

Click here to enter text.
Click here to enter text.

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

The revolver's cylinder emitted a clattering wiz as Seth spun it rapidly with his fingertips like a DJ scratching a record. He held the freshly cleaned weapon with both hands, took aim at his distorted reflection in the toaster, and slowly squeezed the trigger. The hammer crept back languidly, then leapt forward onto the empty chamber, '*click.*'

Seth pushed open the cylinder and dropped in a speed loader releasing five .357 magnum rounds. After one last check to make sure the cylinder was properly aligned he slamming the revolver onto the kitchen table splashing the loose ammo, from the table, onto the floor.

He stared hypnotically at the dancing steam climbing into the air from his freshly brewed cup of black coffee. Now that his gun was dressed for the party he could get back to his most sacred morning ritual.

Seth sipped his coffee as he laboriously walked to the bathroom; the bite of the coffee brought a smile to his previously stoic face. Every sip reminded him with blissful agony of his beautiful wife Daisy. On most days they drank coffee together twice a day; once first thing in the morning, and once on his lunch break.

Seth's office was an hour walk, minimum, from their apartment but she never missed a single lunch date with him. Rain or shine she made the voyage regardless of his concerns about her safety when she travelled alone through the untamed city. She was an incredible woman with a Teflon soul that remained fearless and untainted by the filth of the world around her. Not just magnificent in character or physical appearance; she was also blessed with many talents; a fine artist, and accomplished musician were two labels often placed on her by those who had the pleasure of seeing her beauty expressed through brush stroke or symphonic note.

"God I miss you Daisy. I miss you so damn much," whispered Seth as he stared into his blood shot eyes in the bathroom mirror. His two handed white knuckle grip on the sink became wet with tears.

"Baby, I'm gonna see you real soon, I promise," said Seth as he rested his coffee-cup's rim on his bottom lip before taking the last sip like a shot of whiskey.

Seth cringed at his dilapidated reflection; it mockingly cringed right back. He was always such a well put together man, but since Daisy died he just hadn't been able to get himself out of bed. His shaggy brown hair stood like a tumbleweed on his head. His neglected razor left his face budding with the makings of a respectable beard. The white bathrobe he wore was blotched yellow with spilt food and sweat saturation, his loosely rapped belt revealed that he wore nothing underneath; the need for modesty and cleanliness died with his beloved wife. The stench

of weeks of accumulated grime emanated from his naked body with every movement, striking even his accustomed nose with the violent odor of mayonnaise left to rot in the summer sun.

It had only been three months since Seth held Daisy in his arms for the last time as she choked on her last blood filled words,

“I’m scared Seth, I’m sorry, I’m so scared.”

Moments later the hiss of air leaving her lungs for the last time rang in his ears like a burglar alarm in the night. Visions of that night in the park smacked Seth in the face as he clenched his eyes shut and covered his ears in a hopeless attempt to keep them out. That night when that cowardly mugger stole Daisy’s life over a cellphone and knock off designer purse, he also murdered Seth’s future dreams and present sanity.

If only Seth would have ignored Daisy’s objections to carrying his gun, he could have shot that fucking animal before he plunged that dirty chef’s knife deep into her liver. Daisy always hated guns and chastised Seth when he carried his with him in defiance of the big city’s oppressive gun laws. He was nauseated by the irony that the laws intended to protect people in this horrible wilderness of a city made them helpless victims to the predators who hunted them on its streets. If there was any place a person needed to carry a weapon, it was in this filthy Hellhole.

He ran the shower cold, he needed something stronger than coffee to motivate him to exist on that sorrowful morning. The icy water made his skin jump from his bones. He fought his urge to pull away from the frigid rain and instead embraced it. He finally felt something, it was discomfort but discomfort meant he was still alive; reassurance of that fact had evaded him for the prior three months.

Seth dried himself with one of the pink and red monogrammed towels that had hung untouched on the rack, like priceless works of art, ever since Daisy bought them. He stood naked in front of the mirror as he cupped the towel in both hands to dry his face. The pink embroidered letters SD looked back at him inverted in the mirror; his still damp face hid his tears.

