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GOLLANCZ - NOT FOR SALE

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GOLLANCZ - NOT FOR SALE

For Sara and Sandy

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PROLOGUE

Outside Manú National Park, Peru

The guide wanted to tell the group of Americans to shut up. Of course they weren't seeing any animals: their constant complaining was driving them away. Only the birds remained, and even they seemed skittish. He was just a guide, however, so he said nothing.

There were five Americans. Three women and two men. The guide was interested in how they were paired off. It seemed unlikely that the fat man, Henderson, had all three women for himself. No matter how rich he was, shouldn't two women at one time be enough? Perhaps the tall man had one? Perhaps not. As far as the guide could tell, the tall man was there to act as Henderson's bodyguard and servant only. He and Henderson did not act like friends. The tall man carried the fat man's water and snacks and did not let his eyes linger on any of the women. There was no question that he was in Henderson's employ. As was the guide.

The guide sighed. He'd see how the women were portioned off at camp, he thought. In the meantime, he would do what he was paid for, which was lead them through the jungle and point out things

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that were supposed to impress them. Of course, they'd already done Machu Picchu, which always left tourists feeling as if they had seen everything Peru had to offer, and now there were no animals to show them. He glanced back at Henderson and decided it was time for another break. They'd had to stop every twenty minutes so that the rich man could run into the brush and move his bowels, and now the guide was worried Henderson might be overexerting himself.

It wasn't that Henderson was grossly fat, but he was definitely large and clearly struggling to keep pace with the rest of the group. The tall man and the three women, though, were all in good shape. The women, in particular, all looked embarrassingly athletic and young, twenty or thirty years younger than Henderson. It was obvious the heat was getting to him. His face was red and he kept mopping at his forehead with a damp handkerchief. Henderson was older than the women, but looked too young for a heart attack. Still, the guide thought, it wouldn't hurt to keep him well hydrated. After all, it had been made abundantly clear to the guide that if things went well, Henderson might be persuaded to make a sizable donation to the park and the scientists working there.

The day wasn't any hotter than normal, but even though the group had come directly from Machu Picchu, they didn't seem to understand that they were still at elevation. They weren't actually inside Manú National Park, which they didn't seem to understand either. The guide could have explained that they were technically allowed only in the larger biosphere area, and that the park itself was reserved for researchers, staff, and the indigenous Machiguenga, but all it would have done was disappoint them even more than they already were.

"Any chance we'll see a lion, Miggie?" one of the women asked him.

The woman next to her, who looked as if she had come from

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one of the magazines that the guide had kept under his bed when he was a teenager, before he'd had access to the Internet, swung off her backpack and dropped it on the ground. "For God's sake, Tina," the woman said, shaking her head so that her hair swung around her face and her shoulders. The guide had trouble not staring down her scoop-neck shirt as she leaned over to unzip her bag and pull out a bottle of water. "We're in Peru, not Africa. You're going to make Miggie think that Americans are idiots. There aren't any lions in Peru. We could see a jaguar, though."

The guide had introduced himself as Miguel, but they had immediately taken to calling him Miggie, as if Miguel were just a suggestion. While he did not think all Americans were idiots—when he wasn't leading expeditions of tourists on "eco treks," he often worked with the scientists inside the park, most of them from American universities—he was beginning to think that, despite the presence of Henderson, who was by all accounts a genius, this particular group seemed to have more idiots than normal. They were not going to see a lion, and no matter what the woman said, they weren't going to see a jaguar, either. Miguel had been working here for the tour company for nearly three years, and even he'd never seen a jaguar. Not that he was truly an expert. He had been born and raised in Lima, and the only reason he was there, instead of back in the city of more than eight million, was a girl. They'd gone to university together, and when she landed a plum job as a research assistant, he managed to squirm his way into helping out inside the park occasionally. Recently, though, things hadn't been going so well; his girlfriend had seemed distracted when they'd been together, and Miguel had begun to suspect that she'd started sleeping with one of her coworkers.

