

A Perfectly Legal Solution

David Hunter, former prosecutor, now in private practice sits with Millie Cumberlake in her living room. It is 9:00 AM. The maroon couch on which he's perched manufactured circa 1900, sags badly and causes him to sit nearly sideways to avoid tilting. The house is a small cottage on a poor backstreet in Bloomington, Indiana. Behind the living room, is a tiny kitchen, two small bedrooms and a bathroom. A heavy aroma comprised of the thousands of prior-cooked meals plus a heavier stench from the bath plumbing has command of every square foot of the home.

Millie, a comely woman aged thirty-two has been weeping. Her left eye is nearly swollen shut and her lower lip is purple. She brushes back her rich brown hair and gives David a look of utter despair.

"I'm at my end, David," she sobs. "Cowder wailed the livin' shit out of me again. I can't take no more. I just want to crawl off somewhere and die. I got no reason to live."

In a most empathetic voice David said, "Millie, these are the types of cases my elderly partner and I have thrived on. He's always promised, 'With poor folk, there's always a solution. Lots of time it's not obvious, but by God, it's there. So we gotta find that way, conventional or not. We're here to fix things, to make lives better. We ain't likely to get rich doin' it, but what the hell.'"

"I'm flushed down the toilet of life. I'm gone."

“Now, Millie, don’t say that. I’m here now to mentor you and to assure you, that this thing is going to end and I mean quickly.”

“I’ve done ever’ thing you’ve told me. And the police. And before that my pop and ma, both doornail-dead now. And nothin’, repeat nothin’ has worked. He’s beaten me for years; his fists, his belts, switches, fishin’ poles, cue sticks, a goddam toaster, you name it.”

“I know, and it’s so important that you have done everything I have advised, it lays the foundation for this, well this, immaculate ending.”

She rolled her eyes. “Always gonna be the end of it, never the hell is.”

“Listen to me Millie, I’ve only been your attorney now for six months, your guy before me was full of promises, this time is different. And what I’m going to propose isn’t for everyone. But you’re country, you can do this thing and it will work. And the nightmare will be over.” said David lighting a Camel.

“What’s being a country girl have anything to do with anything. From what I’ve observed all my life, it seems like country girls got a much huger cross to bear.”

“You’ve been through so much. Your son passed on at five. You’ve had two miscarriages?”

“Three.”

“Your parents are gone, your sister’s in the hospital with inoperable lung cancer. You and your deadbeat-ex-con-of-an-ex have known only dire poverty and bankruptcy mainly because he can’t hold a job. But now, you’ve inherited your parents’ home and it’s nearly paid off. You’re

a tough gal, Mil, it's nearly 1960, you have many good years ahead of you. I know a ton of people who'd love to hire you."

"Like who? And for what?"

"Millie, heck yes. As a bookkeeper you were great at that at Sears, a waitress at a swanky place like the Foxfire, a receptionist, a manager-trainee down at Woolworth's, a hotel maid, and so many opportunities at the university. Geez, you graduated second in your class at Gosport High."

"There were only twenty-two of us," she sniffled, "That's the year my folks sold the farm and moved to Bloomington, and my dad took a job at RCA."

"Yes, and now you have a lot of work experience, a great work ethic and then, there's your appearance."

"No, David Hunter, I cannot go on. Sure, I thank you for what you say. But I cannot function and I won't live as a beaten *kept woman*." She raised her voice and flung a Coca-Cola can against the wall. "*The hell with it all!*"

"Listen to me, I've come with the *real* solution. It's gonna take just a little gumption, but you can do it." He glanced, wincing at her grotesque bruises. "You have to do it, Millie."

"If I have him arrested again, he promises to kill me. And I'm sure he will. He hates me. Just wants me for rough sex and a good chunk of the money I make. We're divorced and he rapes me you know. Anywhere he pleases too and it hurts bad. The cops have always said I'd need proof. It's like if I *claim somethin'* but he says *never happened*, well according to them

those cases just don't stand up. What the hell can I do? He's a sanctimonious nut too, claims I still belong to him and it's the Lord's way that I submit. Or suffer God's wrath through him."

"Mildred, we've discussed all this and I agree, you two have been down the arrest road time and again. He's released over and over, he's elusive and a master at the sorry repentant role. A master salesman. The arrest ship has sailed as they say." Hunter said, gazing at the chunk of plaster on the floor from the coke can.

"Well what? I'm sure as hell not hirin' no hit man. Hell, he knows most all the bad people around here, they'd tell him."

"No Mil, I wouldn't advise you to break the law. What I am going to propose is quite legal though equally permanent."

