

MONDAY

Applebees or Red Robin. Or a hundred others are never too far from any hotel. As manager of the sales team, Chris had delegated the decision to Rob who was really too old to be doing the job that he was doing. By Rob's age, Chris had already finished two tours, gone back to school to nail down a BA and had even applied to law schools well outside of Texas, he had put himself out there, branded his name, and gotten offers, paying offers, over the lackey position Rob seemed contented by. Hell, Chris didn't even know his last name. Something simple, something white-bread, panhandle-simple like Tyler or Murphy. Nah, if it was Murphy, he wouldn't go red-faced after two of these tall-glass pints of Northwest hop-water shit that tasted like coffee, lawncutting and Christmas-tree leavings.

This was a meeting of sorts but Chris strived to make things casual, comfortable. He liked setting the road staff at ease. It had been a long day of power-point and pie-charts. They were weary, all the fiber-optic sales-pitch sense drained out of them. At this point, he was merely a figurehead, that guy who had his name attached to the company, who had the best handshake, knew so and so and was engaged to that Sheila Peckinpaw. He didn't need to sell. Not really. These days, suits did their research and made their decisions before the Boeing touched its feet to the floor. He'd been doing Skype and conference calls for months, shooting statistics back and forth. It was more about trust, about track-record, about appearances. If the clients saw any of these men as Chris saw them, or as he saw himself, they wouldn't sign any papers. Hell, no one would.

Somewhere along beer number three, while one of the guys, the one with hair like bent hay, who called the waitress 'honey' in some backwoods version of a drawl, Chris began to detach as he often found himself doing, wondering how much longer all of this was necessary. They all loved him, loved him because he could drink them under the table, and would pick up the tab and because of his

portfolio and connections and the medals and service. But, most of all, because he put them at ease, so that he might simply, drift away.

It must have been the manager because he was wearing a white shirt with a tie tucked and knotted under his collar and hair gelled and combed in some vaguely officious way that was struggling somewhat apologetically, as if mired in the same singsong routine as morning preparations. A man stood out there in the vestibule, with his hands jammed into his pockets, his skin varnished with salt-sweat and hair matted and beaten flat. He obviously had no money. That was all over the West Coast. Funny, how the lefty cities with their noses in the air always seemed to have to have the most people roaming around at the ends of their tethers.

It wasn't something to prove as much it was something that simply needed to be done. Chris rose from the table while the men were going on about what a disappointment the Rangers had been in the playoffs, and whether or not Jeb was the rightful successor to office. The beers might have emboldened him, might have smoothed his stride just a motion, and the manager with the name pin that said Dwight, was easily placated by eye-contact and deference. "I wouldn't want to step where I don't belong," Chris said, clasping the man's hand between both of his own. "But I would love to buy this gentleman a meal. I'd be honored if he took a seat amongst us." It was just the three of them in the vestibule, mossy with the man's odor.

Nobody wanted this. Not the man, who only wanted a burnt, toss-away burger or the manager and especially not the sales team. Eyes left plates. Children make comments. A grandmother paid for the check prematurely. Chris's subordinates gradually came to the ends of their beers and bacon-burgers while Chris drained his glass of beer three more times and eyed them into their seats. Conversation had stymied. The homeless man ate with the voraciousness and haste of a man about to

catch the last bus out of Galveston before the flood. Chris just drank. This was the greatest twenty minutes of his day. He sat, enjoyed the moment to himself, and drank.

Business was shit. Peter might have said the same thing a couple years ago before tech multinationals their way into the city, skirted regulation and greased politicians, to effectively kill his livelihood, but now, it was truly shit. Whereas, he used to avoid picking up the wheezing, bandaged masses at hospitals with their vouchers and special needs, he was now at their whim and sat in hopes, of maybe a distanced, metered one, from social service who travelled from outlying areas like Milwaukie or even Hillsborough because the psych ward was better in Portland proper. Or, possibly a flat-rate blood delivery out of the American Red Cross that might take him to another hospital as far down Interstate Five to Salem. Or not. Mostly, they were people going to work. People stuck with the company bound by half-hearted trust. Still there were others who enjoyed the idea of local business. And still others who wanted to remain anonymous, to pay cash and disappear.

It was difficult to read while waiting. Each minute was another minute that he was not being paid, another minute of squandered opportunity. It was a clear day too. Unseasonably warm, skies glassy with just occasional knots of shifting clouds. He could have been hiking, going out to the coast, working on that novel he started a couple of years ago, taking his girlfriend out to a movie, calling his landlord about the fridge that kept leaking, applying for new jobs, enrolling in classes. Instead, he was bent into jagged shapes, playing word games on his smart phone. This was life on the cusp of forty.

