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Don't Look Twice

Written by Andrew Gross

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DON'T LOOK TWICE

Andrew Gross

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To my brothers,
Michael and Rick

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

"Mango Meltdown or Berry Blast?"

Ty Hauck scanned the shelves of the Exxon station's refrigerated cooler.

"*Whatever . . .*" his thirteen-year-old daughter, Jessie, responded with a shrug, her eyes alighting on something more appealing. "*What about this*?"

Powie Zowie.

Hauck reached inside and read the brightly colored label. Megajolt of caffeine. Highest bang for the buck.

"Your mother lets you drink this stuff?" he asked skeptically.

Jessie looked back at him. "Mom's not exactly here, is she?"

"No." Hauck nodded, meeting her gaze. "I guess she's not."

In just the past year, forbidding new curves had sprung up on his daughter's once-childlike body.

Bra straps peeking out from under her tank top. Jeans clinging to the hips in an "unnatural" way. *Gangly* suddenly morphing into something a bit more in the range of *troubling*. Not to mention the newly mastered repertoire of eye rolls, shrugs, and exaggerated sighs. Hauck wondered if the request for an ankle tattoo or a belly piercing could be far behind. "You don't get to win," a friend who had teenage daughters once warned him. "You only *delay*."

Jesus, he recalled, *it was just a year ago that she liked to get shoulder rides from me.*

"Toss it in the basket," he said, acquiescing. *"One."*

Jessie shrugged without even the slightest smile, failing to grasp the significance of his offering. "Okay."

At the end of the aisle, a man in a green down vest and tortoiseshell glasses reached into the cooler and met Hauck's gaze. His amused, empathetic smile seemed to say, *Know exactly what you're going through, man!*

Hauck grinned back.

A year had passed since the Grand Central bombing. A year since the events set in motion by the hit-and-run accident down on Putnam Avenue had thrust Hauck out of his long slumber and into the public eye. In that year, Hauck had

been on the morning news shows and MSNBC and Greta Van Susteren, the case rocking not just the tall iron gates of the Loire-styled mansions out on North Avenue, but the financial circles in New York as well. It had turned Hauck into a bit of a reluctant celebrity—the object of friendly ribbing from his staff and the local merchants along the avenue. Even his old hockey buddies, who used to tip their mugs to him because of how he once tore up the football league at Greenwich High, now joked about whether he knew Paris or Nicole, or could get them past the bouncers into some fancy new club in the city on a Saturday night. Finally Hauck just had to step back, get his life in order.

And keep things on a steady keel with Karen, whose husband's death had been at the heart of the case.

And with whom he had fallen in love.

At first, it had been hard to bridge all the differences between them. She was rich. Hauck was the head of detectives on the local force. Their families, lifestyles, didn't exactly merge. Not to mention all the attention the case had generated. That in solving the mystery of her husband's death Hauck had unleashed something buried and now restless inside her. In the past year, her father, Mel, had taken ill with

Parkinson's. Her mother wasn't handling it well. Karen had gone down to Atlanta to help take care of him, with her daughter away at Tufts and her son, Alex, now sixteen, recruited to play lacrosse at an upstate prep school.

It had been a year in which Hauck had finally learned to put much of the pain of his own past behind him. To learn to feel attached again. To fight for someone he wanted. He knew Karen loved him deeply for what he had done for her. Still, a lot of things stood in the way. Not just the money thing or their different families and backgrounds. Lately, Hauck had detected something in her. A restlessness. Maybe a sense of wanting to finally be free after being tied to a man her whole adult life, one who had so painfully deceived her. It was always a roll of the dice, they both knew, how things might work out between them. The jury was still out.

"C'mon," he said to Jess, "grab some M&M's; the boat's waiting."

The autumn chill was late in coming that October Saturday morning, and they were heading out for a final jaunt on his skiff, the *Merrily,* over to Captain's Island before taking it out of the water for the winter. Maybe kick the soccer ball around a bit—not a mean feat

these days for Hauck (whose leg had still not fully healed from the .45 he had taken to the thigh). Grill a few dogs. Who knew how many more of these Saturdays he'd have with Jess. Just getting her up before ten was already becoming a hard sell. They'd just stopped off on the way to fill up the Explorer and pick up a few snacks.

Sunil, who ran the Exxon station next to the car wash on Putnam, was always a friend to the guys on the force. Hauck always made it his habit to fill up here.

As they reached the counter, a woman was at the register ahead of them. The man in the green down vest stepped up, his arms wrapped around two six-packs of soda.

"You guys go ahead." He waved them ahead and smiled good-naturedly.

"Thanks." Hauck nodded back and nudged Jessie.

"Thanks," she turned back and said.

While they waited, Hauck said, "You know, I really hope you'll come up for Thanksgiving this year. Karen'll be back."

She shrugged. "I don't know, Dad."

