

YOU KNOW A PUBLICITY STUNT HAS BACKFIRED WHEN SOMEONE DIES

CHILL RUN



A THRILLER BY

RUSSELL BROOKS

Author of Pandora's Succession

Chill Run

by Russell Brooks

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Prologue

North Hatley, Quebec

Eddie Barrow, Jr. didn't remember feeling the bullet tear into his shoulder. From where he lay on the hardwood floor, the ceiling spun in and out of focus. *God, I can't even lift my arms and legs, let alone move my wrists.* The bullet may have been small, but he felt that it had blown a hole in him the size of a golf ball. Now a chunk of his shoulder was gone. It was surely splattered on the wall somewhere, oozing towards the floor and leaving a trail of blood and tissue.

Eddie could barely open his eyes, but he heard several voices all at once. It wasn't too long after, that he felt himself lifted onto a slightly softer surface and tied down. The frost gnashed into his cheeks and chin as he felt a wintery wind-chill seconds after being wheeled outside. He caught glimpses of men and women in burgundy jackets, shouting orders and calling out words in French that he barely caught. Eddie soon felt himself being jerked upwards and hoisted into the belly of the ambulance, the doors slammed shut.

The warm air inside was a welcome relief as it chased away the chill on his face. This was followed by the jarring, unpleasant screaming of the siren. Although he was strapped in, he still rocked from side to side as the ambulance raced off.

Through partially opened eyes, he saw one of the burgundy jackets—a woman in her forties—staring down at him.

“*Ca va?*” *You're doing all right?* But Eddie was too weak and drowsy to answer. He guessed that's what morphine did to a person. “*Soyez fort, mon grand. On est presque là.*” *Be strong, buddy. We're almost there.* He felt the patting on his forearm from the paramedic, which gave him some comfort.

It was only supposed to be a stupid and harmless publicity stunt. No one was supposed to die. How was he supposed to know that he'd be involved in the biggest investment-fraud scandal in Canadian history? As of now three people were dead and his best friend had been shot. He'd dreamed of making it big in the world with his first novel. For now, he'd settle to live long enough to see tomorrow's sunrise.

Chapter 1

Montreal, Quebec. Four days earlier.

This shit-storm of a day has to end!

There wasn't a pleasant thought in Eddie's mind at the time, as puffs of vapour disappeared nearly as fast as he breathed out. He unbuckled his seatbelt and got out of his car, pulling his wool hat over his ears leaving the tips of his cornrows hanging out the back.

He deliberately parked two blocks away from the strip club so that no one there would know that he drove around in a piece of crap. Not only was it old, had rust stains on the bumper and around the wheels, but lately it had started backfiring. He was sure an art dealer would claim that bird drop stains would increase its value. Boy, how he regretted giving \$4000 cash to that salesman. He should've known the man was a snake.

But the car was the least of Eddie's problems. Earlier in the day he'd lost both his girlfriend and his job. His roommate and best friend, Corey, still hadn't paid his share of the rent. This had been going on for weeks, and every time Corey kept telling him that he'd pay him.

Bullshit!

Corey always kept blowing his money on liquor and video lottery terminals. Corey had spent the last three weeks integrating with the other lowlifes at the strip joint his girlfriend, Jordyn, worked at as a barmaid. Eddie knew that she must be getting fed up with him. It was a miracle that she put up with his crap for so long. Eddie figured that it was the thick skin Jordyn developed from serving winos and other lowlifes every night.

He splashed his way through the mixture of gray, inch-high slush and gravel that covered the sidewalk. He couldn't believe that it was already November—meaning that there was another four to five more months in this freezer box. *Why'd my parents leave Barbados for this? What the hell were they thinking—giving up the hot sun, and the beach, just so that I could be born in this? After all, the Barbadian economy's strong enough, there's no damn snow to shovel and no icy roads and sidewalks to throw him down. And he didn't have to put the snow tires on the car every year—a law that was recently enacted in this province.*

Eddie didn't make it five feet inside the joint when a human cement truck blocked him.

"Ton identification," said the bald-headed bouncer.

Eddie made a face. "What?" He'd only been asked the same question by this bastard the last dozen times he'd come to this strip joint.

"I said, hi want to see your hidee. You make me repeat in henglish, so show it."

"Boy, move aside. You've seen me come here before. You know I'm twenty-four."

"Rules are rules. I want to see your hidee."