He'd almost fallen asleep, almost allowed the tidal whoosh of cars out beyond the brush on the 405, to lull him into sedated semi-sleep that also gave rise to headaches. It was a hotel call, one of those by the convention center. The hotel probably called it in, given it was a local area code and the person's supposed last name: Brant. They were probably gone by now, scooped up by the scavengers lurking in

valet zones. And it was rush hour which would mean it would take fifteen minutes to drive the mile and...It didn't matter. Work was work. Peter drove.

It didn't matter what the man looked like, this Brant, somewhat red-raced, a patient urgency like someone waiting for pain pills to kick in. But, his mannerism, the words coming out in torrents of spit-dust. "A seedy part of town. Doesn't matter, Somewhere, where I can...you know..."

The meter was on. The car was moving. If Peter was someone else, he might have driven straight onto the freeway, out into the numbers, found a building with mattresses outside like fallen tombstones and told him the one on the end and he'd have to pay first.... But, what good what that do? The passenger huffed an inhaler and said he'd been to Portland, and a cab driver had helped him with...

Peter asked him to be specific and the man sighed like he was deflating. He had recently splashed cologne that barely concealed a metallic beery smell. Peter hadn't had a drink in twenty-seven days and could smell it through two panes of glass, welded steel and molded polymer. And his itchiness. Once set at ease, there is the next, the more, always the question of something more.

"Just need a gram. Two. Two grams. I just need two grams." The man, Brant, paused. The car, as mind slowed to a red light. "And fifty for you. On top of the fare." The light turned but there was traffic. "A hundred. Hundred for you. Plus the fare. A good deal. I've got to leave tomorrow. I closed this deal. I work in fiber-optics. Have you heard of Clear Channel?"

Peter was able to maneuver the car across the intersection and pulled into a loading zone. "What exactly are you trying to ask for?"

"Coke," the man, Brant said. "You know someone? You must. Every city across the country and over the border always knows somebody. You have to these days. You have to diversify. You have..."

Peter knew someone. Hell, everyone did. But it was the afternoon. And this was a stranger. Even though he hadn't heard of narcs busting anyone in years, as luck would have it that could very well change today. "I don't think so."

"But you know someone. I can read people. I went to school for business. That's what most of business is: reading people. You know somebody but you don't trust me. I don't blame you."

Peter would draw this out. He didn't want to make a phone call. But then again, what did it matter? This man with his voice sliding away at the end of a sentence before he clipped it short, wasn't a cop. That would be a hell of a thing if the budget-challenged city was recruiting from some southern state, giving them a stipend to get liquored and putting them in cabs to score bags of coke. If they really gave a shit, they'd send an attractive woman to any bathroom line at any club any weekend night.

"You're thinking about it. You are. And you know someone." He shuffled in the backseat and finally produced a brown leather wallet which he flipped open between the seats. "I'm not a cop." And there was his face, Christopher Brant from the Lone Star state. "I've got cash." He was calm now, closing the deal. "No risk."

Peter ran his fingers over the face of his phone. He sent a text out to a friend. Couldn't hurt to see if he was around at least. It didn't matter. Once, things were highly secretive, on the backs of toilet seats, folded in origami dollar bills or matchbooks, but now people sniffed it from their palms, chopped lines up huddled around tables in the bar, tapped it out onto the backs of their wrists. "Okay," Peter said. "Are you sure." The meter was running.

"Sure?" The man laughed. A tension had eased in him. "When are you really sure." He took another pull from his inhaler. "Now, you're friend has rock, right?"

Linda used to be called Lynn a lifetime ago but Bo insisted on calling her that still which, in his case only, was really just fine. She let on that it caused her grief but really, she actually sort of liked it. He might have been handsome still if he had done something about that knock-kneed gait when something could still have been done about it and if he hadn't gotten his neck all knotted up with ingrown hairs or whatever was going on there, just like bent nails hammered into his skin. He wasn't much older than her, maybe only three or four years but those years held on when you knew someone from childhood. He was always her brother's friend, played left tackle for Roosevelt while her brother was receiver. He was always around, seemed like everyone was back then. But he was the only one she still saw from those days. Now, mostly, they moved off to other cities, further out into the numbers as the homes closer-in became more valuable and desired. The younger ones, sons of classmates of hers came around now with their hoods up over their heads like they didn't know anyone. Everyone knew of everyone else, orbited around the same planets, but made sure not to know much of one another at all.

