Life Expectancy

Dean Koontz

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PART ONE

Welcome to the World, Jimmy Tock

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On the night that I was born, my paternal grandfather, Josef Tock, made ten predictions that shaped my life. Then he died in the very minute that my mother gave birth to me.

Josef had never previously engaged in fortune-telling. He was a pastry chef. He made éclairs and lemon tarts, not predictions.

Some lives, conducted with grace, are beautiful arcs bridging this world to eternity. I am thirty years old and can't for certain see the course of my life, but rather than a graceful arc, my passage seems to be a herky-jerky line from one crisis to another.

I am a lummox, by which I do not mean *stupid,* only that I am biggish for my size and not always aware of where my feet are going.

This truth is not offered in a spirit of self-deprecation or even humility. Apparently, being a lummox is part of my charm, an almost winsome trait, as you will see.

No doubt I have now raised in your mind the question of what I in-

tend to imply by "biggish for my size." Autobiography is proving to be a trickier task than I first imagined.

I am not as tall as people seem to think I am, in fact not tall at all by the standards of professional—or even of high school—basketball. I am neither plump nor as buff as an iron-pumping fitness fanatic. At most I am somewhat husky.

Yet men taller and heavier than I am often call me "big guy." My nickname in school was Moose. From childhood, I have heard people joke about how astronomical our grocery bills must be.

The disconnect between my true size and many people's perception of my dimensions has always mystified me.

My wife, who is the linchpin of my life, claims that I have a presence much bigger than my physique. She says that people measure me by the impression I make on them.

I find this notion ludicrous. It is bullshit born of love.

If sometimes I make an outsized impression on people, it's as likely as not because I fell on them. Or stepped on their feet.

In Arizona, there is a place where a dropped ball appears to roll uphill in defiance of gravity. In truth, this effect is a trick of perspective in which elements of a highly unusual landscape conspire to deceive the eye.

I suspect I am a similar freak of nature. Perhaps light reflects oddly from me or bends around me in a singular fashion, so I appear to be more of a hulk than I am.

On the night I was born in Snow County Hospital, in the community of Snow Village, Colorado, my grandfather told a nurse that I would be twenty inches long and weigh eight pounds ten ounces.

The nurse was startled by this prediction not because eight pounds ten is a huge newborn—many are larger—and not because my grandfather was a pastry chef who suddenly began acting as though he were a crystal-ball gazer. Four days previously he had suffered a massive stroke that left him paralyzed on his right side and unable to speak; yet

from his bed in the intensive care unit, he began making prognostications in a clear voice, without slur or hesitation.

He also told her that I would be born at 10:46 P.M. and that I would suffer from syndactyly.

That is a word difficult to pronounce *before* a stroke, let alone after one.

Syndactyly—as the observing nurse explained to my father—is a congenital defect in which two or more fingers or toes are joined. In serious cases, the bones of adjacent digits are fused to such an extent that two fingers share a single nail.

Multiple surgeries are required to correct such a condition and to ensure that the afflicted child will grow into an adult capable of giving the F-you finger to anyone who sufficiently annoys him.

In my case, the trouble was toes. Two were fused on the left foot, three on the right.

My mother, Madelaine—whom my father affectionately calls Maddy or sometimes the Mad One—insists that they considered forgoing the surgery and, instead, christening me Flipper.

Flipper was the name of a dolphin that once starred in a hit TV show—not surprisingly titled *Flipper*—in the late 1960s. My mother describes the program as "delightfully, wonderfully, hilariously stupid." It went off the air a few years before I was born.

Flipper, a male, was played by a trained dolphin named Suzi. This was most likely the first instance of transvestism on television.

Actually, that's not the right word because transvestism is a male dressing as a female for sexual gratification. Besides, Suzi—alias Flipper—didn't wear clothes.

So it was a program in which the female star always appeared nude and was sufficiently butch to pass for a male.

Just two nights ago at dinner, over one of my mother's infamous cheese-and-broccoli pies, she asked rhetorically if it was any wonder

that such a dire collapse in broadcast standards, begun with *Flipper,* should lead to the boring freak-show shock that is contemporary television.

Playing her game, my father said, "It actually began with *Lassie.* In every show, she was nude, too."

"Lassie was always played by male dogs," my mother replied.

"There you go," Dad said, his point made.