He watched the Americans take water or little bars wrapped in plastic out of their backpacks, and then he walked a few paces

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farther down the path. He glanced back and saw the lion woman, Tina, smiling at him in such a way that he wondered if maybe that night, when Henderson went into his tent, she might be available for him. He'd had chances with tourists before, though the opportunity presented itself less often than he would have expected, and he'd always turned them down. But maybe tonight, if Tina offered, he wouldn't say no. If his girlfriend was cheating on him, the least he could do was return the favor. Tina kept smiling at him, and it made him nervous.

He was made more nervous by the jungle, however. The first few months after he'd left Lima to come here he'd hated it, but mostly he was used to the closeness of it by now. The constant buzz of insects, the movement, the heat, and the life that seemed everywhere. It had all become background noise eventually, and until today, it had been a long time since he'd been scared to be in the jungle. Today was different, though. The background noise was gone. It was unsettling how quiet it was aside from the nattering of the group behind him. They had been complaining about the lack of animals, and if he had been honest with them—and he hadn't, because that was not what a guide was paid to be—he would have told the group that he was bothered by it as well. Usually they would have seen more animals than they could have asked for: sloths, capybara, brocket, monkeys. God, they loved the monkeys. The tourists could never get enough monkeys. And insects, of course. They were usually everywhere, and when all else failed to keep the tourists entertained, Miguel, who had never been scared of spiders, would often pick one up on the end of a branch and surprise one of the women in the group with it. He loved the way they shrieked when he brought it close for them to see, and the way the men tried to pretend as though the spider didn't bother them.

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Behind Tina, he saw Henderson bending over and grabbing at his gut. The man may have been very rich—Miguel had not recognized Henderson the man, though he had certainly heard of Henderson's company; the researchers all did their work on Henderson Tech's small silver computers—but he did not seem particularly special. He'd been complaining the entire morning. He complained about the roads, about the lack of access to the Internet at the lodge, about the food. Ah, the food. He complained and complained about the food, and as Miguel saw Henderson bent over and making a face, it appeared that at least as far as the food was concerned, Henderson might have had a point.

"You okay, boss?" The bodyguard was ignoring the three women, who were still arguing with one another about where it was exactly that lions lived.

"My gut is killing me," Henderson said. "That meat from last night. I've got to take a shit. Again." He looked up at Miguel, and the guide motioned with his thumb for Henderson to head off the path.

Miguel watched him disappear into the trees and then turned to look ahead again. The tour company kept the path well enough maintained that it was easy to move tourists along when there wasn't somebody like Henderson who needed to keep stopping. They'd bulldozed a strip and then tasked the guides with staying on the path so that nobody would get lost. As with any other human encroachment in the rain forest, the jungle was trying to reclaim the trail, so the company ran the machine out every few weeks. For the most part, the path made Miguel's work much easier. He could look ahead and see clear to where they would be going for close to a hundred meters. It also meant there was a break in the canopy, and when he looked up he could see the blue sky. There wasn't a cloud anywhere, and for a moment

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Miguel wished he were on a beach instead of leading this group of Americans.

A bird flew over the breach in the canopy. The guide watched it for a second and was about to turn back to the group to see if Henderson had made it back from his bathroom break when he realized something was wrong with the bird. It was flapping its wings frantically, moving erratically. The bird was struggling to stay in the air. But there was something more. The guide wished he had a pair of binoculars, because the bird's feathers looked wrong. They looked like they were rippling, like there was—

The bird fell from the sky. It stopped struggling and simply plummeted.

Miguel shivered. The women were still chattering behind him, but there were no other animal sounds in the jungle. Even the birds were quiet. He listened more closely, and then he heard something. A rhythmic pounding. Leaves crunching. He'd just about figured out what it was when a man burst around the bend in the path. Even from a hundred meters away, it was clear something was wrong. The man saw Miguel and screamed at him, but Miguel couldn't make out the words. Then the man glanced at the path behind him, and as he did so, he tripped, falling heavily.

It looked to Miguel like a black river rushed up behind him. The man had only managed to get to his knees before the dark mass rolled over and around him.