"Permanent, David? Not with that man. He could go away forever and the day he'd come back, he'd kill me. I'm beat, it's over. I want you to be my executor and you keep half the proceeds." she said, with a nod.

"Millie, that's generous of you. But you're gonna live far, far longer than I. And you don't owe me a thing. Sometime, if you feel like it, cook up a chicken and invite me over, but that's all I'll take."

Tears flowed down both cheeks. "You're a sweet, good man. And I'm sure God is pleased with you. And I'm sorry your wife was killed in that car accident a few years back."

"Millie, speaking of God, do you believe that he helps those that help themselves?"

She thought for a moment, "Yes, if he's awake enough."

"Well, suppose he's awake right now? Does he help those--?"

“He sure ain’t helpin’ the lazy ones.”

“Well, that’s right and that’s what it’s come to. And you are going to buy your freedom, your sanity and your happiness.” He paused a moment. “Just by helping yourself. And it’s all legal and even covered in the bible.”

She looked puzzled but then became obviously self-conscious as she caught him staring at her bruises.

“I love your face, Millie. Even swollen it’s beautiful and it fits you.”

She glared at him, her visage only radiating pain.

David reached into his sport jacket’s side pocket. He pulled out a thirty-eight-caliber pistol and set it on the scuffed coffee table before her.

“Oh, you’re not serious,” she gasped.

“This goes on your lap. Barrel pointed out, with this throw pillow over it. It’s loaded, six shots. Now, pay attention.”

David strode to the doorway and screwed in an eyelet in the frame then worked in another eyelet, this one with a three-inch curved hook attached to it, which he screwed into the door. He allowed just enough space for the door to hang slightly open so that anyone could see the cheap devise and then could either poke it up with say a knife, or just rip it out easily.

“Legally, this constitutes a lock. A shit one for sure, but a lock none-the-less. When anyone is told NOT to enter and they breach this, they are breaking into your home. Your job will simply be to sit there calmly then instruct Cowder in any vile, or insulting language you want *not to enter and to get the hell off the property*. What do you think will happen?”

“Well, he’ll rip it open and head for me with vile intent.”

“Of course,” said David pacing slowly towards her, “And when he gets right here, not any sooner, not any later, you flip off the pillow and you shoot all six rounds into his upper chest, not his head though, ’cause you’ll likely miss.”

“Wha- what?”

“It’s self-defense Millie. As the law will see it, *he broke into your house, he started for you*. Plus, we have his abusive record, and pictures of your face as of now, and the testimony of many of your friends and family. It will be seen as justifiable, perhaps additionally thought of as desperation, as a pure panic move. If we had to, we could even throw temporary insanity into it. But it will never come to that. The DA, who hates the son-of-a-bitch to start with, will never bring charges.”

“Oh David, I can’t—”

“Millie, you grew up on a corn and bean farm. I know you know how to shoot. Your dad took you hunting from the time you were eight. I’ve heard you won some kind of a pistol contest when you were fourteen, beat all the boys. Now, you have to. And you will be completely free and without a sin on your soul.”

“David,” she moaned. “Murder—”

“Not even close, Mildred. Self-defense. Everyone in our country has the right to it. It is simply this, when you feel your life is in deathly peril, or even if you feel you are in danger of great bodily harm, then you have the right to use deadly force. I could win that case one hundred

out of one hundred times in all forty-nine, well next month, fifty states. But there won't be a case. The prosecutors, whom I know very well, would never bring one."

She held the pistol. "Six shot, thirty-eight, revolver. My God though Hunter, what if it misfires, jams whatever?"

"It won't, Mildred. I checked it this morning, it fired perfectly, then I cleaned and reloaded it. But in the one in one-hundred thousand chance that it did, here's a much smaller twenty-two. No bigger than your hand. And we'll stick this one underneath your other throw pillow, just to your right, so you can grab it if you need to. Easy as a walk in the park. Easier, than coloring Easter Eggs."

They argued and plotted for hours.

Finally, in a low resolute voice, "I have to, David. I know it."

"That's right Mildred. And then call me, and I'll be here. Call the police. Don't touch him. Let him fall where he falls and leave him. You can do this."

"If I know him, I'm likely sure he'll be comin' over later this afternoon or tomorrow, as he didn't get sex yesterday, just tended to my pummelin' when I refused him money. Then I promised to give him some in a day or two."

"Let's stay focused Mildred. Now again, as soon as I leave latch the door. Remember to tell him that he cannot come in. Say it strongly. When he does, let him get to right here." David stood about ten feet away. "Then pull this from beneath the pillow on your lap and shoot. Use both hands if you want. All six rounds in the chest, the sternum, center mass as they say."

