

I arrived at the warehouse at 7:45 p.m., exactly on time. I am always precise. You learn fast to always be on time: too late, and you might get shot for being lousy at your job; too early, and you might get shot for seeing something you shouldn't. You learn fast to let the rhythm of your truck's wheels count out the seconds; it keeps you smooth, keeps you regular.

I stepped out of the truck. My boots splashed into a puddle, but I shook the water off like a mutt and closed the door. The boots were cheap; so were the jeans, t-shirt, and rain slicker. All bought and paid for by a third party, who left it all in a package at a different location each time. The only people who should ever see your face are those who have more to lose than you.

A man was standing by the rear entrance to the warehouse, an anonymous metal door that resembled hundreds of others I'd walked through over the years. The man glowered at me as I walked up, his pants and leather jacket helping him melt into the shadows cast by the dim warehouse lights.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"You know who I am, Jack. Let me in."

His name probably wasn't Jack, but he knew who I was by the look in my eyes, and he let me in.

The warehouse was like most of those I went to: lit by fluorescent lighting, basically empty, as though it had been constructed with this one purpose in mind. Occasionally, I'd have to go to a house, or an apartment. Once I went to an aquarium; I was half tempted to let the sharks do my job for me, but figured that my employers were looking for something a little more subtle. I never went to the woods, though, or the riverbank; if they were already there, they had no need for me nor my talent for disposal..

Four men occupied the warehouse; one lay on the concrete floor in a pool of blood. I shook my head and turned to the man I picked as the leader.

"Wasn't a clean kill."

The man shrugged. He was older, his hair dyed but the roots showing. His clothes clung to his wiry frame, and a gold Rolex threatened to slip off his wrist. I had seen him before, though I did not know his name.

I knelt beside the body. A middle-aged male, face-down, with short brown hair, dressed in a three-piece suit. There was a briefcase off to the side. I pointed at it. "His?"

The older man nodded.

"You need it?"

He shook his head.

I stood up and walked around the body. After I had made a complete circle, I knelt beside him again. I pressed my fingers to his throat, checking for a pulse. Always make sure they're dead.

He was done for, so I stood up. I turned back to

the older man. "I need to go get my supplies."

He nodded.

I left the warehouse. It had started to drizzle again. I pulled the hood of my slicker up and walked over to my truck. The bed was empty except for a folded canvas drop cloth and some rope. I grabbed these items and walked back into the warehouse.

I slipped the hood off. Water pooled on the floor. After frowning at it for a moment, I took off the slicker and let it drop. No sense mixing water with the drying blood. There was already a big enough mess.

I unrolled the cloth a couple feet from the body, so that the dry side was up. Then I walked over to the body and knelt down again, checking the angles, the way it had settled, where exactly the blood was coming from. It appeared to have been a gut shot, at least at first. I shook my head. They should have known better.

I took a pair of leather gloves out of my back pocket and put them on. Then I reached out and turned the body over. I didn't hesitate, nor did my breathing quicken at all, but my vision blurred slightly. There was a bullet hole in the man's forehead—they had apparently decided a slow death wasn't necessary—but I could still recognize him.

I felt the others staring at me, the older man in particular. I felt I had to say something.

"Guess I can see why you guys called me."

One of them coughed. I didn't look up to see who.

"Well. He won't be found. Wish I could say he won't be missed."

I figured that was almost a bit too much, so I stood back up. I turned to the two younger men and asked, "Care to give me a hand here?"

They joined me without a word. I expected them to take off their Nike track jackets to avoid stains, but they left them on. I shook my head—those jackets had to be expensive—and I told them, "Grab his feet. I'll get the hands. And mind the blood."

They did as instructed, and I grabbed his hands,

and together we lifted him. A heavy man; I hate it when they're heavy. We hefted him onto drop cloth, and I was panting by the time we dropped him down, but the two thugs were barely sweating. I smiled and nodded at them after the job was done. "Thanks, gents."

I turned to the older man. "The blood's on your floor. I trust you can handle it?"