Miguel took a few steps backward, but he found that he didn't want to turn away. The black river stayed on top of the man, roiling and building, as if it were dammed by something. There was a lumpy movement, the man underneath still struggling. And then the lump collapsed. The black water splashed out to cover the path. From where Miguel was standing, it looked like the man had simply disappeared.

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And then the blackness started streaming toward him, covering the path and moving quickly, almost as fast as a man could run. Miguel knew he should be running, but there was something hypnotic in the quietness of the water. It didn't roar like a river. If anything, it seemed to absorb sound. All he could hear was a whisper, a skittering, like a small patter of rain. The way the river moved was beautiful in its own way, pulsing and, at certain points, splitting and braiding into separate streams before rejoining a few paces later. As it got closer, Miguel took another step back, but by the time he realized it wasn't actually a river, that it wasn't water of any kind, it was too late.

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

Agent Mike Rich hated having to call his ex-wife. He fucking hated it, particularly when he knew that her husband—and he fucking hated that he was her *husband* now—might pick up the phone, but there was nothing he could do about it. He was going to be late, and if there was one thing that annoyed his ex-wife more than his being late to pick up their daughter, it was when he knew he was going to be late but didn't call. Hell, if he'd been better about both those things in the first place, Fanny might still be his wife. He stared at his phone.

"Just get it over with, Mike."

His partner, Leshaun DeMilo, was divorced himself, but didn't have any kids to show for it. Leshaun always said he'd made a clean break of it. Not that he seemed to particularly enjoy being single again. He'd been going about dating with a grim determination. Mike also thought Leshaun had been hitting the bars a little hard recently, and had come into work looking rough around the edges more than once since the divorce.

"You know the longer you wait the worse it's going to be," Leshaun said.

"Fuck you, Leshaun," Mike said, but he thumbed his phone on

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and hit his ex-wife's number. Of course, her husband answered.

"I assume you're calling to say you're going to be late again?"

"You got me, Dawson," Mike said.

"I prefer to be called Rich, Mike. You know that."

"Yeah, sorry. It's just that, you know, when I hear Rich, I think me. Agent Rich. All that. It's weird calling you by my last name. How about Richard?"

"As long as you aren't calling me Dick—at least to my face—I'll live."

That was another thing that pissed Mike off about his ex-wife's new husband. Rich Dawson was a defense lawyer—which was reason enough—but he was also kind of a great guy. If Dawson hadn't gotten rich keeping the very douche bags out of jail that Mike spent his time arresting, and if Dawson weren't laying the wood to his ex-wife, Mike could have seen himself having a beer with the guy. It would have been easier if Dawson were just an unrepentant shitbag, because then Mike would have had an excuse to hate him, but Mike was stuck with knowing he had nobody to be pissed off at but himself. Mike couldn't decide if he should look on the bright side of things because Dawson was terrific with Annie, or if that was something that made his ex-wife's new husband even worse. It killed Mike that his daughter had taken to Dawson like she had, but it had been good for her. She'd been quiet for the year or so between when he and Fanny had split and when Fanny had hooked up with Dawson. She hadn't been sad, or at least hadn't admitted she was, but she hadn't talked much. In the year and a half since Dawson had come into the picture, however, Annie had seemed like herself again.

"Just let me talk to Fanny, okay?"

"Sure."

Mike shifted in his seat. He never complained about having to sit in the car for hours on end, the stale coffee, the thick, fetid smell