"Look at us," Linda said tapping out a menthol from a soft-pack. "Waiting outside this Greyhound like we got someplace to go."

"Hmm-huh." Bo kept his Caddy that he had since Linda worked reception at the clinic up past the main library downtown. She used to see him go by when she waited for the number four down there in the bus mall. One day, after denying him the pleasure many times before, she accepted a ride. It was raining. Hell, it was always raining. But for some reason, one of those days, she just felt a little bit different. And here they were a decade and change later, in the same spot, hustling the same change in a new city, one where they were strangers again in a bigger, more profound sort of way. "You need me, I'll be in the club." He began to walk away. He was holding out. Of course he was holding out.

"Playing deuces wild while I stand here waiting for the rain to come."

"Rains always coming. You know that by now."

“Yeah well, you come on back by because I’m going to get up.” She wasn’t sure who she was directing this toward but she straightened her back and held firm if anyone was paying attention.

He grunted something and was shuffling back toward his Caddy.

Smoking gave her something to do. A sense of purpose. If the police rolled up she was just smoking and people-watching like anyone else. And she didn’t have shit on her anyhow. Well, except for the stem but they wouldn’t actually do anything for that. Not unless one of these boys fired off a round or two and it was time for heads to roll. But that didn’t happen all that much anymore.

She felt around in her purse. A crumpled dollar, some brillo scrap, lipstick nail-clippers, lighter...nothing, not even enough for a cheap happy hour brew. And these fools all around with money tucked away wherever nobody would find it. And all she wanted today, really, was a brew. Days like this, when the sky was clear and she didn’t need to put on extra clothes for the cold, she almost felt like herself. But then, a feeling like club soda came into her and fizzed for a while, something between wanting something and remembering something, but not quite either or both.

And then someone, was talking to her, asking her some bullshit question about if she knew Jerome. A white man. Asking about Jerome. Well, yes she did.

Someone, somewhere. Philly, Chris, thought told him to use that as an opener. Of course it seemed sort of bigoted, like every black person knew a Jerome, but the guy who told him said it was just a way in and he didn’t have a cop face even though he was in the military a decade and change ago. She didn’t seem upset anyway. She was thin, but not skinny, wore hoop earrings that a cat could jump through and probably put on lipstick the same way most people do chap-stick in winter but there was a

plain calmness about her. Although, he could sense there were others closing in, tightening the circle around him.

Chris wasn't going to go to the younger folks. It was always best to do business with someone about your age. "Two gram. Rock," he said, hurrying his voice to convey something like urgency. After all this was the only place the cab driver knew of to take him.

"Hundred-fifty," she said without flinching. Her smile was gone. It was all business now.

It seemed like a lot. It was a lot. Including the amount he'd already promised the cab driver, this was going to cost the whole three-hundred dollars Chris had brought. But this was special. Tomorrow he'd go home, be the dutiful fiancé. Today, today might be the last time. It would be another week before he was out on the road again. "Fine," he said. "Good. You've got to get yours too right?"

"Hmm-huh." She made a motion for him to keep his arms, down, his money pocketed. "I got to go get one of these kids to take care. Drop it on the floor."

"Hell no." He knew he appeared out of place. But, hell this was Portland. More than half the people down here were white guys in sweatshirts. He folded the money in his palm, took her hand and pressed it. "A hundred," he said. "I give you the other fifty when you give me rocks."

She sighed like this was another day of the same shit and walked off to some younger guys in baseball caps and hoods in a huddle like they were in a craps game without the dice.

"I got you. What you need?" Another guy, a white guy with too many piercings, wearing an undershirt and huge jean shorts that he held up with pocketed hands stood in front of Chris while someone else he couldn't see was behind. The cab was across the street, the driver occupied with his phone or something in his lap. It wasn't his problem. Hell, it wasn't anyone's problem.

“I’m good. I’m good,” Chris was saying. He could actually break this kid’s arm before he raised he raised up if he had to. The difficulty was in knowing when the situation had crested.

The woman beat the kid off with a glare. That was good. She knew her way around here. The others offered her deference. Of course there were the tell-tale signs, the glossed, chapped lips that always curled inward, the splotches on her skin where glass or metal caps had singed her. She did an obligatory, once-around but there weren’t any cops. The cab driver had told him they didn’t hassle with it much anymore. They were put-out, a labor negation in limbo, budget cuts, lowered morale due to public scrutiny. Could have been anywhere. Hell, Chris could have been a cop. He had thought about it for a minute. And then this whole interaction would go a bit different.