He nodded, watching me.

"I've got some ammonia in the truck if you want it."

He shook his head. I thought to press the point further, but stopped myself.

I rolled the cloth over the body, then tied it off with the rope. I looked at the two men again. "My truck's outside." Over my shoulder I shouted, "Hey, Jack! You mind?"

The older man made a motion with his hand, and the guard at the door came in. After I slipped my rain slicker back on, the four of us hauled the body outside, where we threw it into the bed of my truck. The drop cloth was thick; I wasn't afraid of it tearing. The rope solid; it would hold. A good biodegradable drop cloth and rope are the two most important tools of my trade. Without them, a body is just a body; with them, a body is something vaguely resembling a body. It may not seem like there is much of a difference, but there is. Always make sure you wrap and tie the body effectively.

When the body was resting in the truck bed (which had been sprayed with an industrial-strength polyurethane lining), I pulled the roll-out cover over it, securing it at the tailgate and locking it, just for good measure. One of the thugs watched me as I did this, and I shrugged at him.

"Can never be too sure," I said. His expression didn't change.

I walked back into the warehouse to get the briefcase. The older man was standing near it, waiting for me. After I had the briefcase in hand, I said to him, "Just for the record, you'll pay my handler the second half tomorrow."

He nodded.

"Okay." I held his eyes, and in them I could see

how everything was going to go down. But not here; I still had some time left.

I went back out to the truck, walking around the three men who had gathered near the door. They watched me as I climbed in behind the wheel. I checked my gloves for blood in the glow of the dome light; seeing that no blood had gotten on them, I placed them on the passenger seat, and then set the briefcase on the floor. I shut the door, turned on the ignition, and backed out of the lot. My headlights caught the three men, standing just outside the door, watching me. The older man was nowhere in sight.

I drove south. I had about an hour's drive; the whole way, I kept glancing into the rearview mirror. There were plenty of headlights, but I couldn't see anyone following me. Of course, I wouldn't see them; that was the whole point. I was good at what I did; they were good at what they did.

I was conscious, more so than usual, of the body in the truck bed. I had, on occasion, disposed of the remains of someone I'd recognized. It went with the territory. But never had I gotten rid of someone so prominent. Usually, the task is left to the killers; the fewer people who know about it, the better. This was especially true with high-profile victims, which is why I usually disposed of lowlifes, people who wouldn't be missed much, and who caused no problems if I saw their faces before getting rid of them. In this situation, though, everybody had something to lose; one man had already lost everything, and soon someone else would too.

The briefcase lay in front of the passenger seat; I could see it out of the corner of my eye. For a full twenty minutes I fought the temptation; but then I decided I had nothing to lose, and so reached over, hefted it up onto the seat, and unlatched it. The lid popped open, but in the darkness I couldn't see anything. I reached over and opened the glove box, removing a small penlight. I clicked the light on and shined it into the briefcase.

Alternating my attention from the road to the briefcase's contents, I examined the documents inside. There were a few sheets of paper, plus the requisite pen and pencil

set. The documents seemed to be generic legal paraphernalia, nothing fancy or illegal. Something to do with real estate. It was questionable, given the deceased's political status, but nothing incriminatory. There was nothing in here to suggest why things were going to go down the way they were; odds were, that was due to the identity of the victim, not his business habits or associates.

I turned the penlight off and put it back in the glove box. Then I put my gloves in the briefcase and latched it up again. I placed the briefcase in the small space behind the driver's side seat, wedging it there so it wouldn't move about the truck.

Then I reached under the seat and grabbed the pistol I kept in a holster. I pulled it up and placed it on the passenger seat. It was a Glock 9mm. The entire gun was colored a heartless black; it was an ugly thing, but effective. The compact model allowed for a ten round capacity. It felt threatening, sitting there beside me. I fired and cleaned it on a regular basis, but I hadn't actually shot at someone in quite a while. I usually arrived on the scene after all the shooting was over.