I escaped being named Flipper when successful surgeries restored my toes to the normal condition. In my case, the fusion involved only skin, not bones. The separation was a relatively simple procedure.

Nevertheless, on that uncommonly stormy night, my grandfather's prediction of syndactyly proved true.

If I had been born on a night of unremarkable weather, family legend would have transformed it into an eerie calm, every leaf motionless in breathless air, night birds silent with expectation. The Tock family has a proud history of self-dramatization.

Even allowing for exaggeration, the storm must have been violent enough to shake the Colorado mountains to their rocky foundations. The heavens cracked and flashed as if celestial armies were at war.

Still in the womb, I remained unaware of all the thunderclaps. And once born, I was probably distracted by my strange feet.

This was August 9, 1974, the day Richard Nixon resigned as President of the United States.

Nixon's fall has no more to do with me than the fact that John Denver's "Annie's Song" was the number-one record in the country at the time. I mention it only to provide historical perspective.

Nixon or no Nixon, what I find most important about August 9, 1974, is my birth—and my grandfather's predictions. My sense of perspective has an egocentric taint.

Perhaps more clearly than if I had been there, because of vivid pictures painted by numerous family stories of that night, I can see my father, Rudy Tock, walking back and forth from one end of County

Hospital to the other, between the maternity ward and the ICU, between joy at the prospect of his son's pending arrival and grief over his beloved father's quickening slide into death.

With blue vinyl-tile floor, pale-green wainscoting, pink walls, a yellow ceiling, and orange-and-white stork-patterned drapes, the expectant-fathers' lounge churned with the negative energy of color overload. It would have served well as the nervous-making set for a nightmare about a children's-show host who led a secret life as an ax murderer.

The chain-smoking clown didn't improve the ambience.

Rudy stood birth watch with only one other man, not a local but a performer with the circus that was playing a one-week engagement in a meadow at the Halloway Farm. He called himself Beezo. Curiously, this proved not to be his clown name but one that he'd been born with: Konrad Beezo.

Some say there is no such thing as destiny, that what happens just happens, without purpose or meaning. Konrad's surname would argue otherwise.

Beezo was married to Natalie, a trapeze artist and a member of a renowned aerialist family that qualified as circus royalty.

Neither of Natalie's parents, none of her brothers and sisters, and none of her high-flying cousins had accompanied Beezo to the hospital. This was a performance night, and as always the show must go on.

Evidently the aerialists kept their distance also because they had not approved of one of their kind taking a clown for a husband. Every subculture and ethnicity has its objects of bigotry.

As Beezo waited nervously for his wife to deliver, he muttered unkind judgments of his in-laws. "Self-satisfied," he called them, and "devious."

The clown's perpetual glower, rough voice, and bitterness made Rudy uncomfortable.

Angry words plumed from him in exhalations of sour smoke: "duplic-

itous" and "scheming" and, poetically for a clown, "blithe spirits of the air, but treacherous when the ground is under them."

Beezo was not in full costume. Furthermore, his stage clothes were in the Emmett Kelly sad-faced tradition rather than the bright polka-dot plumage of the average Ringling Brothers clown. He cut a strange figure nonetheless.

A bright plaid patch blazed across the seat of his baggy brown suit. The sleeves of his jacket were comically short. In one lapel bloomed a fake flower the diameter of a bread plate.

Before racing to the hospital with his wife, he had traded clown shoes for sneakers and had taken off his big round red rubber nose. White greasepaint still encircled his eyes, however, and his cheeks remained heavily rouged, and he wore a rumpled porkpie hat.

Beezo's bloodshot eyes shone as scarlet as his painted cheeks, perhaps because of the acrid smoke wreathing his head, although Rudy suspected that strong drink might be involved as well.

In those days, smoking was permitted everywhere, even in many hospital waiting rooms. Expectant fathers traditionally gave out cigars by way of celebration.

When not at his dying father's bedside, poor Rudy should have been able to take refuge in that lounge. His grief should have been mitigated by the joy of his pending parenthood.

Instead, both Maddy and Natalie were long in labor. Each time that Rudy returned from the ICU, waiting for him was the glowering, muttering, bloody-eyed clown, burning through pack after pack of unfiltered Lucky Strikes.

As drumrolls of thunder shook the heavens, as reflections of lightning shuddered through the windows, Beezo made a stage of the maternity ward lounge. Restlessly circling the blue vinyl floor, from pink wall to pink wall, he smoked and fumed.