Screw my ID, I don't have time for this. "Man, move aside. I'm not in the mood."

"Patrick," came a young woman's voice from the bar. Eddie glanced around the bouncer and saw Jordyn behind the bar counter. He gazed at her, forgetting about the cement truck. Corey sure knew how to pick them. It must have been so easy for him since the best ones were always attracted to him. But Jordyn was somewhat unique, being born to an Italian father and a Jamaican mother. There wasn't a place that Corey went with her where they didn't draw stares. She preferred her dark hair to be in locks, showing off her Caribbean roots. And her arms were just as toned as Michelle Obama's, which she loved to expose. Eddie didn't recall her ever having mentioned playing any sports while in high school, but she sure knew how to take care of herself.

She finished wiping off a glass with the towel and put it back beneath the counter. “Come on, stop teasing Eddie and let him in.”

“You heard the woman. Move your ass,” said Eddie.

Patrick grumbled. “You’re lucky you ‘ave friends that work here.”

“Yeah, and you’re lucky I ain’t a foot taller with the same steroid supplier.” That’s when two gorilla-sized hands grabbed him by the collar.

“Hey!” Jordyn’s yell would’ve put every female police officer to shame. “Let go of him.”

Eddie narrowed his gaze as he looked into Patrick’s crimson-colored face as he was released. Eddie then shot him a smirk, as though to say, “*You can’t mess with me.*”

“Eddie,” Jordyn yelled again. “Get your ass over here and stop antagonizing him.”

Eddie’s mouth dropped as he looked at her. “What did I do?”

“Don’t give me that puppy dog stare. Get your ass over here. Now!” She emphasized the *now* with an index finger pointed downwards at the empty barstool that was beside where Corey slouched over the counter.

Eddie walked over, lowering his head, too embarrassed to look at the winos that stared at him. *Damn, why’d she have to go dissing me in front of everyone?*

There wasn’t any music playing at the moment, which was unusual since the jukebox was usually blaring. Then again, there weren’t any strippers performing at this time—meaning that they were either in the back smoking or giving private shows. At the bar, sat the four regulars that he saw each time he passed by. Now Corey was becoming one of them. Three weeks was all it took for him to blend in.

Eddie walked up behind and stared at his best friend. He wondered if Corey knew that he was standing next to him. Eddie slapped him on the back of his bald head, jolting him up and making him nearly fall off his barstool.

“Get up. Where’s the money?” Eddie’s Barbadian accent erupted.

“Damn, why you have to lash me so?” Corey answered, rubbing the back of his head.

“You were supposed to leave the money for me, remember? Where is it?”

“Money for what?”

“The rent. You *do* remember what that is, don’t you?”

Corey sighed and mumbled into his arm. “I’ll get you the money, don’t worry about it.”

“Don’t give me that shit again,” Eddie yelled, only to lower his voice when he saw Jordyn give him a cold stare. “I came home from work half hour ago to find nothing but bills on the table—and not the type you can buy things with. You ain’t in Trinidad. You think we can survive without electricity in this cold weather?”

Corey’s head dropped back down into his arms on the counter. “I’ll come up with the money. Don’t worry.” Corey then fumbled for the glass, grabbed it, and stretched his arm out across the counter banging the glass twice. “Baby-girl, pour me another one.”

“You ain’t getting one,” Jordyn replied as she cleared the counter of some empty beer bottles. Yup, she still had some of the Italian-sister attitude.

Corey looked up at her. “Oh come on, just one more for your boy.”

“I said, no. You’ve had enough.” She then narrowed her eyes, clearly annoyed. “I don’t even know why I bothered giving you those two drinks earlier.” She then looked at Eddie. “Let me pour you one. It’ll help calm you down.”

Eddie shook his head. “I’m good.”

“Suit yourself.” Jordyn swiped some tip money off the counter and dropped the bills and coins into her pocket. Eddie missed the clinking sound of coins, something he wished he had more of at this moment.

“Will you talk to Corey, please? He’s had a rough day,” asked Jordyn.

Who the hell am I, his psychologist? Eddie sat down on the stool next to him. “Let me guess. You got fired again, didn’t you?” Corey groaned and looked away from him.

“Goddamn it! When are you going to stop this nonsense? I ain’t here to bail your ass out for the rest of your life. You owe me at least eight hundred in rent back-payments now. You’re pulling me down with your *Canadian Idol* trauma. But I ain’t going to put up with this much longer. You hear me?”