I reached the site shortly after 9:30; night had already fallen in earnest, bringing with it a moderately heavy rain. Even with the limited visibility, I knew where the turn-off was; just a gravel road among the trees, but I had been down this highway more times that I wanted to think about. I turned onto the road and checked my rearview mirror to see if anyone turned in after me. No one did, but I hadn't expected them to. They were better than that.

I drove for another two miles. Finally, I came to a small three-room cabin, with a well a few yards to the side, flush to the ground. I had built the cabin and dug the well several years ago, all the necessary equipment rented through multiple false identities; the two individuals who had helped me build everything and install the necessary plumbing had been relocated to the bottom of the well. I had used them for the trial run, and everything had worked perfectly.

I turned around in the wide space in the road and

backed up to the front of the cabin. Then I turned off the ignition. Before opening the door I unscrewed the dome light and took out the bulb. I wasn't worried about them finding me; they knew where I was. However, I didn't know where they were, and I didn't want to ruin my night vision. I still had some time, though: they wouldn't do anything until the body was properly disposed of. This was my part of the job, not theirs.

I reached for the briefcase. At the same time, with the other hand I grabbed the Glock and slipped it into my waistband, then pulled the rain slicker over it. I got out of the truck, walked over to the well, took the metal cover off, and tossed the briefcase in. Then I walked back to my truck and unlocked the cover over the truck bed, letting it slide back in place with a loud snap. I climbed up into the bed of the truck and let the tailgate down. Then I rolled the body out of the truck. It was remarkably easy to do; you learned, over time, the best techniques to gain the best momentum. After a while, you didn't need to push too hard; by the time the body reached the end of the tailgate, it had enough momentum on its own to roll over the edge. It fell onto the ground, making a dull thud as it hit the mud.

I stood up and purposely did not glance over my shoulder. Now for the sulfuric acid. It was a highly concentrated mixture, purchased third-hand from a company that supplied the acid to a phosphate fertilizer manufacturer.

The cabin housed a storage tank. With the flick of a switch I could fill the bottom of the well with acid that burned away flesh and tissue; over time, even the bones would dissolve.

Was I overdoing it? Perhaps we were too far from the highway for smells to ever reach there, but if I err, it is the error of caution.

I jumped out of the truck bed, intended to haul the body into the third room of the cabin, the butchering room, but as soon as my feet hit the ground I spun around, reaching for the Glock. In my assumption of their movements, I had forgotten something:

They didn't know about the time I took with the acid.

I fired but I was too late. I felt the bullet enter my side, and I felt the Glock drop from my hand into the mud, but I never heard a gunshot. Silencer, probably. I didn't see a muzzle flash for the second shot, but I felt the bullet graze my head, and there was a roaring in my left ear, and then there was this immense pain, and I

wanted to shout that they had blown my ear off, but I felt another bullet in me, I couldn't tell exactly where, and my legs gave out and I fell.

They were as good, in their own way, as I was in mine.

I lay face-up in the mud, rainwater flowing through my hair, splattering my face. Two men appeared above me.

They were talking, but I couldn't hear what they were saying. I stared up at them, too shocked to say anything. They looked down and I closed my eyes.

They moved off, and from the corner of my eye I could see them dragging the body over to the well, then kicking it in. I wanted to laugh, because they didn't cut it up first, it was still too solid to dissolve thoroughly, but the very thought of laughter caused my lungs to scream, and what came out was a sort of coughing sound that felt like a roar, but was probably little more than a wheeze.

I closed my eyes as they walked back towards me.

Hands grabbed me. I opened my eyes again, but neither man was looking at my face. They lifted me, one man at my feet, the other holding my arms. They carried me towards the well.

"Check to see if I'm alive," I said, but it must not have escaped my lips, for neither man stopped what he was doing. They swung me over the side of the well, and for a moment I was weightless, and then I felt my stomach sink, and then my head banged against the lip of the well, and I blacked out.

I woke up when I hit, what must have been mere moments

afterwards. The walls were wet and slick.