"Do you believe that snakes can fly, Rudy Tock? Of course you don't.

But snakes *can* fly. I've seen them high above the center ring. They're well paid and applauded, these cobras, these diamondbacks, these copperheads, these hateful *vipers.*"

Poor Rudy responded to this vituperative rant with murmured consolation, clucks of the tongue, and sympathetic nods. He didn't want to encourage Beezo, but he sensed that a failure to commiserate would make him a target for the clown's anger.

Pausing at a storm-washed window, his painted face further patinated by the lightning-cast patterns of the streaming raindrops on the glass, Beezo said, "Which are you having, Rudy Tock—a son or daughter?"

Beezo consistently addressed Rudy by his first and last names, as if the two were one: *Rudytock.*

"They have a new ultrasound scanner here," Rudy replied, "so they could tell us whether it's a boy or girl, but we don't want to know. We just care is the baby healthy, and it is."

Beezo's posture straightened, and he raised his head, thrusting his face toward the window as if to bask in the pulsing storm light. "I don't need ultrasound to tell me what I know. Natalie is giving me a son. Now the Beezo name won't die when I do. I'll call him Punchinello, after one of the first and greatest of clowns."

Punchinello Beezo, Rudy thought. *Oh, the poor child.*

"He will be the very greatest of our kind," said Beezo, "the ultimate jester, harlequin, jackpudding. He will be acclaimed from coast to coast, on every continent."

Although Rudy had just returned to the maternity ward from the ICU, he felt imprisoned by this clown whose dark energy seemed to swell each time the storm flashed in his feverish eyes.

"He will be not merely acclaimed but *immortal.*"

Rudy was hungry for news of Maddy's condition and the progress of her labor. In those days, fathers were seldom admitted to delivery rooms to witness the birth of their children.

"He will be *the* circus star of his time, Rudy Tock, and everyone who sees him perform will know Konrad Beezo is his father, patriarch of clowns."

The ward nurses who should have regularly visited the lounge to speak with the waiting husbands were making themselves less visible than usual. No doubt they were uncomfortable in the presence of this angry bozo.

"On my father's grave, I swear my Punchinello will *never* be an aerialist," Beezo declared.

The blast of thunder punctuating his vow was the first of two so powerful that the windowpanes vibrated like drumheads, and the lights—almost extinguished—throbbed dimly.

"What do acrobatics have to do with the truth of the human condition?" Beezo demanded.

"Nothing," Rudy said at once, for he was not an aggressive man. Indeed, he was gentle and humble, not yet a pastry chef like his father, merely a baker who, on the verge of fatherhood, wished to avoid being severely beaten by a large clown.

"Comedy and tragedy, the very tools of the clown's art—*that* is the essence of life," Beezo declared.

"Comedy, tragedy, and the need for good bread," Rudy said, making a little joke, including his own trade in the essence-of-life professions.

This small frivolity earned him a fierce glare, a look that seemed capable not merely of stopping clocks but of freezing time.

"'Comedy, tragedy, and the need for good bread,'" Beezo repeated, perhaps expecting Dad to admit his quip had been inane.

"Hey," Dad said, "that sounds just like me," for the clown had spoken in a voice that might have passed for my father's.

"'Hey, that sounds just like me,'" Beezo mocked in Dad's voice. Then he continued in his own rough growl: "I *told* you I'm talented, Rudy Tock. In more ways than you can imagine."

Rudy thought he could feel his chilled heart beating slower, winding down under the influence of that wintry gaze.

"My boy will never be an aerialist. The hateful snakes will hiss. Oh, how they'll hiss and thrash, but *Punchinello will never be an aerialist!*"

Another tsunami of thunder broke against the walls of the hospital, and again the lights were more than half drowned.

In that gloom, Rudy swore that the tip of Beezo's cigarette in his right hand glowed brighter, brighter, although he held it at his side, as if some phantom presence were drawing on it with eager lips.

Rudy thought, but could not swear, that Beezo's eyes briefly glowed as bright and red as the cigarette. This could not have been an inner light, of course, but a reflection of . . . something.

When the echoes of the thunder rolled away, the brownout passed. As the lights rose, so did Rudy rise from his chair.

He had only recently returned here, and although he had received no news about his wife, he was ready to flee back to the grim scene in the intensive care unit rather than experience a third doomsday peal and another dimming of lights in the company of Konrad Beezo.