“What happened to your friend?” asked one of the regulars.

“He auditioned for *Canadian Idol* last year when they were in town,” Jordyn answered.

“He was good to go up until he stood in front of the judges and saw that the British guy—I can’t remember his name—paid a surprise visit.”

“I know who you’re talking about,” he slurred.

“He was so freaked out that he lost his concentration,” Jordyn said. “It was a complete disaster. Long story short, his audition was broadcast on national TV last summer and he’s been named the worst singer ever. He can’t walk down the street without someone recognizing him.”

“Poor kid,” the man said covering a cough with his hand. “So can I have another drink?”

“No.”

“How about a lap dance?” Jordyn flashed her middle finger to him before she walked away.

Eddie then leaned closer to Corey. “You got to let this go. If you can’t pull yourself together, you’re on your own. You’ll be lucky if Jordyn doesn’t leave you too.” Corey groaned and put his head back down on the counter. *Whatever. In one ear and out the other, as they say.*

“Hang on a few minutes, guys. Marie-Eve just arrived to take over my shift,” said Jordyn referring to the other barmaid who just walked in. Marie-Eve pecked Eddie on both cheeks and ran her hand across the top of Corey’s head as she walked by. Jordyn disappeared behind a set of swinging doors. When she re-emerged a few minutes later, she was wearing a fake fur coat, carrying her purse in one hand with Corey’s jacket hanging on the other.

Eddie watched the way the blackness of her coat reflected the light. She only wore fake fur, and he was always careful not to bring up any animal abuse cases around her because she’d rant for hours about it. Jordyn put Corey’s jacket on the bar stool next to his. “Help me get him up?”

Eddie looked down at Corey, who was still hunched over the counter. “Sure, anything.” He then slapped Corey on the back of the head—jolting him out of his nap.

Corey refused Eddie and Jordyn’s help in walking to the car. He slid into the backseat, while Jordyn sat with Eddie up front. The car backfired once before Eddie drove off. All Eddie could think of was getting a new car.

A half hour later they were in the Notre-Dame-de-Grace borough and were parked in front of their favorite Jamaican restaurant. It wasn’t anything flashy, just a simple hangout in the basement of an old two-story brick building—with a hair salon and a video rental store upstairs. The car backfired again, just before they all got out.

“When are you going to trash this car?” asked Corey—a lot more sober—as he shut the door.

Eddie shot him a look. “The money you owe me would’ve helped me pay for the repairs. Did you ever think about that?” *The nerve of him, telling me to trash my car.*

“I told you not to buy any car from that guy. He’s a crook. Besides, you’re better off buying a new one.”

Jordyn was the first to walk down the narrow steps and open the front door, jingling the bell attached to it.

“Guys, keep it down,” she said as she held the door open for them.

“Hold that thought, baby-girl,” said Corey as he rushed past her to the back of the restaurant. Eddie figured all that beer he’d been drinking earlier was finally making its way out.

There wasn’t anyone inside the cramped three-table dining room except for Robert—Flick’s son—who leaned on his elbows by the cash register, flipping through a magazine.

“Junior, is that you?” came Flick’s unmistakable heavy Jamaican-accented voice from the kitchen, just as the sound of sizzling blasted. The smell of exotic spices leaked into the dining area, guaranteeing any visitor’s mouth to water.

Eddie walked up to Robert and bumped fists with him as he looked towards the kitchen. “What’s going on, boss? How you know it’s me?”

“Whenever your car backfires, my clients all run for cover. Can’t you see the place is empty?”

Eddie and the others sat down at a table. He never knew Flick’s real name. It was sad how he served the best Jamaican food in this part of town, yet he couldn’t get many customers. Things went downhill for him when he lost his wife to cancer three years before. The financial strain was catastrophic to the point that he nearly lost his restaurant. Being in this location was all he could afford.

Robert came over and placed some plastic table mats and silver utensils for them. Eddie took off his winter hat and gloves, shoved them into the sleeve of his jacket and hung it on the back of his chair. He sat on one side of the four-person table facing Jordyn, who did the same with her jacket.

“We got jerk chicken and rice tonight.” said Robert.

“I’ll have that with a Sorrel. A large one.” said Eddie.

“Corey and I’ll have the same,” said Jordyn.

Robert left them and Jordyn turned to Eddie. “So what’s going on with you today? You were quiet on the way over.”