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of socks and sweat that filled the car when they had to bake in the sun. The temperature was in the mid-eighties. Unseasonably warm for Minneapolis in April. There were years that he remembered snow still on the ground on April 23. Except for in the dead of summer, mid-eighties was *hot* for Minneapolis. He and Leshaun used to keep the car running and blast the air-conditioning—or, in the Minnesota winters, the heat—but Mike's daughter had been turned into one of those young environmental crusaders by her elementary school. She'd made both him and Leshaun promise not to leave the engine running if they were just sitting there. Left to himself, Mike probably would have caved and turned on the AC, but Leshaun wouldn't let him. "A promise is a promise, dude, particularly to your kid," Leshaun had said, and then he'd even bought reusable metal coffee cups for them to keep in the car. At least he hadn't gone so far as to make Mike wash and reuse the piss bottle on the days they were on surveillance but weren't parked close enough to a McDonald's or a Starbucks to hit a bathroom. They didn't actually run surveillance that much anymore. Days like this, though, when they *did*, were something Mike sort of missed. It was supposed to be part of the gig. There was a certain romance to the sitting and waiting. And waiting. And waiting. But his back was killing him today. They'd been in the car for nine hours already, and he'd spent the day before at the YMCA with Annie, swimming and throwing her in the air and chasing after her. At nine, Annie was getting to be a load, but what was he going to do? Not roughhouse in the pool?

He arched his back and stretched a little, trying to get comfortable. Leshaun held up a bottle of Advil, but Mike shook his head. His stomach had been bothering him, too—coffee and donuts and greasy burgers and fries and all the crap that made it harder and harder every day for him to stay in shape and run the miles and do the pull-ups he needed to do to keep passing his physical—and

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popping a couple of pills to help his back seemed like a bad idea. Fuck, Mike thought. He was only forty-three. Too young to be getting old already.

"How late, Mike?" Fanny came on the line already swinging for the fences.

Mike closed his eyes and tried to take a cleansing breath. That's what his therapist had called it. A cleansing breath. When he opened his eyes, Leshaun was staring at him. Leshaun raised an eyebrow and mouthed "Apologize."

"I'm sorry, Fanny. I'm really sorry. We're on surveillance and relief is running late. It will just be half an hour. Forty-five minutes at most."

"You're supposed to be taking her to soccer, Mike. Now I have to do it."

Mike took another cleansing breath. "I don't know what else to say, Fanny. I'm really sorry. I'll meet you at the field."

He wanted to be there. There was something about the smell of the cut grass and watching his little girl run around chasing a ball. The crappy wooden bleachers reminded him of what it was like to be a kid, of looking over to the sideline at baseball or football games and seeing his own dad sitting there, watching solemnly. Seeing Annie goofing around with the other kids, or scowling and concentrating while trying to learn a step over or some other new skill, was one of the best parts of his week. He never thought about his job or his ex-wife or anything, really. It was a different world out there on the soccer field: the sounds of the kids yelling and the coaches' whistles all functioned like a reset button. Most of the other parents chatted with one another, read books, tried to get work done, talked on their cell phones, but Mike just watched. That's it. He watched Annie run and kick and laugh and for that hour of soccer practice, there was nowhere else in the world for him.

"Of course I can take her, but that's not the point. The point is

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that you're still doing it. I mean, I can leave you. I can get a divorce. But she's stuck with you, Mike. As much as she loves Rich, *you're* her father."

Mike glanced over at Leshaun, but his partner was ostentatiously not listening. Leshaun was doing what he was supposed to be doing, which was staring at the alley. There wasn't much chance that the prick they were waiting for, Two-Two O'Leary, was going to show up, but given that he used as much of the meth as he sold, and had wounded an agent in a bust gone bad the week before, it probably wasn't the worst thing in the world to have one of them paying attention.

"All I can do is keep apologizing." He glanced at Leshaun again and decided he didn't care if Leshaun was listening or not. It wasn't like they hadn't talked about his relationship with Fanny—or Leshaun and Leshaun's ex-wife's relationship—more than he had ever talked about it with his therapist, or, for that matter, with Fanny. Maybe if he'd talked about things with Fanny as much as he had with Leshaun, things would still be okay. "You know I'm sorry. About everything. I'm sorry about everything. Not just being late." Mike waited for Fanny to say something, but there was only silence. He went on. "I've been talking with my therapist about it, and I know that I'm late saying this. I mean, I guess I'm late with everything, but I'm trying to say I should have told you I was sorry a long time ago. I didn't mean to let things fall apart, and even though I'm not really happy about it, I *am* happy that you're happy. And you know, Dawson—Rich—seems like he makes you happy, and I know that Annie loves him. So, you know, I'm sorry. I'm doing my best to be a different kind of guy, a better man, but there's always going to be a part of me that's just the way I am. And that goes for the job too."