Seth guiltily hung the towel neatly on the rack, hiding the fact that he had used it from Daisy. He walked down the hall towards his bedroom stepping over the rolling hills of dirty clothes that had accumulated since he lost his will to care about such insignificant details. The pictures of Daisy that hung on the wall drew his attention despite how hard he tried to avoid their gaze. Their wedding picture wrung tears from his broken heart.

Seth slammed his door closed behind him guarding himself from the past; now it was time to prepare for today, the only day that had mattered since her death. The day he would finally see his love, Daisy, again.

Seth had no hesitation in picking the perfect outfit to wear. It was his favorite suit; the black pinstriped suit Daisy bought him for the job interview that brought them to this pathogenic city. Only a short three years ago he returned home; home from a year in Hell, the Hell of war in the deserts of who gives a fuck nowhere. It was the third time he had gone to Iraq, but the first time he had ever had a reason to come home. He met Daisy only six days before his deployment but he knew instantly that he would love her with every remaining beat of his heart. She would never admit to him that she had loved him from that first night they spent together, but she didn't have to. Her actions left the proof of her love undeniable by any sane person who witnessed the chemistry and felt the electricity spawned by their embrace.

Their three day old relationship was fortified by a year of letter writing and video chats from half a world away. Like on all deployments the Dear John letters started no later than month three, but none from her. While ten year marriages crumbled to ruins all throughout his squadron, his three week love rose from the sands like the great pyramids of Egypt. When he arrived home Daisy's hug nearly knocked him off his feet. If only he knew then what her love for him would one day cost her, he would have gladly walked into a hail of bullets and never came home.

Seth looked like a new man after stepping into his tailored suit, and neatly combing back his long wet hair. He was ready, well almost; Seth picked up the revolver from the kitchen table and walked toward the front door. He plucked his long jacket from the coat rack and dropped the revolver in its right front pocket. As he closed and locked the door behind him he put on his jacket and slipped his hand into its pocket, gripping the weapon. The beauty of the hammerless revolver was he could shoot it from within the pocket of the coat without the victim even knowing he had it. He positioned the weapon carefully in his hand and raised the right side of his coat several times to practice his hidden draw as he walked down the stairwell.

"Perfect," said Seth with a voice as cold and hollow as his heart.

The apartments and halls of his building where a microcosm of the city itself. Johnny from 4B laid unconscious at Seth's feet. The junkie lay on the stairs with his pockets turned inside out; surely too sedated to have even been aware that his pockets were picked through by the jackals that called him neighbor. The white foam that bubbled from the corners of Johnny's mouth may have meant that last batch of heroine he slammed was a little too pure to keep his soul grounded to his scarecrow like body. Seth didn't care if that piece of shit died in the puddle

of piss that surrounded him anymore than Johnny cared that he was blocking the stairwell. As far as Seth was concerned the government should just give these junkies more dope, all that they could ever want, and more than they could handle. Make it as pure as possible and let Darwinism weed out the weak by their own hand. At least the world would be a better place for the people whom actually gave a shit about living in it.

“Fuck you Johnny,” said Seth as he stepped over him.

Three steps later Seth stopped cold.

How many people’s lives has that fucking roach ruined, and how many more will he ruin in the rest of his life, thought Seth as he watched Johnny’s eyes flutter.

Seth knelt next to Johnny and asked, “How many lives have you ruined kid, how many more lives will you destroy with parasitic existence?”

Gurgling was the only reply.

“Well Johnny, I can’t answer my first question, but I’ll answer the second one for you,” Seth reached out to Johnny’s face and compassionately brushed his hair from his eyes with his left hand as he lifted his chin with his right. Seth stared into Johnny’s glossy twitching eyes as his left hand slid from Johnny’s scalp onto his nose clenching it gently, just enough to deny oxygen’s entry. Seth’s right hand lifted Johnny’s slack jaw closing his mouth and ceasing the flow of bubbles that frothed from his flaccid frown. Johnny’s gurgles turned to gags which in turn brought on tremors throughout his oxygen starved body.