Eddie sighed and leaned back in his chair. She always knew when something wasn’t right with him. Such as, the week that led up to the day that he moved out of his parent’s house. They were sitting at this very table. She and Cory were drinking Trinidadian beer while he had an Irish Moss. It was the first time he cried in front of them, being unsure where he was heading in life. His father didn’t support the idea of him wanting to be a novelist. What did his dad know? All he wanted were the same things all West-Indian parents wanted of their children—that they either became teachers, doctors or lawyers. But a novelist? Please.

“Vanessa left me and I got laid off,” said Eddie.

“What? You’re kidding,” said Jordyn. Just then they heard the toilet flush in the chicken-coop of a bathroom in the back of the restaurant.

Corey—appearing to be much more sober than before—approached their table, hung his jacket on the empty chair beside Jordyn, and sat. He then noticed Eddie’s long face. “What happened?”

Eddie broke the bad news to him. Corey's torso dipped forward. "Your girl left you *and* you got laid off? No way."

Eddie put his elbows on the table and dropped his head into his hands. "I decided to drop by her place this morning before work only to find out that she wanted her apartment key back."

"Did she at least tell you why?" Jordyn asked.

"She didn't have to. I knew that she was cheating on me."

"You found another man's underwear in her laundry basket, didn't you," said Corey.

"No, there was a used condom in her bedroom. I saw the wrapper next to it—and it *wasn't* a brand I normally use."

Jordyn fell back in her chair with her hand covering her mouth. "Whoa, wait a minute. You go to her place, she tells you it's over. And you do what, search her place?"

"In a way, yeah."

"How'd you know that she was cheating on you? I mean, before you found the condom." Corey asked.

"Last week I came by and saw a juice glass on one of the night tables in her bedroom."

Corey shrugged his shoulders. "So?"

"It was on the table that I normally sleep next to. Not the one she usually leaves her drinks on."

"Damn, you're good," said Corey.

"So did you bring it up this evening?" asked Jordyn.

"Of course I did. She told me that I was paranoid. So I barged past her, walked into her room, emptied the trash on the floor, and sure enough, found the condom wrapped in a bunch of tissue paper along with the condom wrapper."

"What did she say then?" asked Corey.

"Not much. So I threw her key on the floor and left. I guess I ain't good enough for her. I'm just some wannabe writer that works in a bookstore and can't even get a book deal or sell my last ebook online. Nothing was ever good enough for her."

"Oh, I almost forgot," said Corey as he reached into his coat pocket and handed Eddie two envelopes. They were opened. "These came for you today."

"You opened my mail?"

"One's from an agency. The other's from a publisher."

"Thanks. Maybe you can tell me what they said."

"Oh you'll want to throw them out. They didn't like what you sent them." All Eddie got in the last two months from agents and publishers that he had queried were rejection letters and emails. He tossed the envelopes back at Corey. *Those were the last two I queried. Now what? I guess I can turn it into an ebook and then sell it online.*

Jordyn got up and walked around to Eddie and hugged him, pecking him on his forehead. "I'm sorry about what happened. You didn't deserve that." Corey came over and did the same, mocking Jordyn. Eddie shoved him away before Corey had a chance to fake-kiss him on the forehead. He wouldn't cry this time. Not over Vanessa, not over the rejection letters. *Just be strong.* That's all he could tell himself.

Just then, Jordyn looked up at the television that sat on a shelf on the wall. She turned to Robert. "Can you turn up the TV?" When Eddie looked up, the volume was being raised. He assumed Robert must have used the remote control from where he stood. It was entertainment news and they were talking about some pop singer he didn't care for.

“THE SINGER JUST SIGNED A TWENTY MILLION DOLLAR BOOK DEAL IN WHICH SHE WILL TELL ALL. FROM THE SEX TAPE SCANDAL, TO HER NEW YEARS EVE PARTY BAR FIGHT, TO GETTING BACK IN THE MUSIC STUDIO...”

What the fuck? Eddie turned to Robert, “Man, turn that off. I’m tired of hearing such nonsense.”

“Damn! Twenty million!” echoed Corey.

Eddie shot Corey a glance. “Go ahead, rub it in. Never mind that she can’t sing, and sells millions of albums. All because of what? Because she behaves like some high-priced-ho? Now *she’s* got the book deal and I don’t. Give me a break.”

Robert brought over their meals and set them down before them.