"Mike." Fanny's voice seemed faint, and Mike shifted again. He couldn't tell if it was his shitty phone cutting out or if she was

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talking more softly. "Mike," she repeated. "There's something I wanted to talk to you about."

"What? You going to divorce me again?"

Leshaun straightened and then leaned a little bit out the open window. Mike sat up in his seat. There was a car pulling into the alley. A Honda, which wasn't really Two-Two's ride of choice, but it was the first action they'd seen for a while. The car stopped with its trunk hanging over the sidewalk, and then a black teenager, maybe fifteen or sixteen, got out of the passenger-side door. Mike relaxed, and Leshaun sat back. Two-Two was selling guns and meth, but he was also big time in with the Aryan Nations. There wasn't much chance he was rolling with a black kid.

"I want to change Annie's name," Fanny said.

"What?"

"I want her to have the same last name as me, Mike."

"Just a second." Mike put the phone down on his thigh and rubbed his face with his free hand. He wished he still smoked, though it wasn't as if Leshaun would have let him light up in the car. The car. The goddamned car felt so close and hot. With his bulletproof vest over his T-shirt, he was sweating. Couldn't they run the engine just for a few minutes, have a little fucking air-conditioning? He needed to stand outside for a minute, to stand up, to get some fresh air. He opened the door. He needed a blast of cold air like they had in those gum commercials, but it wasn't any cooler outside the car.

"Mike?" Leshaun was looking at him. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing man. I'm not going anywhere. I'm just going to stand outside, okay? I just want to take this call outside the car for a minute. Is that okay with you? Do you mind?" He realized his voice had gotten loud and hard, and he knew that when he was done talking to Fanny he was going to have to apologize to Leshaun. Leshaun was a good partner, a good friend, and he'd understand,

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but still, it made Mike feel like an asshole. Like more of an asshole. Leshaun nodded, and Mike got out of the car. He shut the door behind him, not that it mattered with the windows open.

He lifted the phone back up. "What are you talking about, Fanny?"

"Come on, Mike. You had to see this coming. Didn't you see this coming?"

"No, Fanny, I didn't see this coming."

"Oh, Mike. You never see anything coming."

He heard the brush of the phone against Fanny's cheek and then the low murmur of her saying something to Dawson. He pressed the phone hard against his ear. "You're not changing Annie's name. She's my fucking daughter, and she's going to be Annie Rich, not Annie fucking Dawson."

"Mike," she said. "Annie's my daughter too. It's weird, having her have a different last name from me."

"You didn't have to change your name to Dawson," Mike said. Even as he said it, he knew it was the wrong thing to say, but he couldn't help himself.

Fanny sighed. "We can talk about this later, but it's going to happen. I'm sorry, Mike, I am, but things have changed."

"I'm trying to change too," Mike said.

"I appreciate that. I do," she said, and then neither of them said anything for a few seconds. Mike could hear Fanny breathing. Finally, she said, "Do you want to talk to Annie?"

"Please," he said. He felt defeated.

Mike leaned against the car, facing the alley. He shifted against the side of the car, rolled his shoulder, and tugged down on his T-shirt under the vest. It was wet with sweat. Better to be uncomfortable than dead, though. The agent Two-Two had shot in Eau Claire probably would have died if he hadn't been wearing body armor: three shots stopped by body armor, one bullet clean

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through the agent's biceps. It was a hundred miles from Eau Claire back to Minnesota, though, and hell, nobody thought Two-Two—even hopped up on Nazi meth—was going to come back to his bar after the debacle in Wisconsin. He adjusted the strapping to loosen the vest. Normally he had a shirt over it, but when they were just going to sit in a car all day, he figured there wasn't much point trying to hide it. And of course, it's not like he wasn't wearing his badge hanging off the chain around his neck. He loved being able to wear it, loved the way people looked at him differently when he introduced himself as Special Agent Rich, but as he fingered the chain, he thought that there were times when it felt like something he needed to take off more often.

