

A DEAL for a DAY

I used to like Gray. That's what we called him. His name was John Piper. He seemed like everyone else. He dressed like anyone else. He came to work regularly. He had to watch his money, like any one. He was six foot tall and thin. Well thin compared to me. Handsome I guess, I mean women seemed to find him so. They smile at him and he seems to be able to talk to anyone of them. They talk back. I wish I was so lucky.

Clothes are difficult for me to find. If it fits my back I can't close it in the front. If it fits in the front it's too wrinkled in the back. I really have to do something about that.

We often joked about things like the weather or politics. I thought we were on the same page when it came to religion.

I'm like any man. I complain about sex with my wife and enjoy the fantasy of sex with someone other than her. Gray never complains. I don't know what he is thinking. We may be talking when a woman comes our way. If she wants to talk to me her eyes wander toward him.

A certain girl (woman) walks by me every day. She might not be that knock down drag out gorgeous but I find her blue eyes and soft smile attractive. Her shape doesn't belong to Barbie, but hey I'm not a spring rooster anyway. Her name was Kelly.

John and I were talking, sports maybe politics when Kelly walked by.

"I'd like a picnic basket and a blanket." I said. Maybe I was drooling. He stopped right in the middle of his sentence and turned towards me. Looked me straight in the eye. He asked.

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“What if I could help you with a thing like that?”

“What do you mean?”

“What if I could help you with a thing like that? What if I could snap my fingers and the whole world stopped while you had your fun and then I snapped them again and the world returned to normal.”

“You could do that?”

“No, Of course not. But maybe I could fix you up.”

“Peg wouldn’t find out.” My first thought was what if my wife found out and “chee ... it.” I pictured my finger crossing my throat.

“I’m not going to tell her, but you will have to keep your lips closed.”

“What’s would a thing like that cost? I don’t make a lot of money here.”

“Hey, I know. Nobody makes enough money here. All I want is a day from your life.”

“A day of my life? OH NO. I saw Shrek III. Shrek traded a day of his life, but in the fine print, it was his day of birth. The day he was born. It didn’t turn out very well for him.” I shook my head. I had watched the movie when Rumpelstiltskin tricked Shrek and he needed loves first kiss to break the spell.

“No nothing like that,” Gray put his hands out, palms towards me. “just the last day of your life. The average man lives into his seventies. That’s over twenty seven thousand days. What’s one? You are over fifty aren’t you that’s eighteen thousand days already. You can’t remember them all. Can you?”

“One Day? The last day of my life?” I said. I mean I could be dying of cancer or something. I might like going a day early, save me some suffering.

“One day.” He said calmly. “It’s a deal then?”

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“Yea, I guess. What are you going to do with my day?”

“Let’s just say I’ll have it if I want it.”

“Do I have to sign anything?”

“No”

“Handshake?”

“My word is good. I assume yours is, too.”

“It is.” I said. He clapped his hands together. “Done”

“OH look. Speak of the Devil.” He said with a grin. I’ll never forget that grin. He stood up right in the path of Kelly. He pointed at me with his thumb. “AH Kelly, Clad here would like to have sex with you.”

She didn’t seem embarrassed at all. I was. I couldn’t believe he’d blurt it out just like that. I covered my face with my hands. I felt like the seat I was setting on fell away. If I could have turned into a snake right then and slithered out of my chair and away I would have.

“You tell Chad ... I’ve been thinking about him ... and I’d be glad to.” There was some reprieve. Gray was standing between her and me. Gray continued to grin. “Call me.” She said and flipped her fingers at me in that flirty way. Gray stepped aside and Kelly continued on her way. She swung her rear and turned to say over her shoulder. “Call me. I mean it.”

“Damn you.”

“What?” Gray said. His grin had turned into a downright laugh. “You had me scared for a minute there. I thought you going to die right then and there and I might be able to collect.”

“Damn you.”

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“What? You get what you want. I get what I want.”

“I could have done that.”

“You didn’t. I did it for you.”

“But ...”

“But nothing.” There was a silence, but only for a moment. He stood there with that grin. “Do you think Detroit will take Boston Saturday?” He just took a day of my life and he wants to talk about the Tigers.

“What about?”

“I think the Tigers by three. I’ll bet even up.”

“You’re on for a ten spot.” What was I thinking? I never bet on sports. I guess I was feeling lucky. I ended up paying Gray. He didn’t ask about my date with Kelly. I didn’t volunteer.