Eddie dove into his food when Corey said to him, “You know? Maybe that’s what you need to do.”

Eddie swallowed and looked up at him. “Need to do what?”

“Maybe you need to do what the stars do in order to get book deals or sell more books—do something scandalous.”

Eddie chuckled. “Boy, you crazy.”

Corey shook his head. “No, I’m serious. How often does a celebrity put out a book that *doesn’t* make it to the bestseller’s list?”

Eddie thought about the question before he answered. “Hardly. Now what does that have to do with me?”

“You’ve written a book. No one knows who you are. That’s why publishers don’t want you.”

“Maybe it’s because my stories aren’t any good. Maybe I should try to figure out what I’m doing wrong or just write another book.”

“Please. Do you think that blonde bimbo got a book deal because of her writing skills? She can’t even sing and she’s got record deals. Lately, her record sales hit a slump. Next thing you know, she films herself being humped several times and leaks it to the internet. Now, everyone’s talking about her again, and the scandal’s helped to boost her album sales. It ain’t got nothing to do with talent. ‘Cause we all know that she ain’t got none.”

“Corey’s got a point there,” Jordyn said as she ate her salad. She put down the fork and looked at Eddie. “Remember a while back when New York State Governor Eliot Spitzer got caught with a call girl? Guess what happened to the call girl?”

“What?”

“After the scandal broke, the call girl got a job as a sex advice columnist for a major newspaper, I can’t remember which one. Oh yeah, it’s also boosted her singing career. Maybe if you did something scandalous, you’d be able to sell yourself to agents and publishers a lot easier.”

“What, you mean like getting naked on film?” Eddie chuckled as he shook his head. “I can’t believe I’m hearing this from you two. You expect me to film my black ass and broadcast it all over the internet. Besides, millions of people are already doing that.”

“Ah,” Jordyn pointed a finger upwards. “But what if you did it with a celebrity, or an important public figure? Think. What if you were caught with someone who stood to lose everything?”

“I hear you. But it’s *those* people who’ll bask in the limelight. No one cares who they got nasty with. I’d only be helping *them* get book deals,” said Eddie.

“That’s why it’s important for you to build a back story. Imagine if everyone knew about your problems. Such as, your girlfriend cheated on you, your parents don’t even support you, and you got laid off. No offence, but you’re also driving a piece of crap with four tires and a steering wheel. True?”

Eddie nodded. “Yeah, in a way.”

“There you go,” said Corey. “Enough people will feel sorry for you, and the media’s going to feed on that.”

Eddie finished off his meal, leaned back to stretch and yawn, covering his mouth.

Corey pushed his half-empty plate to the side.

Jordyn glanced down at it and pointed her finger towards his plate. “Are you done with that?”

Corey looked at her and without a word, slid the plate over to her.

Eddie’s eyes widened. *Damn, she’s had quite an appetite lately.*

“So what do you think?” asked Jordyn.

Eddie shrugged his shoulders. “About what?”

Corey sighed. “Come on, bro. We’re trying to help you. Don’t you want to be better known as an author?”

“Not *that* way I ain’t. Besides, how would I ever get close to a celebrity? I don’t know any, and neither do you.”

“Actually,” said Jordyn as she wolfed down some of the jerk chicken and wiped her mouth with the napkin. “I never said this to anyone, but I’m a femdom.”

“You’re a what?” Eddie cried out.

Corey and Jordyn hushed him. “Keep your voice down.”

Eddie glanced over his shoulder at Robert, who momentarily looked up from the magazine he read, obviously due to Eddie’s outburst. Eddie looked back at Jordyn while he lowered his head closer to the table. “You’re a dominatrix? Like one of those freaky girls that dress up in vinyl and lash people with whips?”

“Yes. And don’t you dare tell anyone.”

“Why the hell would you do something like that?” He then looked at Corey. “Did you know about this?”

Corey shrugged his shoulders. “Yeah.”

“And you’re cool with the fact that your woman sleeps around with Lord knows who?”

“Whoa, just a minute,” Jordyn pointed her finger at him. “I’m not a prostitute, so let’s get that straight. I entertain my clients by humiliating them. There’s no sex involved.”

“Cause that’s my territory,” said Corey patting his chest.

“I didn’t know you were so freaky,” said Eddie.