“You got the fifty?”

Red cellophane in her palm. That was it. He was good. It might be shit but he wasn’t going to burn one right here. There was bound to be something in it. That and a few beers and a playoff game would be fine for the night. He reached into his pocket. And then the other pocket. It was in the right...

He got taken. Either that or he bullshitted about the money there was when Peter had picked him up. Now there was some sort of muffled commotion going on, and the younger guys had stepped away and he was walking back toward the car, with the woman quickly behind him, his hands still digging into his sweatshirt and jeans and now his wallet.

“It was those boys who came up on you,” she said, sliding in before he could. And then to the driver: “Did you see those boys rushing up on him?”

“Fuck, that was stupid,” Brant said. “Leaving it in my fucking pocket.” And then to the driver: “Did you see what happened?”

Peter would not get involved. That was the agreement. "I don't do the lookout thing."

"So now what?" The woman said. "I need to get mine too."

Brant was cradling something in his hand. Peter caught a glance of it when he turned to check for clearance to pull the cab into the road. It looked like tooth fragments, obscured by the red plastic.

"You got a stem, we can split one of these."

"Not in the car," Peter said. "There aren't many rules I have left but that's one. Certain things got to happen outside."

"This isn't going to go very far." Brant sighed. "You know of a bank around here?"

"How much did you lose?" It wasn't so much empathy that compelled Peter to ask so much as it was concern for his own interest in the deal.

"I had three...in my pocket. I was going to pay you cash. You can run my card though. Go ahead. I want you to so you feel alright with things. Run it for fifty and keep the meter going."

The man read Peter well. In situations such as these, the issue of payment was paramount. Especially when things began to deviate from an already frayed plan. Before he slid the card, he read the name as it appeared and it actually matched the name he'd been given: Christopher Brant.

There was a bank with a drive-through ATM but Brant asked if Peter would park in the small lot. As he slid the car into park, Brant nearly rolled out the back with the woman on his heels. "I've got to take a piss," he called back. "I need privacy to do that."

"He's going to piss right on the bank huh?" Linda said. The man was rich. Well, not private-jet rich but maybe business-class rich. Linda flew business class once when they botched her reservation

back out to Detroit to visit a sick Aunt. All that money and he was acting like some sailor on leave. "He's good for it though." She could tell the cab driver was impatient, irritated with the current and forthcoming nonsense. "Where's he gonna go anyway? He's not from here I gather."

The driver nodded. "He's from Texas. Some businessman."

"No, he won't run off. He couldn't find his way. He needs us both."

Linda tried to settle herself, cool her jumping nerves. "How long you been doing this?"

The driver shrugged. He was watching for the man who had just reappeared, zipping up his pants smiling crookedly. "Too long," he said.

He might have said something more, some sort of pleasantries but he just busied himself with his meal-ticket as he made himself regular again and slid his card into the bank machine. "Texas, huh? He thinks he knows some shit. He's got that air about him like he knows everyone."

"Salesmen are like that. They over-empathize."

The man made a hand motion outside the window like he wanted Linda to scoot across but she wasn't moving an inch. He could go around. And he did. Exasperated but calm, he took a seat next to her again. "Now, you said you have a guy we could go to with some decent stuff?"

"My man Bo. He sits down there at the club across Burnside burning up his money on Deuces Wild." This was all Linda was going to say about it.

"Well, can you tell the driver more specifically where and can we go meet him?"

"I've got to get mine too. You give me three on two and we'll go."

"But, I've already spent three hundred. Plus the cab--"

"What those boys did is not on me. Don't you put it there. Don't even try."

The man rose his hands up. "Fine," he said. "It's my last day here. Let's do it. But I buy two and I'll give you half on one."

Linda sighed. "We just going to break it apart like that? Like this thing goes like that?" She would call him out. He was a tourist, a know-nothing. People like him hated to be put in their place. "You really don't know shit about shit."

"Lady," he said. "I've done this all around the damn country. I got a guy in Philly who I burned through an ounce with in one weekend. An ounce. Not of this piddling shit. I know guys all across this country. And this is Portland. This is Portland isn't it?" When there wasn't any response from her or the driver, he modestly conceded. "Okay. Four on three. I've got to get mine too. This is my last day out here. I've gotta make the most of it."