Kelly, Now that’s another story seems her husband was an over the road truck driver. She was lonely. We developed a steady relationship. We met every Wednesday afternoon, at her house.

One day at work I thought I saw a man charge up behind Gray. It was in a dark hallway. No one else was around. He was a huge man. He spun Gray around. He grabbed Gray by the shirt. I hurried over to see what might be happening. I thought Gray might need some help. Not like I am a fighter but I could call for help if it was necessary. I heard the man say.

“Brenda’s left me again. You gotta bring her back.” Gray continued to shake his head.

“I can’t. You shouldn’t have slapped her around so much.”

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“You will bring her back, You little bastard. I don’t care how many days you take this time. I’ve got to have her back”

“I can’t.”

“You can’t or you won’t. Hey look I could snuff you right here and now.”

“Can’t. She was suppose to come back one more time. This time you kill her, then yourself.”

“Listen, I’ll give you all the days you want.” He was begging at this point but didn’t loosen his grip.

“Well that’s the thing. You aren’t scheduled to go until sometime next month, but you sold me all those days. Today is your last day.” The man tightened his grip on Gray. Gray remained calm.

“You little bastard, I’ll take you with me then.” He put his hand on Grays` throat. Gray could barely speak.

“I’m going to live. You sold me your days.” The big mans grip loosened. It seemed Gray didn’t need my help or anyone else`s. Gray stepped back and brushed his clothes. I would have thought that this ruckious would have drawn a crowd. It didn’t. I was the only one that witnessed it. The big man staggered away weakly.

“There is no need to fight it. You’ve got another ten minutes. When the time comes, relax. Just close your eyes.” Gray said.

“Go to hell, You bastard.”

A maintenance man came by a few minutes later. He asked. “Did you hear? Some big guy just choked to death in the cafeteria. I turned my wrist to check my watch. Ten minutes had passed.

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A buzzer sounded and emergency crew ran through the building. I hurried to see what was happening. A par-a-medic was performing C P R on the man on the floor. One was doing compressions on his chest. I watched.

Gray deals for real. I felt sick to my stomach. How many days had I traded already?

The blood must have drained from my face. I felt as pale as the guy that had strangled Gray. I had thought this was a joke. This was no joke. My throat felt dry I tried to swallow. I didn't have anything to swallow. How did Gray know these things? I didn't like the thought that Gray knew when someone (ME) was going to die.

I saw Gray every day. I had to watch what I said. I didn't need him to know what I had seen, what I knew. I never mentioned our deal.

One day I was in the last stall in the mens` room. Sometimes these things take time. I heard the slap of feet. One pair stopped at the urinals and the other at the sink.

"I don't know what I'm going to do." The man at the urinal said.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm into Big Tony. I need forty thousand dollars by Friday or else."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I've already got a second on the house."

"Boy I'd hate to be in your shoes."

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“Do you think a new pair of shoes will help?” The man at the urinal moved to the sink. I got a look at him through the crack in the stall, not a good look, but he had a snake tattoo on his arm. I figured I’d recognize when I saw him again.

The men had left the mens room and I was standing at the sink. I didn’t hear the door. I didn’t see him in the mirror.

“Chad. I’ve got to tell you something.” I turned quickly and Gray was standing close behind me and to the left. My heart stopped.

“Yea.” This was the first time Gray had talked to me in a while. One moment I was alone the next he was standing beside me.

“I know you have been seeing Kelly on Wednesday afternoons, but you see tomorrow Vince will walk in on the two of you. He will pull a gun and shoot you three times in the chest. It will kill you.”

“Are you telling me not to see her tomorrow? Thanks Bud. Thanks a lot.” I said in a cheerful voice.

“You don’t seem to understand. I’ll have to be collecting today. After work today just sit in your car. Don’t try to drive home. You could accidently take someone out, maybe that neighbor kid. Auu ... What’s his name ... Timmy ... Tommy?”

“Toby”

“Yea, That’s it. Toby. Cute kid Too! He’ll be on his tricycle, on the sidewalk near your drive. It would be a shame. A. G. D. shame.” He waved his hands around.

“What about me?” I cinched my lips. My lunch wanted to return to my mouth.