Jordyn leaned closer to him. “It’s just work. Do you think I want to serve drinks for the rest of my life to a bunch of lowlifes who have nothing better to do than get drunk and stare at my ass all the time? No. I want to own my own coffee shop someday. The banks are giving me a hard time loaning me the cash, so I have no choice.”

Her words hit him like stones the way she spat them out, jolting him to the back of his chair.

“Anyhow,” she said, a bit calmer. “Getting back to what I was saying before. I would do my thing once a week. Some of my male friends are doing the same thing too. You’d be amazed at some of the clients we’ve had.”

“Not to mention the cheddar that she brings home in one night,” Corey added.

Eddie wasn't as interested in the money as he was in knowing who her clients were. He stretched his neck forward with his eyes dilated. "Who?"

"All types of people. You'd get your regular Joe and Jane who are living out their fantasies behind the backs of their spouses and families. Sometimes we get couples—gay and straight. At times, we'd get your typical grandma and grandpa."

Eddie made a face. The images of geriatrics struggling to zip up their leather or PVC outfits over their adult diapers came to mind. *Ewww!*

"Then you'd also have real celebs, pro athletes and even politicians."

"No way," said Eddie.

"Yes way," said Corey.

"And this weekend, one of my colleagues will be hooking up with a very high-profile individual who lives south of the border."

"Who is it?" asked Corey.

Jordyn glanced briefly over at Robert and lowered her voice even more. "I'm not really sure yet. But from what I was told. She's the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, and she'll be in town for a conference this weekend."

"You lie."

"It's no lie, Eddie," Jordyn replied. "The guy that's doing the job owes me a big favor. I'm sure that I can arrange to have you substitute for him."

"What, like being a...a *pinch* dominator."

"Well, yeah. A *maledom* is the correct term. But you can put it that way. Geez, it's amazing how guys always use sports analogies when it comes to anything remotely sexual."

"Do you know what she looks like?"

"Not right now."

"Then you can count me out."

Corey turned to him. "Why's that?"

"How am I supposed to get freaky with someone when I don't even know what they look like *before* I meet them?"

"Man, don't stress yourself over that," Corey answered. "If she's the CEO of some Fortune 500 company, then she's got to be loaded with cash. She probably goes to the spa once a week and has her own personal trainers to keep herself looking like a twenty-year old."

"And what if she don't?" countered Eddie. "What if she's out of shape and looking twice her age?"

"Then she'll probably be so desperate that she'll pay more to have her session with you," Corey answered.

Eddie jerked back in his seat. "That's easy for you to say."

Jordyn shook a fist. "Will you calm down."

"I am calm," said Eddie raising his voice.

"Yo, man, keep your voice down," said Corey.

Eddie inhaled, and then exhaled. This was way too much for him. What made them think that he'd be so desperate that he'd sink to such a low level? "Man this is way too unbelievable for me."

Jordyn grabbed Eddie's forearm. "Relax. It's not such a big deal."

"So you say."

"Listen," said Jordyn, "You're not having sex with her, you just have to make her live out her fantasy. The guy you'll be substituting for is close to your physique—he's about five-foot-

eight, one-hundred-and-fifty to sixty pounds. He's a bit more muscular than you but I think you'll still get away with it. Oh yeah, I'm told that the client prefers men of color, so you're in luck."

"I don't care, 'cause I ain't doing it. This is the stupidest idea I've ever heard," Eddie stood up.

Corey's mouth dropped open as though he was surprised. "What are you talking about? What do you have to lose?"

"It doesn't matter. It's a stupid idea. I'm going to the bathroom." Without pushing the chair back in, he walked to the back—passing Robert—who tried his best to hide his smile.

The bathroom was more of a powder room minus the fanciness of one. One of the floor tiles was missing, and the toilet seat shifted to the left when you sat on it. Closing the door required one to force their entire body into it.

When Eddie was done, he washed his hands, dried them, and then used the hand sanitizer that was on the shelf.

He then looked at himself in the mirror. *Were they for real? How could I expect to get a book deal from doing the dominator thing? Man, that shit only worked in the movies.* Maybe that's what he should write about next, so long as he got his current project off the ground. Who was he kidding? He's not Jordyn. So what, if she could do stuff like that and not think much of it? That's her. And how could Corey enjoy being around her knowing that she's spanking some naked old geezer who had more spots than a leopard?

On his way back to the table Eddie stopped at the cash register. "How much for the meal?"

"Nine-eighty-five each," Robert answered.