When he arrived at the ICU and found two nurses at his father's bedside, Rudy feared the worst. He knew that Josef was dying, yet his throat tightened and tears welled when he thought the end loomed.

To his surprise, he discovered Josef half sitting up in bed, hands clutching the side rails, excitedly repeating the predictions that he had already made to one of the nurses. "Twenty inches . . . eight pounds ten ounces . . . ten-forty-six tonight . . . syndactyly. . ."

When he saw his son, Josef pulled himself all the way into a sitting position, and one of the nurses raised the upper half of the bed to support him better.

He had not only regained his speech but also appeared to have overcome the partial paralysis that had followed his stroke. When he seized Rudy's right hand, his grip proved firm, even painful.

Astonished by this development, Rudy at first assumed that his father had experienced a miraculous recovery. Then, however, he recognized the desperation of a dying man with an important message to impart.

Josef's face was drawn, seemed almost shrunken, as if Death, in a sneak-thief mood, had begun days ago to steal the substance of him, ounce by ounce. By contrast his eyes appeared to be enormous. Fear sharpened his gaze when his eyes fixed on his son.

"Five days," said Josef, his hoarse voice raw with suffering, parched because he had been taking fluids only intravenously. "Five terrible days."

"Easy, Dad. Don't excite yourself," Rudy cautioned, but he saw that on the cardiac monitor, the illuminated graph of his father's heart activity revealed a fast yet regular pattern.

One of the nurses left to summon a doctor. The other stepped back from the bed, waiting to assist if the patient experienced a seizure.

First licking his cracked lips to wet the way for his whisper, he made his fifth prediction: "James. His name will be James, but no one will call him James . . . or Jim. Everyone will call him Jimmy."

This startled Rudy. He and Maddy had chosen James if the baby was a boy, Jennifer if it was a girl, but they had not discussed their choices with anyone.

Josef could not have known. Yet he knew.

With increasing urgency, Josef declared, "Five days. You've got to warn him. Five terrible days."

"Easy, Dad," Rudy repeated. "You'll be okay."

His father, as pale as the cut face of a loaf of bread, grew paler, whiter than flour in a measuring cup. "Not okay. *I'm dying.*"

"You aren't dying. Look at you. You're speaking. There's no paralysis. You're—"

"*Dying,*" Josef insisted, his rough voice rising in volume. His pulse throbbed at his temples, and on the monitor it grew more rapid as he strained to break through his son's reassurances and to seize his attention. "Five dates. Write them down. Write them now. *NOW!*"

Confused, afraid that Josef's adamancy might trigger another stroke, Rudy mollified his father.

He borrowed a pen from the nurse. She didn't have any paper, and she wouldn't let him use the patient's chart that hung on the foot of the bed.

From his wallet, Rudy withdrew the first thing he found that offered a clean writing surface: a free pass to the very circus in which Beezo performed.

Rudy had received the pass a week ago from Huey Foster, a Snow Village police officer. They had been friends since childhood.

Huey, like Rudy, had wanted to be a pastry chef. He didn't have the talent for a career in baking. His muffins broke teeth. His lemon tarts offended the tongue.

When, by virtue of his law-enforcement job, Huey received freebies—passes to the circus, booklets of tickets for carnival rides at the county fair, sample boxes of bullets from various ammo manufacturers—he shared them with Rudy. In return, Rudy gave Huey cookies that didn't sour the appetite, cakes that didn't displease the nose, pies and strudels that didn't induce regurgitation.

Red and black lettering, illustrated with elephants and lions, crowded the face of the circus pass. The reverse was blank. Unfolded, it measured three by five inches, the size of an index card.

As hard rain beat on a nearby window, drumming up a sound like many running feet, Josef clutched again at the railings, anchoring himself, as if he feared that he might float up and away. "Nineteen ninety-four. September fifteenth. A Thursday. Write it down."

Standing beside the bed, Rudy took dictation, using the precise printing with which he composed recipe cards: SEPT 15, 1994, THURS.

Eyes wide and wild, like those of a rabbit in the thrall of a stalking coyote, Josef stared toward a point high on the wall opposite his bed. He seemed to see more than the wall, something beyond it. Perhaps the future.

"Warn him," the dying man said. "For God's sake, *warn him.*"

Bewildered, Rudy said, "Warn who?"