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“Look at this on the bright side. Peg will never find out, this way. You’ll always be her man and you’ll always be a hero to your kids. Nobody will ever know about Kelly. It’s really better this way. You can call Peg. You can talk to her one more time. Let’s be honest. A lot of men don’t get a chance like that. It might be a good idea not to mention our little deal.” Gray spoke so calmly and mono tone like as if he was reading a line from the news paper.

My left hand swung behind me searching for the sink to hold on to. I didn’t know what to think. Then it struck me.

“I know someone. ... I know someone. ... I know someone that needs a little favor.” I straightened up. “Could I make a deal? Could I buy a day? Could I live?”

Gray just stood there. He looked at me with those steely eyes.

“Chad, Are you serious?” He said calmly in that mono tone voice that he often used. “I mean you don’t know what you’re asking.”

“I don’t want to die.”

“Everyone dies.”

“O K every one dies. But today come on. Give me a break.” My head pounded and my heart raced. The best thing I could have wished for would be to have done this whole thing over. I never would have made any such deal. I wouldn’t be in this predicament. I’ve got a wife and kids to think about. What would they do without me? I got to make a deal.

“We could try this I suppose.” Gray said with an expression less face. “Turn up your hand.” I turned up my left hand. He spit into the palm of my hand then he rubbed it in with his. “You might not be cut out for this, but go ahead. See if you can make a deal.”

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I had never noticed how cold he was until this day. I mean we had joked and laughed. There was something about him or should I say there wasn't something about him. That's it. Something wasn't there.

I looked around the factory. Now where did that guy go? Wasn't he wearing jeans and a tee shirt. On the back of the tee shirt was a ... a I put my hand to my mouth. I don't know why people touched their face as if they can think any clearer somehow. I did it and yes I was convinced I think clearer.

He had a snake tattoo on his arm and the name of some bar on the back of his shirt. BEAST HEAD BAR. That's it. Snake tattoo, on the arm and the beast head bar on his shirt. I thought I saw a man with a breasts head on his shirt across the way. I wanted to watch him until he turned to see if I recognized his face. My heart was pounding. I knew I couldn't wait. I mean what if I missed my chance. Besides I wasn't suppose to leave my post.

A horn blew and the assembly line stopped. I hurried over to where the guy worked a drilling machine. He was setting the safety gear as I walked up.

"How about those Tigers?" I said in a casual way.

"Who wants to know?" The man said as he turned toward me.

"Oh, I heard you might be good for a little bet."

"Well you heard wrong."

"Come on, just a ten spot. I'll give you three runs. Tigs by three." The man hesitated. I thought I had him. He shook his head.

"You know betting can get you in a lot of trouble. A buck here a five spot there. Before you know it you're in to a thug and way over your head." I had to play dumb. I didn't want him to know I knew what

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I knew. He sat and laced his fingers and stared at the floor. "I owe a guy more than I can ever repay. You probably never heard of him but I think he's going to kill me." I knew this was my cue. I had to work this right. I had too. Tease him a little bit but don't scare him off. How did Gray phrase it?

"What if I could help you with a thing like that? I mean what if I could snap my fingers and this wouldn't be a problem for you anymore."

"You could do that?" I had him. I could see myself with a rod and reel. I'm leaning back. The rod bends. I lean the rod forward. I turn the crank. I'm reeling him in. He's a big one and I'm reeling him in. I laugh. Ha ha ha. It's a fake laugh but still a laugh.

"NO, Of course not, but if I could. What would it be worth to you? I'm not talking your first born or anything. I'm just supposing."

"Well I really don't have much and what I do have is mortgaged up to here." He held his hand to his head. "I really needed to win what last bet. I don't know why I'm telling you this."

"You probably sensed I can help, but you've got to help yourself. You got to stop gambling. I'll go talk to Tony. Maybe I can get you on a payment plan."

"You'd do that for me? Thanks, Thanks a lot. What do I owe you?"

"One day of your life. The last one of course. No big deal."

"The last day?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Sure, why not." He was a gambler. I knew he'd deal.

"When I clap my hands it's a deal. No backing out. You understand."

"Yea Yea Yea, Whatever."

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“One Two Three.” I clapped my hands. A shock zizzed through my body. It felt like the insides turned upside down and inside out. I fell back. I almost fell into some machinery. I was dizzy. I went back to my work station. I was nauseated. I’d go see Big Tony after work.