Eddie took out his wallet and found a creased five dollar bill. He then pulled out a few coins from his pocket and sighed. He turned to Corey and Jordyn. "Can you guys spot me a Toonie?"

Jordyn was about to grab a two-dollar coin from her purse and toss it to him. She sucked her teeth, "Keep your money, Eddie. I got this one." She walked over, pulled out two fresh twenties along with a crumpled five, and placed them on the counter. "Keep the change."

Just then the bell on the front door jingled as it was pulled open. A slight gust of cold air followed. After Eddie turned to see who it was, he looked away, rolling his eyes with a sigh. "Look who's here."

But Jordyn had already seen him and lowered her head. "Oh God."

It was Theo. He was close to Eddie's height and build with dreadlocks hanging out from his winter hat. He was also Jordyn's ex.

"What's up, Flick?" said Theo louder than he needed to. He was always starved for attention.

"Hey," Flick's voice came from the kitchen, above the sounds of frying food. Flick must have been up to his arms in his cooking that he hardly had time to leave the kitchen to greet his customers.

Although Eddie, Jordyn, and Corey paid no attention to Theo, he still saw them.

"What's dis? Me gal come to me favorite hangout spot to find me?"

"You wish," Jordyn said without looking at him.

Eddie swore that this guy was going to push their patience one day. He already had to separate Corey from him after a fight at a nightclub. The bouncers eventually physically threw all of them out.

Theo then looked at Corey. “And she bring along she singing boy toy.” He then laughed. Eddie watched as Corey was about to take a step towards Theo. He immediately blocked him, mouthing the words, “No you don’t.”

Corey didn’t say anything.

“Dem judges tore you up. And dat British dude? Lord have mercy! Did you know you’re on *YouTube*? I had to send that video to my friends and family in Jamaica.”

Jordyn spun around to face him. “You didn’t.”

“Of course, mon. I couldn’t keep dat to me-self. I also emailed it to my friends in St Lucia, St Vincent, and Grenada. You’re a hit. I mean your video’s got over seventy thousand hits in just two weeks. I mean dat video must have made it half way past England by now.”

The nerve of this guy. He still couldn’t get over Jordyn leaving him for Corey. Shit, that was over two years ago, and he still had it in for Corey.

Corey played along with a fake laugh. “Yeah, I’m glad you found that video funny.”

Eddie tapped Corey’s arm, hoping to draw his attention away from Theo. It didn’t work.

“Yeah, mon. ‘Nuff respect.” Theo was about to bump fists with him.

“Good, now get the fuck out of my face,” growled Corey. Theo dropped the smile and raised his hands in surrender as he backed off.

“What’s dat I hear?” Flick’s voice echoed from the kitchen.

Shit! Now Corey’s done it. Eddie’s first two inner fingers shot up to both his temples. Saying the wrong thing in his franchise was a sure fire way to get Flick out of the kitchen, no matter what he was doing. Flick was out by the cash register seconds later, shaking a large wooden spoon. He was in his sixties, but still had the agility of a forty-year old. “I told you youngsters before that I don’t want to hear *any* foul language in my restaurant, do you understand me? I ought to put ten lashes across your behinds with dis spoon.”

“Yes, and we’re so sorry. It won’t happen again,” said Jordyn, waving her hands quickly, as though she was surrendering for all of them.

“It better not.” Flick pointed the spoon at each of them, one at a time.

“For sure, sir. It won’t happen again,” Jordyn repeated. Flick then retreated back to the kitchen, mumbling something to himself. Eddie then signaled to Jordyn to walk on.

Eddie looked at Theo, who was clearly trying to hold back a laugh. Theo then lifted his gold chains from under his jacket, letting them dangle out in the open as he turned to Jordyn.

“You know my number when you’re ready to come home to a real man, right?”

Jordyn ignored Theo as she walked past him.

Corey eyed him as he walked away, which prompted Eddie to nudge him forward. He wasn’t going to break up another fight between the two of them, and get them banned from his favorite restaurant.

Eddie zipped up his jacket by the time he reached the top of the stairs, took out the car keys, and pondered what just happened. Leave it to Jordyn to always be there to bail him and Corey out of a sticky situation. When his eyes fell on his car, he thought again about what Jordyn and Corey had suggested. *Could this really work?* Then images of half-naked old people in PVC came to mind. He made a face in disgust. *Hell naw!*

Chapter 2

Laval-sur-le-Lac, Québec. Three days earlier.