She told the cabbie to wait across the street, in front of some mission shelter. A couple of men in work-boots stood outside smoking cigarettes and laughing about something. Chris felt compelled to talk to them but stayed put in the cab. "So, how long have you been doing this?" He said to the driver.

The driver bit his lip. He was watching the bar across the street where the woman had walked.

"She'll be back," Chris said, sensing his anxiety. "Besides, I've got more riding on it than you. You'll get paid."

"How do you know? She could just slip out the back."

"I know people. I might be a mark. I might not be. But, right now, I'm paying off. I shouldn't have told her I'm leaving tomorrow. That was my fault. I should have made it seem like I'd be the gift that keeps on giving."

He sensed the driver might want to ask questions but wouldn't. This was a business transaction essentially and he very well might have wanted it to stay that way. "I'm getting married in a couple of weeks," Chris said. "Are you married?"

The cab driver shook his head and said something about a girlfriend.

"I think I had to," Chris said, sounding more sullen than he might have intended. "It is what's best for me. She's more important than I am. Ring cost me nearly eight grand." He sighed, trying not to stay fixed on the tinted windows of the bar. "It's what was best. She's really great."

"Seems like it might be a good thing for you."

"Probably seems that way, yeah. And she is. And she could never know about this." Now, the woman appeared outside the bar, head forward moving with a briskness that told him everything was alright. "She works for a very prominent person." Chris wasn't entirely sure why he was saying this. "Someone who you might have heard of if you follow national politics."

His disposition changed. Brant's practiced posture, his well-honed comportment shifted once the woman was back into the cab and the bags were spilled out over the seat. She was wary of doing this, but he convinced her it was okay. He had just payed Peter another fifty dollars. And this, now was the moment of victory.

"And this is good? This is good stuff?" Brant said.

"Yeah. Of course. I've known Bo since we were learning math."

"Well, we've got to try it. Where's a place we can try it?"

There was a silence. Peter was unsure if this was directed to him so he took the opportunity to tell them that, as long as it wasn't in the cab, he didn't care. This was making a living.

The woman seemed uneasy at first but relented, suggesting the park. She had a stem and they could use hers. "But you've got to keep cool," she told Brant. "Don't want to draw attention. That doesn't do any good."

Peter found a place to park and they argued a moment before finally stepping out of the car. Brant was doing his best to be coy but his mouth moved like he was pleading a case while the woman stayed cool. She led him to a bench, sat, opened her purse and sifted through her purse like this was any other Monday. And she seemed to be listening.

The things people told Peter were often either confessional or fictionalized. They could really say anything the same way people did in bars or doctor's offices. Nothing that happened inside the car ever truly mattered. It could all be dismissed once the meter was turned off. It was all bullshit whether it was true or not. People had confessed to murders, affairs or fame. None of it ultimately mattered.

And so what, if this guy was engaged to some politician from Texas? It didn't ultimately mean anything. There he was out there anyway, with his hands cupped around his face, his chest muscles contacted to hold that smoke in, just a little bit longer...And she was there next to him, now with her mouth going, telling him the way things were.

"Okay now, we going out to my place," Linda said, getting back into the cab. "Aren't we?"

The man, Chris, might not have heard or he just didn't want to. "Yeah. Where is that?"

"One hundred and-"

“So now we’re going all the way out there? It’s rush hour you know?” The cab driver said.

“Is that far?”

“But, I was saying.” People were always interrupting Linda. Always. Her voice may not have been demanding enough, her language not eloquent enough but goddamnit, people needed to let her speak.

“Chris here, said he’d go on out there with me. He’s got these-“

“Walmart cards,” he interrupted. “I’ve got a ton of them and she needs new shoes.”

Linda would have shown them, would’ve proven that her shoes were trash and she spent so much time on her feet. But the driver wasn’t having it. He’d begun to reach his end with the whole bit. A ride home would’ve been truly nice. Like old times when she used to cab home from work on Fridays. On Payday. But this day had been good. She had a rock and she was sure Bo would buy her a brew or two after she brought in the business. But she wasn’t going to let him off. She wasn’t an experience or a prop. And she did need new shoes amongst other things and he, he had it all and then some, happily pissing it away.

“I’ve got to hit the ATM again,” Chris said, going through his wallet. “I’ve got to...”

“Listen,” the driver said. “why don’t you just give her one of those cards and I take you back to your hotel. You got what you needed, right?”

But people like him always wanted more. Linda saw it all the time. There was never an end to it. He needed someone there to tell him it was okay, that this whole episode was perfectly normal. “I got a pipe, a new one back at my house,” she said. She almost added that she cooked but caught herself. Now that would be truly fucking ridiculous.