"Jimmy. Your son, Jimmy, my grandson."

"He's not born yet."

"Almost. Two minutes. *Warn him.* Nineteen ninety-eight. January nineteenth. A Monday."

Transfixed by the ghastly expression on his father's face, Rudy stood with pen poised over paper.

"*WRITE IT DOWN!*" Josef roared. His mouth contorted so severely in the shout that his dry and peeling lower lip split. A crimson thread slowly unraveled down his chin.

"Nineteen ninety-eight," Rudy muttered as he wrote.

"January nineteenth," Josef repeated in a croak, his parched throat having been racked by the shout. "A Monday. Terrible day."

"Why?"

"Terrible, terrible."

"Why will it be terrible?" Rudy persisted.

"Two thousand two. December twenty-third. Another Monday."

Jotting down this third date, Rudy said, "Dad, this is weird. I don't understand."

Josef still held tight to both steel bedrails. Suddenly he shook them violently, with such uncanny strength that the railings seemed to be coming apart at their joints, raising a clatter that would have been loud in an ordinary hospital room but that was explosive in the usually hushed intensive care unit.

At first the observing nurse rushed forward, perhaps intending to calm the patient, but the electrifying combination of fury and terror that wrenched his pallid face caused her to hesitate. When waves of thunder broke against the hospital hard enough to shake dust off the acoustic ceiling tiles, the nurse retreated, almost as if she thought Josef himself had summoned that detonation.

"*WRITE IT DOWN!*" he demanded.

"I wrote, I wrote," Rudy assured him. "December 23, 2002, another Monday."

"Two thousand three," Josef said urgently. "The twenty-sixth of November. A Wednesday. The day before Thanksgiving."

After recording this fourth date on the back of the circus pass, just as his father stopped shaking the bedrails, Rudy looked up and saw a fresh emotion in Josef's face, in his eyes. The fury was gone, and the terror.

As tears welled, Josef said, "Poor Jimmy, poor Rudy."

"Dad?"

"Poor, poor Rudy. Poor Jimmy. Where is Rudy?"

"I'm Rudy, Dad. I'm right here."

Josef blinked, blinked, and flicked away the tears as yet another emotion gripped him, this one not easy to define. Some would have called it astonishment. Others would have said it was wonder of the pure variety that a baby might express at the first sight of any bright marvel.

After a moment, Rudy recognized it as a state more profound than wonder. This was *awe,* the complete yielding of the mind to something grand and formidable.

His father's eyes shone with amazement. Across his face, expressions of delight and apprehension contested with each other.

Josef's increasingly raspy voice fell to a whisper: "Two thousand five."

His gaze remained fixed on another reality that apparently he found more convincing than he did this world in which he had lived for fifty-seven years.

Hand trembling now, but still printing legibly, Rudy recorded this fifth date—and waited.

"Ah," said Joseph, as if a startling secret had been revealed.

"Dad?"

"Not this, not this," Josef lamented.

"Dad, what's wrong?"

As curiosity outweighed her anxiety, the rattled nurse ventured closer to the bed.

A doctor entered the cubicle. "What's going on here?"

Josef said, "Don't trust the clown."

The physician looked mildly offended, assuming that the patient had just questioned his medical credentials.

Leaning over the bed, trying to redirect his father's attention from his otherworldly vision, Rudy said, "Dad, how do you know about the clown?"

"The sixteenth of April," said Josef.

"How do you know about the clown?"

"*WRITE IT DOWN,*" Josef thundered even as the heavens crashed against the earth once more.

As the doctor went around to the other side of the bed, Rudy added APRIL 16 after 2005 to the fifth line on the back of the circus pass. He also printed SATURDAY when his father spoke it.

The doctor put a hand under Josef's chin and turned his head to have a better look at his eyes.

"He isn't who you think he is," said Josef, not to the doctor but to his son.

"Who isn't?" Rudy asked.

"*He* isn't."

"Who's he?"

"Now, Josef," the physician chided, "you know me very well. I'm Dr. Pickett."

"Oh, the tragedy," Josef said, voice ripe with pity, as if he were not a pastry chef but a thespian upon the Shakespearean stage.

"What tragedy?" Rudy worried.

Producing an ophthalmoscope from a pocket of his white smock, Dr. Pickett disagreed: "No tragedy here. What I see is a remarkable recovery."