He was surprised by how long it took for Johnny to succumb to suffocation, he had killed before but only with bullets from his rifle while in combat. This time was different, he enjoyed it far more. The feeling that erupted in his heart when he felt Johnny’s life leave his body was like

a ten minute orgasm. The lifeless body before his felt like justice, justice for Daisy, justice for all the Daisys of the world that fell at the hands of evil and desperate men. Seth knew it was hypocritical that he condemned men for lesser crimes, then himself killed to punish them; but this was not murder, this was something special that he did for the world; a gift to all humanity. If murder was passion unleashed through violence then this was justice freed from the restraints of the cowards who only spoke the word through toothless mouths.

He gently laid Johnny's limp head on the cold linoleum as his lifeless-body convulsed and his hands grasped for the last time at invisible tormentors. Seth stood and wiped the drool and snot from his hands onto the stairwell wall.

The piece of shit that killed his Daisy had been caught trying to pawn her phone and was due at his preliminary hearing in two hours, there was no more time to waste.

Even this early in the morning the streets of the city were teeming with vibrant life and hope filled people; but Seth only saw victims and predators, sorrow and disappointment. He wished his eyes would have never been open to the reality of the world; he envied the people around him who although tempted fate with their naiveté, also got to enjoy their sitcom lives in the blissful ignorance of their fantasy world.

Six blocks. Six blocks was all that separated Seth from his wife's killer. The thought that this monster lived so close to him sickened him; how many times had they passed on the street oblivious to each other and their intersecting fates.

As Seth walked through the very same park where Daisy was murdered, the savage lust in his eyes swelled like infection. His teeth ground in his mouth as he kicked a discarded beer can from the spot where Daisy took her last breath.

“I will see you soon, my love. Forgive me.”

In an hour the man who killed his wife would be in court pleading with the judge to be sent home to his family until the trial. The man who police said was once a respected school teacher but after being laid off fell into a deep depression and prescription pill addiction. This man, Adam Baker, would simply get to walk out of the court house and go home to his wife, Lacy, his fifteen year old son Mike and his five year old daughter Kylie.

Seth wondered in tormenting agony if Adam’s family believed that their once adored husband and father was innocent; did he get to keep their love after murdering his?

Mr. Baker, I promise you that you will never see their smiling faces again, thought Seth as he walked up the stairs, condemning the tears that were welling in his weary eyes.

13 D, an unlucky address for a very unlucky man, Seth Knocked.

Lacy answered the door with a look of haste and confusion on her stress worn face.

“Hello,” said lacy in a tone that made it sound like a question.

“Lucy Baker? I’m Mr. Brian Wright, part of your husband’s legal defense team,” said Seth as he smiled and extended his hand for the shake.

“Adam is already in court, you aren’t supposed to be there are you?”

“No ma’am, I came to discuss a couple of matters with you while my associates tend to Adam. May I come in?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Hi Mike, Hi Kylie, I’m Brian, an associate of your fathers.”

Mike nodded at Seth before taking Kylie by the hand and walking her down the hallway and into a bedroom, closing the door behind them.

“Would you like something to drink Mr. Wright?”

“No, thank you.”

“Misses Baker...”

“Lucy, please,” interrupted Lucy with a smile.

“Lucy, call me Brian too please, has your husband discussed with you the particulars of his case?”

A look crept over Lucy’s face that to Seth looked like the opening act of a grand lie.

“He wouldn’t do anything like that, robbing and killing, he couldn’t. I know he has a pill problem but he would nev....” rich, frothy blood erupted from Lucy’s mouth as Seth twisted his K-Bar knife in her lung then pulled it out only to slam it with a wet and sloppy thud right back into the other.

Seth held her by the hair as he helped her down to her knees where she folded backward over herself, gurgling blood as her dying gaze grew dull and fell toward the room where her children sat unaware and unprotected. The pleading look of betrayal in her eyes reminded him all too much of that in Daisy’s as she died in his arms only weeks before.

Seth pinned a blood stained note to the living room wall with his knife, then walked down the hall and opened the bedroom door.

“Forgive me Daisy.”

Four rapid shots echoed through the apartment; seconds later, a fifth.

[Click here to enter text.](#) / **The Kindness of Strangers** / 10