"Hey, Daddy."

"Hey, beautiful. I'm going to have to meet you at the field, okay?"

"Okay."

"How was school?"

"Good."

"Anything exciting happen?"

"Not really."

That's what talking with her on the phone was like. When they were together, he couldn't get Annie to stop talking, but there was something about the invisibility of talking to each other over the telephone that made it so she rarely said more than a couple of words at a time. It was like she thought there was some sort of evil magic at work, and if she told the telephone too much information, it was going to steal her soul. The thought made Mike smile. It sounded like a book Stephen King would write.

He was about to ask her what she'd had for lunch when he saw the car. It was a red Ford truck, big tires, tinted windows, and it was turning into the alley. "Beautiful, I've got to go."

"Okay. I love you, Daddy."

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"I love you too, baby." He felt his stomach churning. He let his free hand reach up again to finger the badge hanging around his neck. "I love you so, so much. You remember that, okay? No matter what happens, you remember that."

The truck stopped. Mike put the phone in his pocket. He felt the car move as Leshaun opened the door and slid out. Mike moved his hand from his badge to his hip, until he could wrap his fingers around the handle of his gun. The metal was cool against his hand. He took a moment to look over his shoulder for Leshaun. His partner was starting to stand up straight, and Mike looked back toward the red truck. He realized too late that Two-Two had already seen him standing outside the car, had seen the bulletproof vest, had seen the badge hanging around his neck. Mike shouldn't have been standing outside the car, talking on the phone. He shouldn't have looked back at Leshaun. Mike should have been in the car with his partner, should have been paying attention, should have been a lot of things.

Two-Two's passenger, an undershirt-wearing dipshit with a shaved head who looked like he was barely twenty, came out firing a handgun. Mike wasn't even sure he heard the bang of the man's pistol, but he heard the *plink* of a bullet hitting the door of the car, heard the glass of the windshield shattering. He heard a grunt, and then the heavy drop of Leshaun's body hitting the ground. All this before Two-Two even got out of the truck.

Mike's mind went blank, and he watched the man from the passenger side of the truck pop the emptied magazine out of his gun, reach into the pocket of his baggy pants, and pull out another clip. Meanwhile, Two-Two's door opened, and Mike saw that he was also carrying a pistol. Two men, two guns, Leshaun hit, though Mike didn't know how bad, and he hadn't even pulled his own gun out yet. He knew he was supposed to be doing some-

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thing, but he was just standing there as if he didn't know what to do, didn't know what to do, didn't know what to do.

And then he did.

He put the kid on the passenger side down first. Three shots clustered in his chest. Two-Two and his buddy weren't wearing vests. He'd heard some of the agents who were gun nerds bitching about the stopping power of the service-issued Glock 22, but judging by the way the kid went down like a bag of chicken parts, the .40 cartridges seemed to work just fine. He'd never actually shot anybody before, had fired his gun only once in the line of duty—it had been one bullet, one time, barely a year on the job, and he'd missed—and he was surprised at how easy and normal it felt. All three bullets went home, and as the kid left his feet, Mike pivoted so that he could aim at Two-Two.

Two-Two had the same idea, though, and Two-Two was pointing back.

Mike wasn't sure who fired first, or if they fired at the same time, because the push of the pistol in his hand was matched by a tug on his sleeve. But he was entirely sure whose aim was better. Two-Two's head snapped back in a mist of blood. When Mike looked at his arm, there was a hole in the sleeve of his T-shirt, but not in his flesh.

The kid from the passenger side wasn't moving, and neither was Two-Two. Mike holstered his gun and hustled around the car to check on Leshaun. There were two holes in Leshaun's shirt: one hole a bloody mess on his upper arm, the other on the chest, clean and clear, the vest doing its job. Leshaun's eyes were open, and Mike had never been happier to see that big black motherfucker staring at him, but as he called for help he realized he was also going to have to call his ex-wife again.

He was going to be really, really late.

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