Breaking loose of the physician's chin grip, increasingly agitated, Josef said, "Kidneys!"

Bewildered, Rudy said, "Kidneys?"

"Why should *kidneys* be so damned important?" Josef demanded. "It's absurd, it's all *absurd!*"

Rudy felt his heart sink at this, for it seemed that his dad's brief clarity of mind had begun to give way to babble.

Asserting control of his patient again by once more gripping his chin, Dr. Pickett switched on the ophthalmoscope and directed the light in Josef's right eye.

As though that narrow beam were a piercing needle and his life were a balloon, Josef Tock let out an explosive breath and slumped back upon his pillow, dead.

With all the techniques and instruments available to a well-equipped hospital, attempts at resuscitation were made, but to no avail. Josef had moved on and wasn't coming back.

X

And I, James Henry Tock, arrived. The time on my grandfather's death certificate matches that on my birth certificate—10:46 P.M.

Bereaved, Rudy understandably lingered at Josef's bedside. He had not forgotten his wife, but grief immobilized him.

Five minutes later, he received word from a nurse that Maddy had experienced a crisis in her labor and that he must go at once to her side.

Alarmed by the prospect of losing his father and his wife in the same hour, Dad fled the intensive care unit.

As he tells it, the halls of our modest county hospital had become a white labyrinth, and at least twice he made wrong turns. Too impatient to wait for the elevator, he raced down the stairs from the third floor to the ground level before realizing that he'd passed the second floor, on which the maternity ward was located.

Dad arrived in the expectant-fathers' waiting lounge to the crack of a pistol as Konrad Beezo shot his wife's doctor.

For an instant, Dad thought Beezo had used a clown gun, some trick

firearm that squirted red ink. The doctor dropped to the floor, however, not with comic flair but with hideous finality, and the smell of blood plumed thick, too real.

Beezo turned to Dad and raised the pistol.

In spite of the rumpled porkpie hat and the short-sleeved coat and the bright patch on the seat of his pants, in spite of the white greasepaint and the rouged cheeks, nothing about Konrad Beezo was clownish at that moment. His eyes were those of a jungle cat, and it was easy to imagine that the teeth bared in his snarl were tiger fangs. He loomed, the embodiment of murderous dementia, demonic.

Dad thought that he, too, would be shot, but Beezo said, "Stay out of my way, Rudy Tock. I have no quarrel with you. You're not an aerialist."

Beezo shouldered through the door between the lounge and the maternity ward, slammed it shut behind him.

Dad knelt beside the doctor—and discovered that a breath of life remained in him. The wounded man tried to speak, could not. Blood had pooled in his throat, and he gagged.

Gently elevating the physician's head, shoving old magazines under it to brace the man at an angle that allowed him to breathe, Dad shouted for help as the swelling storm rocked the night with doomsday peals of thunder.

Dr. Ferris MacDonald had been Maddy's physician. He had also been called upon to treat Natalie Beezo when, unexpectedly, she had been brought to the hospital in labor.

Mortally wounded, he seemed more bewildered than frightened. Able to clear his throat and breathe now, he told my father, "She died during delivery, but it wasn't my fault."

For a terrifying moment, my dad thought Maddy had died.

Dr. MacDonald realized this, for his last words were "Not Maddy. The clown's wife. Maddy . . . is alive. I'm so sorry, Rudy."

Ferris MacDonald died with my father's hand upon his heart.

As the thunder rolled toward a far horizon, Dad heard another gunshot from beyond the door through which Konrad Beezo had vanished.

Maddy lay somewhere behind that door—a woman left helpless by a difficult labor. I was back there, too—an infant who was not yet enough of a lummox to defend himself.

My father, then a baker, had never been a man of action; nor did he become one when, a few years later, he graduated to the status of pastry chef. He is of average height and weight, not physically weak but not born for the boxing ring, either. He had to that point led a charmed life, without serious want, without any strife.

Nevertheless, fear for his wife and his child cast him into a strange, cold panic marked more by calculation than by hysteria. Without a weapon or a plan, but suddenly with the heart of a lion, he opened that door and went after Beezo.

Although his imagination spun a thousand bloody scenarios in mere seconds, he says that he did not anticipate what was about to happen, and of course he could not foresee how the events of that night would reverberate through the next thirty years with such terrible and astonishing consequences in his life and mine.