

The Ungrateful

Chapter one

By

R. S. Courier

With nothing more to say, J.J. stepped from his associate's El Camino and jacked a shell into the shotgun's chamber. He still didn't like the situation, still wasn't convinced he had all the facts straight, but he understood the urgency of this maneuver. He took in a quick scan of the area, the day's remaining yard workers and porch sitters began folding up shop and taking it all indoors. They knew why the Black Car was back in the court, and they wanted no part of it. Some things never change, J.J. thought to himself. March of the Mole People. He did notice a few confirming squints and double takes at his emergence. The car may have been familiar, but he had never been a part of it before. Despite having spent his childhood one row over and two trailers up, he could find no comfort of nostalgia in this place. Through the open window of the car, he fished around for the remaining shells that had spilled from the box, shoving them into the various pockets of his jacket as his enigmatic associate slowly crawled from the driver's seat.

"It's down the road, around the bend, lot number..."

"15. Yeah, I know. You've been telling me that for the past two days now. The old Stetler place." His associate continued, ignoring the interruption.

"Azal should be the only Lilin in the house, but he will definitely have agents with him, from both sides. It would probably be best for you not to enter. Things will be....shifting."

"Gideon, knock it off. I know, I know, I know! Just get Joanne out of there before you start hacking away. I'll drop anything that gets by you."

Without another word, the man named Gideon slung what appeared to be curtain rod wrapped in black sac cloth over his shoulder, nodded to the terms of the agreement and walked.

The duo's boots crunched along the dirt and gravel street, kicking tiny puffs of dried soil into the air, only to be stolen and tossed by a sporadic wind. J.J. imagined how ridiculous they must look to the Moles poking eyeslots through Venetian blinds. He might as well have been wearing a set of jingling spurs and a Mexican poncho, chewing a cigar and grimacing in the sunlight.

Gideon seemed to take no notice of themselves or their reluctant audience. He was all business. Cool and confident in a way that made him virtually unapproachable. J.J. had seen him silence ranting drunks, break up fights, and reduce hard men to tears with nothing but a look. He didn't want to recall what he had seen the man do with the three feet of cold steel blade wrapped up and slung over his shoulder.

The only sound aside from their footfalls was J.J.'s constant sniffing and snorting, followed by a mucousy jiggle whenever he rubbed his nose.

"You really need to get off that stuff." Gideon commented with a complete lack of emotion.

"It's just part of the job. I'll be fine."

"Perhaps you should find another *job*." The last word seemed foreign to the man, and he spoke it as if in mimicking the term rather than understanding it. J.J. never even considered trying to explain to the man what his job was or even what *a* job was. It would take too long and there was no guarantee the effort would justify the end. Besides, he didn't need this asshole pointing out the ever mounting list of problems in his life. He had a vicious ex-wife, an overbearing sociopathic captain, and a numbered amount of low level Coke pushers to do that for him. Ironically the Coke pushers gave him less headaches.

In the four years he had been with the Narcotics Division, he had befriended some of the most appealing, charismatic and loving people he had ever known in his life; and sold them all down the river to gain one of the highest arrest records in the department. So what if his wife blew his cover and ran off to L.A. with his mark to pursue a career in the ever growing porn industry? So what if he's had to look at every true friend he ever had in the eyes and tell them it was all some grand lie and they were pretty much fucked from here on out? So what, if he's had to go into rehab twice for a heroine addiction? So what if his colleagues and peers treat him with the same amount of love and respect they give to the rotting bums roaming the alleyways in drunken stupors. So what if he has to rely, again, on this stoic, heartless, asshole of a sorcerer from another dimension, this time to rescue his 16 year old sister from another stoic, heartless, asshole of a sorcerer from another dimension, who is no doubt the father of the now eight month old fetus growing in her belly. So what? So what? The condescending handshakes, gruff 'attaboys', and pathetic promotions that trickle down from the Commissioner's office are all he needs to be happy in this life.

Gideon was right; he needed to find another job.

The two stopped in front of what seemed like a rather unremarkable trailer house. It was a '72 Nelson, the same as eighty percent of the trailers in the lot. It was white with brown trim, held stationery with cinder blocks. The window shades were drawn and quiet. They both stared at the crudely painted sign posted at the front gate.

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J.J. moved to push the gate open, but was stopped by Gideon's outstretched hand.

"He knows we are here." Gideon claimed, sniffing the air. Out of instinct, J.J. shouldered his shotgun and took in the area with his senses.