Something gave way beneath me; I must have landed on the corpse. The surface I rested on, apart from the corpse, was more or less solid; I didn't dare think about how many bodies I had dissolved here, how many victims I lay on



top of. Their remains held me up, for now.

I looked upward. My gaze was crooked, and it took me a minute to realize that my neck was at an angle I wasn't used to, tilted back a little further than I had ever experienced.

I must have snapped my spine, yet in a way that wouldn't be fatal. I tried to wiggle my fingers; I couldn't tell if anything happened or not, which probably meant nothing did. The same with my toes.

I felt the rain batter my face; it was the only part of my body that had any sensation at all. I opened my mouth to take some of it in, but the acid somehow made it bitter and I tried spitting it out but my throat muscles wouldn't work that way.

I could see them peering down into the well; they were backlit by headlights that somebody else must have turned on in the interim of my fall. I could see them, but they couldn't see me. I smiled up at them and stuck out my tongue, or tried to at least.

They disappeared, and I lay there waiting for the acid to come. It didn't, and I wasn't overly surprised. They didn't know about it, after all. My fatal miscalculation. But I didn't really blame myself; they were good at their job.

They weren't too good at my job, though. I felt like laughing.

They had left the cover off. Amateurs. First of all, they had failed to wrap me up; I was just a body now, not something vaguely resembling a body. And second, and most importantly to my precise way of doing things, they had forgotten to remove my identity, and that of the body I rested on, and then failed to seal up the well.

Without the acid, somebody could find us. Maybe not for a few weeks, maybe months, but eventually the smell of decomposition could reach the highway, and someone would call the cops to check it out. It might not happen that way, but it was my cautionary premise.

Always make sure you dispose of the victim so as to ensure they will never be found intact or in any way recognizably human.

Eventually the headlights disappeared. I lay at the bottom of the well and closed my eyes against the rain that poured down upon me. Every now and then I tried to move my arms or legs, but never with any great effort; I didn't really expect to succeed, and even if I had, there was no escape from.

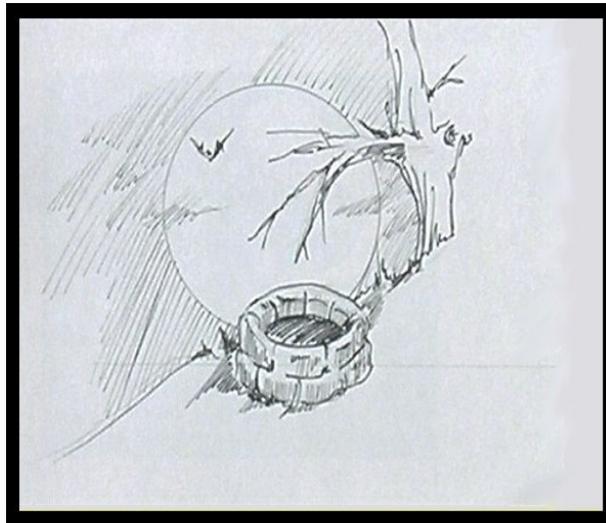
I wondered how long it would take for enough water to build up for me to drown. Probably a while; the ground was soft enough to absorb most of the rainwater that fell into it, and in any case had been designed to leach liquids into the surrounding soil. There was a

certain excitement in not knowing how the end would come.

But even as I lay at the bottom of the well, contemplating how I might expire, I congratulated myself on my success. I had done my job exceptionally well; the incompetence of the two men above proved that beyond a doubt. They had hired me because I was the best. Always take pride in a job well done; that way, you are more likely to do it just as well the next time.

Then acid poured down on me. They had used it after all, but a clog had delayed its arrival. I could hear my flesh hissing as it was burned away.

I screamed.



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**DANIEL DAVIS Bio**

Daniel Davis is the Nonfiction Editor for The Prompt Literary Magazine. His own work has appeared in various online and print journals. You can find him at [www.dumpsterchickenmusic.blogspot.com](http://www.dumpsterchickenmusic.blogspot.com) or on Facebook.

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