She looked at David, bleary-eyed but, at this point, somewhat determined. “Fasten the hasp. He breaks in. Center mass. Let him fall.” she muttered.

David nodded. “That way, Mildred, the District Attorney is happy, the cops are happy, your neighbors are happy and most of all you’re happy. It all fits.”

After David left Millie paced the house incessantly. Her nerves badly shaken, she tossed back two shots of Wild Turkey. After awhile she called her best friend back in Gosport. Their conversation was short but unforgettable.

“Darlene, I want you to know, whatever might happen to me, that I truly love you, girl. We go back to grammar school and you’ve always been there. I just called, to let you know that.” Millie said.

“Come on now, Millie. Nothin’s gonna happen to you, I mean why would you say that? Is it that animal, Cowder again?”

“There’s things I can’t get into now. Let’s just say I got a real uncertain feeling. Oh, Darlene, pray for me, ask God to give me strength. I’ll call you tomorrow. Please pray for me.” Millie said as she hung up and burst into tears.

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At 4:45 PM, an obese, rugged-appearing man saunters up to Millie’s door, he carries a bottle of beer. He is wearing jeans and a black tee shirt, too small for him, with several rips near the belly region. He belches loudly then, “Millie, my little sexy, I’m forgivin’ you for yesterday.

I'm here for a little sugar and also this time I'm expectin' that cash we discussed yesterday. What the—" Cowder Hoss pulls on the latched door.

"It's locked. Get the hell out of here and don't ever come back you pig's asshole."

"Say, what?"

"You heard me, you disgusting shit. You slob, dumb son-of-a-bitch! Go!"

His look of surprise turns to anger. "*Slut!*" he blurts, then smashes the bottle on the porch. "You talk to me that way, you fuckin' bitch. And this ain't no lock you retarded whore." He pulls hard on the knob and the door-frame eyelet pulls out of the wood.

"Get out! Get out now you fat bastard!" she screams.

Calmly Cowder pulls his belt from its loops and doubles it. "What did you call me, you skank?"

"Get out now! Don't never come back!"

Cowder rests his belt over his right shoulder ready to swing. Confidently he strides towards the couch. Millie tosses aside the throw pillow, she tries to stand but can't. As she points the pistol which she grasps with both hands, her arms shake badly. She fires and the shot goes through the front wall, cuts through leaves and lodges in Mrs. Field's roof across the street.

Cowder leaps towards her. "You wretched witch—"

She screams, "Oh God, it aint gonna work!"

The coffee table slams into her shins, Cowder, in the midst of his pounce, is now less than two feet from her. Screaming, she squeezes and squeezes the trigger. The sounds are ear-

shattering, plaster rains from the ceiling. He is on her. His powerful hands on her throat he raises savagely to look into her eyes. But something is horribly amiss with him. His jaw has dropped, drool starts from his mouth and it rolls brilliant red onto her face and neck. His eyes seem to roll back and he collapses on her.

She continues screaming. The neighbor next door, Vicky Metcalfe, has just begun raking freshly cut grass. She rushes in. Blood covers Millie as Vicky rolls Cowder off her. His chest is also drenched in blood; Vicky cannot see the four bullet holes, but senses Cowder is finished.

Hysterical, Millie wails. “He was gonna kill me! He was gonna kill me—oh God.” She wretches but nothing comes up.

“Oh Sugar, oh hon, it’s all right.” say Mrs. Metcalfe.

Millie now gasps for air. “Vicky, please call the police!” Then in a nearly indecipherable moan, “Call David Hunter too, it’s the number in pencil on the wall above the phone.”

Minutes later when Hunter enters the house, Millie stumbles to him and hugs his plumpish frame with all her might. “I did it. I had to.”

“Of course, it’s over now Mills,” whispers Hunter, his best white button-down shirt slathered in blood. “It’s okay. Let’s get you to a hospital. They’ll give you a sedative.” He turns to the two cops.

“We got an ambulance on the way,” the taller one says. “For him.”

“Well, he’s dead. Let’s do her first.”

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There are no charges. Two weeks later David Hunter sits at Millie's kitchen table sipping white wine after a candle lit dinner.

"You look so beautiful tonight, Mildred," he says as their eyes meet.

She looks down at the scuffed linoleum blushing, then smiles, "Thank you. But one thing you have to learn about me, David, is my name is actually Millicent not Mildred.

"I'll correct it on your file tomorrow morning," he says, and they both laugh.

She appears tired, still frail. But she says happily, "Oh Hunter, it was way harder than I'd imagined. But it turned out just exactly like you said, "The DA is happy, the cops are happy, the neighbors are happy and I'm so happy."

Hunter grins, places his hand on hers and says softly, "Yes Millicent, the law is a beautiful thing."