"So what do we do?"

"We proceed. Nothing has changed." With his weapon at the ready, J.J. made once more for the gate and was once again halted.

"What, Gideon? What? Are we going to do this thing or not?"

“We had an agreement. You are not to enter.”

“She’s my sister! Fuck you, I’ve spent way too much time and energy trying to nail this asshole to just stand back and count the bodies! I have to....to,” He had spent the last seventy two hours in a speed riddled haze of shoot outs, demons, black magic, and what appeared to be a haunted yoyo. Events had taken their toll, and he wasn’t sure just how much more his mind could handle. “She’s my sister, man. She’s my sister.”

“Friend Hackett, try to calm yourself. I too love Joanne, she is in our songs as much as you are. You know that you cannot be of use inside these walls, Azal’s Eye has already started to open and the touch of the Lilin will be everywhere. You lack the footing. I will need you to, how do you say.... ‘watch my back.’” Gideon patted J.J.’s back and smiled, two gestures that were so completely beyond his understanding that he appeared comical while attempting them. J.J. thought that this was how Steinbeck’s Lenny must have looked when he was first allowed to ‘tend the rabbits’. Even though his spirit brightened from an inside joke at Gideon’s expense rather than his intentions, it did brighten nonetheless.

“Just bring her out alive. I don’t give a shit what else happens. Ok?” Gideon nodded and pushed the gate open. He strolled up the sidewalk to the looming trailer house of horrors with his trademark confidence that, at this point, seemed dangerously reckless to J.J. When he reached the porch and placed his hand on the doorknob, he turned once again to J.J.

“Remember not to trust all that you see from this moment on. You are bleeding a great deal of Trauma. The Lilin will use that against you.” Without waiting for a response, he opened the door.

As promised when the two had first arrived at the court, things began to shift. The definition of reality suffered a great deal of content editing around the trailer. J.J.’s feet seemed to be fused with the ground upon which they stood and gravity pulled the rest of him in random directions. Watching Gideon enter the house was like watching a movie with every other frame omitted from the film strip or like trying to track movement in a dark room with a strobe light flashing away. Breathing had become an act of discipline that could only be accomplished between fits of vomiting. Unable to maintain any resemblance of composure, J.J. fell to all fours, closed his eyes and willed the attacking to cease. More vomit was his only reward. The sidewalk in front of him had begun to twist, sway and rock like a suspension bridge in an earthquake and the air was vibrating with such intensity that his teeth were chattering.

When he finally came to the conclusion that he was going to be torn limb from limb by nothing more than the air around him and the earth below him, the storm of discord stopped as suddenly as it began. Tentatively, he opened his eyes. Somehow he had made it all the way to the steps of the porch. With shaking legs and arms he slowly rose to his feet and shook the vomit from his arms, realizing with a small amount of pride that he had never once released the shotgun. This was the last thought that ran through his mind before the cold hit him.

J.J. could count on one hand how many times he had felt this sensation. It was a *cold*, though every time that word had seemed to be lacking the descriptive force of what was happening. The cold always preceded something that could only be described as evil, something that rose above all logic and reason. It had first happened to him at the age of sixteen while working as an orderly in the local mental hospital. He had stood

catatonic while he watched an inmate literally tear his own flesh from his bones and devour it. The other times had been worse, and this one was going to be no disappointment.

The first thing he seen emerge from the trailer was the small gray foot of a child, scarred and mud splattered. The calve, knee and thigh followed, as did the other leg. Shuddering, shuddering, he couldn't bring himself to look above the young boy's bony kneecaps. Not that he really needed to anyhow, he knew what was in front of him. It was a vision that had haunted him for the better part of nine years now; it was the first thing he saw when he closed his eyes and the last thing he saw when they opened. The V.A. doctors had told him countless times that it was simply a result of the traumatic ordeal he had suffered in Vietnam, and that this vision and the others would fade in time. After the fourth or fifth time this information was passed, J.J. realized they were really saying, "Quit whining soldier, and get the fuck out of my office!"

He squeezed his eyes shut, opened them and sighed when the legs hadn't vanished like the doctors had promised. With his eyes locked now on the cement in front of him he slowly rose to his full height, shouldered the shotgun, and took aim at the small naked Vietnamese boy with the live grenade in his hand.

The noise of that damn gun was something he never could get used to. It wasn't so much loud as it was *offensive* to him. This time he barely even heard the noise as the head of the boy in front of him erupted into a foul black chum.