I got into my car. The seat was too far ahead. I slid that back. The mirrors were wrong. I readjusted them. Tony would be in his office at the back of the West End Shipping @ Ware House Company. I drove though the rough part of town.

It was a rotting building, covered with steel roofing on the sides and large dirty windows They all looked the same but I knew right away which one is was among other rotting buildings with steel roofing and dirty windows. I parked out front. The large truck entrance roll up door was open about four feet. I ducked and walked in. The place was somewhat dark even in the day light with the door open. I saw a yellow light through a window in the back. Tony`s office. I walked toward it.

I opened the door and a large man smoking a cigar, sat behind the desk. I must have startled him.

“How the HELL did you get in here?” He shouted. He pushed his chair back. His right hand felt his coat pocket. It came out with a gun. He pointed right at me. I wasn’t afraid, without this deal I was dead anyway.

“I’m here on behalf Tom Rich. He’d like a little more time on his investment.”

“NO ... NO ... NO. I DON’T WORK THAT WAY.” There was extreme excitement in his voice. “If I appear soft everyone will take advantage of me.” His eyes never left me. His gun didn’t seem to get heavy as he continued to point it at me. “LISTEN, I DON’T CARE YOU ARE. THE ANSWER IS NO.”

“Hey, You made a deal. Without the deal you’d be nothing. You were just a little two bit thug when the deal was made.” How did I know these things? It was like I was there making the deal to a younger Tony.

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“I did this, I’m Big Tony. You didn’t do nothing for me.”

“A deal is a deal.”

I could see it now. I could see Big Tony setting in his chair behind his desk, the startled look on his face. His gun is drawn, just like now. He fires one shot. His chest is peppered with holes. He falls limply over the desk.

“Let me tell you about tomorrow. Tomorrow a man walks in here. He shoots you several times. You get one shot off but I think you miss.”

“Who is this son-of – a-bitch?” He is shouting and threatening me with that gun. A calm came over me. I could see I really didn’t have to do anything. I spoke in a mono tone voice. “Point of it is, You owe a guy, a guy named Gray the last day of your life. Your last day is tomorrow. I’m here to collect. NOW”

“WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? I’M BIG TONY.” I put my hands up in front of myself as if I could block off his words or bullets.

“Now Look, You are to die tomorrow. If you die tomorrow, my friend,” Oh my GOD did I call him my friend. “won’t get my day.” I wasn’t talking like myself but I was talking as if I was Gray. I turned my right hand around. I made that cupping motion. “I get the day.”

His hand holding the gun started to tremble. His grip tightened.

“I DON’T KNOW WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE. ... I’M BIG TONY. I’M THE TOUGHEST MAN YOU’LL EVER MEET.” He coughed. “TAKE THAT.” I saw fire fly from the barrel of his gun. I heard the glass in the window behind me shatter. I fell to the floor. BANG BANG I heard Tony fall to is desk. BANG I heard the chair slide back. Tony slithered to the floor.

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I got up off the floor and walked out the door. I knew he was dead. Tony wouldn't be around to collect from Mr. Snake Tattoo. Hua I made a deal. I walked toward the half open over head door. I got into my car. I was startled. Gray was sitting the passenger seat.

"How did it go?"

"Piece of cake. He did a lot of yelling and screaming. He even shot his gun a few times then I think his ticker gave out."

"It did. I'll take my day now."

"Suddenly I felt a sharp pain in my stomach. I touched the area with my hand. It felt wet and sticky. I brought my hand to my face. It was red with blood." My heart wanted to stop. I stared. I realized my back stuck to the seat.

"OUCH, I was afraid that might happen. It looks bad." Gray said.

"Come on, I made a deal for one more day." I said. Gray simply shook his head.

"Yea, Well, You have to collect. It looks like you have to collect right away. That means that Mister Smitmer better die right away. You only can collect a day when the owner can no longer has use for his. I have a stock pile. I've been at this a long time. You do not. May be we will meet in another place." He flashed that evil grin, again. He climbed out of the car. He leaned in the car again. "I don't think you'll be seeing me after this. I'll see you first." With that he walked away.

I sat in the car. I felt like I was getting weaker. I had to find the man with the snake tattoo. I started my car.

With Big Tony dead, Snake didn't owe anyone except me. If I died he wouldn't owe anyone. I had to find him. I would kill him if I had too. This pain in my stomach is brutal.

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THE END