She pointed out the ATM and, reluctantly the driver pulled over. "Don't you want cash?" Linda said once Chris was out the door. She could see he was tired and this was more than he wanted to deal with today.

"He's been taken enough. Why don't you just take the Walmart card? What're you going to do with this guy out there at your house?"

This was true. It was actually her sister's house and there were seven of them living there with her in the basement as an afterthought. "He likes spending what he's got," she said. "Shit like this gets him off. It does."

He seemed lost. He just sat down in the cab, glazed with his money in his hand like a receipt he was about to toss away. And then he shook his head. "Yeah, the hotel. I think I should go back to the hotel." He turned to Linda. "Lynn, I want you to have this." He handed her a couple of twenty dollar bills and gave the cab driver the rest. "I hope this helps you, he said to her." And there it was, the charity he felt like he had to give. But she'd take it.

Chris was able to breathe. Lynn was gone now. She was going to be okay. He was going to be okay. The Walmart cards were giveaways. He should have known that he'd left them at home. They were charitable donations. Campaign write-offs Sheila had entrusted him with. It was good to hear her voice again even if just over the phone.

The car was parked in front of a head shop, some place he could get a stem, a filter, some lighters. The driver was getting paid. Sheila had just finished her day and was having some wine, turning on Hannity or maybe Blitzer, rifling through the mail while checking her emails. And, on his end, he was coming back from a late dinner. A bit too many beers and don't tell him what happened in the Rangers

game. He couldn't wait to see her. The trip had gone well. Everything was normal. Nothing new to report. Everything was good.

The store didn't have what he needed. Well, not exactly. He was able to buy the stem but not the filter. They sold roses out of the stems to validate their purpose as something other than to smoke speed or rock out of. He would save the rose for Sheila.

"She doesn't know about this," he found himself saying. "She knows my uncle died from it. Well, I told her it was drinking mostly but yeah. He's the guy who turned me on to it. Used to smoke it out in the garage. He was a cop if you could believe it. Tried shit they seized one time and that was it. He felt bad about it too but people are flawed." It was getting dark and he found himself transfixed by the headlights, long beams of yellow light. And he was envious of all of them.

The cab driver didn't say much. What was there for him to say, Chris supposed. It wasn't his job to say anything. But then he did. "So you're fiancé is an assistant to someone I might know of?"

"Considering you seem to follow the news on the radio, I'd say so. He ran for a pretty important position. But that's not it. Not really. I met her because I used to be in that racket too. I was a congressman back in the day, if there ever was one. And if you're wondering why I told you this, why I told Lynn back there, any of this, well, you might need to know people a bit better."

Peter pulled in front of the hotel and put the car in park. "Well," he said, as if they actually knew each other. "Good luck or something like that."

"Luck's got nothing to do with it," Brant said. He tipped the valet for saying hello to him. He was neat again, composed, just a couple of beers with dinner.

It would be hours later. Hours of waiting, of walking groceries for old ladies and prying addresses from drunks nixed from bars that Peter would find himself outside the hospital again. There was always blood to be delivered or heavily medicated releases. He found himself staring at his phone. He typed in his passenger's name. There he was, the same man plus ten or fifteen pounds in a pressed suit and pressed smile, flag over his shoulder. He hadn't been lying.

It had been another hour. Peter had all but forgotten about the man from earlier. None of it really mattered anyway. Peter wasn't a public person. And who would he tell aside from his girlfriend anyway? One more, fare he told himself. One more.

The rain was coming. Little spits of it at first and then a reluctant march. The onset of fall.

An hour and a half and still nothing. This was life. This was time being burned away. Finally, just as he was about to give up, an order came in. It was a hospital release. The E.R called dispatch.

It only took Peter a moment to drive there considering he was just at the other end of the hospital. He almost expected, or somehow knew, that outside the E.R staring out into the rain was the same man that he had picked up earlier. In his hand he had a clear plastic bag with his sweatshirt. He wore a button down shirt untucked and a blazer unbuttoned. He smiled the same way he had earlier when he saw that it was Peter. He withdrew something from his pocket that Peter couldn't see until he was closer. It was some bills fanned out like a deck of cards.

Chris poured himself into the back of the car. "Didn't expect to see me again huh? I guess that was some good shit. My subordinate found me on the floor with the volume of the T.V turned all the way up. These things happen I guess. Now, what do you think Lynn is up to right now?"