Serge Lamont tugged on the mutt's leash as it stopped to sniff at something in the snow. It was the only way of showing the Saint Bernard—Marc-Antoni—who's boss. The dog ought to appreciate having him as his master, after he put down \$1600 in loose change two days ago in veterinarian fees. How the hell can one mutt cost so much? There was a fee for the heart *Doppler*, another for routine checkups, the cleaning of the nails, ears, and teeth. There was even a charge for the office call. How the hell do they justify charging for an office call? These crooks would've charged him for owning his own dog if they could get away with it.

The backyard of his two-storey mansion was big enough to hold a small roller coaster and a Ferris wheel. Some people would've just let the dog run around in the yard on their own every morning. Not Lamont. He needed to get out and catch the crisp morning air. It was the only thing that woke him up, something that coffee couldn't do as it did for others. He left his wife, Chantal, in bed. It was close to the end of the school semester. For her and the other university professors, they'd be psyching themselves up for the midterm exam period.

Outside was quiet, which was normal for the Laval-sur-le-Lac district where he lived. There was hardly any chirping from the birds this time of year since they were all down south, most likely nesting in either his beachfront condominium in the Florida Keys or the other in the Dominican Republic. He pictured the palm trees blowing in the ocean breeze. But all he saw ahead of him were a few pine trees. Surrounding them were a larger number of conifers whose stiff, leafless branches were bent downward from the weight of the ice that covered them.

Lamont pulled up his scarf over his exposed neck and zipped his jacket up over it. Wisps of vapor clouded in front of his mouth as he breathed, only to disappear less than a second later. But he liked his morning walks with Marc-Antoni. Even when the temperature dipped below minus twenty Celsius, he wouldn't back away. After all, how else could he remind the neighbors who the top brass in the neighborhood was if he couldn't be seen regularly? Like him, most of his neighbors also worked in the financial sector. One of them was a Member of Parliament. But they were all in his pocket, since most of them had investment portfolios in his company. Those who weren't, it didn't matter, since he was a major shareholder in some of the companies they worked for.

When he took over as chairman of Borealest Investments fifteen years ago, Lamont helped take the company out of Montreal and brought its presence across Canada and as far south as Houston, Texas. Sure, the economic crisis a few years before hit his company hard. But then again, who wasn't? His company stayed afloat while others went belly-up.

This all started when a couple of greedy and arrogant assholes down in the US screwed things up for everyone. Now the rest of the world was paying for it. And it didn't make things easier for his company, which had lost millions more than he and his partners had let their investors know. Hell, he didn't even know where and when it all started. Sure, he had pocketed some of the money, but then again who wasn't nowadays. There were also a few bad decisions made here and there awhile back. Now the shit kept pouring slowly into the fan.

Marc-Antoni kept weaving back and forth in front of him—his nose inches from the sidewalk-less road. What was he sniffing for anyway? Lamont was sometimes envious of a dog's senses. They could smell better, hear better and could even sense trouble around them. Maybe had he had a dog's senses, he could've predicted the impending financial crisis.

Ahead, two joggers ran towards him.

As they ran by they said, “Bon matin, Monsieur Lamont, ca va?” *Good morning, Mister Lamont. How are you?*

“Ca va, merci,” *I’m well, thanks*, he replied with a nod.

Mark-Antoni pulled impatiently on his leash, as they were meters away from the park by the Lake of Two Mountains. This is where Lamont would normally let go of the leash and let the mutt run about on his own. He looked around and saw that they were alone, so he let the mutt go free. He didn’t need to be reprimanded by some overzealous city employee. But it shouldn’t have been a big deal anyways since Marc-Antoni never wandered too far off from Lamont.

He looked both up and down one last time to be sure that he was alone. Satisfied, he walked up to the lake and stood close enough that he heard the water lapping a few feet away. In a few more days the ice chunks would freeze together and form a new surface. A few weeks after another dumb ice-fisher will be on the news after having fallen through the ice. Even despite the numerous public warnings about the dangers of ice fishing on this lake, people still did it.

He reached into his jacket pocket, took out his mobile phone and dialed a number. Lamont heard the other phone ring twice.

“Oui,” came a reply.

“I thought that I should give you a call this morning.”

“And?”

“I had another lengthy talk with our friend. I did my best to negotiate but nothing’s changed. It’s really unfortunate. So you’ll have to kill him.”

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