the woods. He asked me to kneel down. While kneeling, I got hold of a stone and hid it. I waited for the right moment. He crackled his knuckles. Seeing an opportunity, I threw the stone at him. His grip on the gun loosened. Then he fell down following a couple of quick jabs. I got hold of his gun and pointed at his forehead. Bam and he lay dead as a dodo. This time I didn't repeat the same mistake.

I got the keys from his pocket and drove towards the town. I knew a gunshot would make a lot of noise and hence I bought a silencer. Thanks to Sam Luther for I had a license to carry a gun now. I bought a club too from a nearby shop. Stopping the car a few meters away from Luther's house, I walked towards his house without getting noticed.

I saw the man in black who had escorted me in the station getting inside the house. I had to make sure if everybody I had seen with Luther were present inside the house or not.

Peeping through the window, I counted the number of persons. There were three.

‘Ray, Charles is not picking up his phone. Go and wait for me in the car,’ I could hear Luther shout at one of his men.

Ray walked out towards his car. In order to have a go at him, I threw a stone towards a can making enough sound to get his attention. Curious, he walked towards the back yard. I made a move from the back and gave a blow with the club. I could almost hear the crunch in his skull.

I picked him up and observing that no body was there in the back yard. I made him stand in front of the back door with the support of the door. I knocked at the door and was ready with my gun.

Looking through the peephole the second guard shouted, ‘Oh boy, don’t you understand. You were asked to be in the car. What’ s the matter with you?’

Shouting at Ray, he opened the door. Whiz went the bullet through his stomach. I quietly pulled both the bodies inside the door. I was in the kitchen. I pulled out the hose as well as the lock off the cylinder. Within few seconds the odour filled the room. I walked out locking the back door. I locked the front door too from outside.

I had a dirty plan in my mind, which I didn’t even hesitate to do. I rang the doorbell. Sam Luther came down shouting.

‘Hey, can’t you even wait for a second,’ he was surprised to find me at the door, ‘What the hell...’

Terrified he tried to open the door but in vain. He started searching for his gun, which unfortunately wasn’t there in his pocket.

‘Mr. Luther, lets play a game. Will you kill a person for me?’

Sam Luther looked into my eyes confused.

‘His name is Mr. Robert.’ I threw the gun inside away from him. I ran out while he went for the gun. I ran with all my strength towards Charles’ car. Luther got hold of the gun and it was too late to realize the odour of the gas.

I drove off and I could see the house blown into pieces. Reaching the station I realized a briefcase in the back seat. I opened to be dumbstruck. It was full of hard cash.

Giving a notorious smile, I went inside taking the briefcase and bought the ticket for the next train to my town.

Reaching my town the next day, I hired a cab to my home. Catherine rushed outside and hugged me as if she was seeing me after years.

I switched on the television.

“Two explosions rocked Vancouver today. First one was in the Kingston hotel at half past nine in the morning and the second in a house few minutes away from the hotel. According to the police, there seems to be no connection between the two explosions. The explosion in the hotel was due to a minor bomb and the explosion in the house nearby was caused due to gas leakage. What baffles the cops is the recorded clip in a mobile handset found near the house. This clip clearly shows that the French billionaire Mr. Sam Luther was one of the inmates of this house. Police still has no answer for the previous assassination report. The clip further shows that Mr. Luther was himself involved in the previous assassination story. But how and why he deceived everybody and who managed to record it, is still a mystery. This is Sharon reporting from Vancouver for CNN.”

I told the whole story to Catherine expecting the worst. She broke down shedding away all her tears. I just hoped she would understand my position.

I had to tell her for I had promised so. I did keep my promise. *He who interferes shall bear the consequences.*



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