"You should. She likes you, Jess. You know that. It would make me feel good."

"It's not that . . ." She twisted her mouth. "It's

just that it's different. They're, you know . . . *rich*. Samantha and Alex, I mean, they're nice, but . . ."

Hauck knew the adjustment had been toughest with her. His daughter felt like a fish out of water with them. Sam and Alex had grown up on rented boats in the Caribbean and on spring breaks flew out to Beaver Creek to ski. She went up to Massachusetts to visit her cousins and once they'd all flown down to Orlando to do the theme park thing. He squeezed her on the shoulder, careful not to draw any attention to it. "Yeah, but that doesn't make them from Saturn, Jess."

"It's Mars, Dad," she corrected him.

He shrugged. "Or Mars."

The woman at the register finally finished up. Hauck stepped up to the counter.

Sunil greeted him with his usual smile. "*Lieutenant!* So, how is the big star these days? I don't see you on the TV so much anymore."

"That gig's over, Sunil. They don't pay me enough."

The Pakistani laughed at Jessie. "Pretty soon, we're gonna see your father on *Dancing with the Stars* . . . Doing the tango with some fancy celebrity. I bet you are very proud of your famous father, young lady . . ."

"Sure." Jessie shrugged.

Hauck put his arm around her. "She thinks I'm famous in my own mind . . ." He brought up the basket. "So, Sunil, we have a couple of sandwiches and sodas, and we also took a—"

It was the screech that Hauck heard first.

Grating. Terrifying. The red truck jerking to a stop right in front of their eyes. The heavily tinted passenger window slowly rolling down.

Then the man in the red bandana leaning out—*not a man,* Hauck recalled later, *barely more than a boy*—extending the short black cylinder as Hauck, unable to believe what he was seeing, stared at the protruding barrel.

A second before the body-blow of dread set in. Before he realized in horror what was about to take place.

He grabbed Jessie.

"Everyone get down!"

CHAPTER TWO

The barrel erupted, spitting orange flashes of death and terror all around. The station's storefront shattered.

"Jess!"

Hauck pulled his daughter to the floor, the earsplitting *zip, zip, zip* of twenty rounds per second exploding glass, toppling counters of candy and shredding magazines all over them. He heard Jessie's high-pitched shrieks from under him. *"Daddy! Daddy!"*

Above, the window sign promoting discount tune-ups crashed in.

All Hauck could do was press himself into her as tightly as he could, shouting back above the deafening rain of glass and noise something he wasn't sure of, something he didn't know was true: "It's okay, Jess, it's okay! It's going to be okay . . ."

But it wasn't okay.

Bullets tore through the walls all around them, the store shaking like an earthquake was happening. Hauck had seen the muzzle pointed at his face. He felt sure the attack was aimed at him. Covering his daughter, an even more terrifying fear rippled through him:

What if the gunman tried to come in?

Suddenly, the barrage came to a stop. Just as quickly as it had begun. Hauck held there and prayed for the sound of the truck's engine revving up. He didn't hear it—only a heart-stopping double-clicking noise, which terrified him even more.

The shooter was shoving in a second clip.

He knew he had to do something. And do it now. From outside, he heard frightened wails and screaming. He had no idea if anyone might have already been hit. He slid off Jessie, fumbling at his waist for his gun—and, in panic, found only the empty space where it normally would have been, realized it was back in the Explorer. *In the fucking glove compartment!*

He was unarmed.

The second wave of gunfire started in.

"Stay down!" Hauck screamed above the noise directly in Jessie's ear, rounds zinging through the remaining jagged shards of glass that still clung to the front facade.

Jessie reached for him. *"Daddy, no . . . !"*

Hauck cupped her face in his hands. "Jessie, please, just stay down!"

He pulled out of her grasp, his heart colliding back and forth against his ribs, and scrambled over to the door. He grabbed the largest object he could find, a two-gallon drum of motor coolant, and, using it as cover, crawled outside.

The red truck loomed directly above him. The muzzle jutted from the passenger window, jerking wildly from the recoil. Hauck realized his only option was to wrestle the gun from the shooter's grip. He slid cautiously along the pavement, ducking under the gunman's view. Suddenly the truck's engine revved.

He got ready to lunge.

As if in answer to his prayers, the shooting suddenly stopped. Above him, he heard the deafening roar of the truck's massive V-8, the gunman shouting something he couldn't make out over the noise.

Then the sparkle of silver rims zooming by, the cab careening off a stanchion as it shot past him, veering into the street.

Hauck scrambled after it, focusing on the make and plates. A Ford F250, *ADJ . . . 9,* dealer plates. The rest he couldn't make out. It jerked a sharp left, bouncing wildly over the curb at

the corner, and took off south, toward the Connecticut–New York border.

A plume of dark gray smoke crept out from the scene.

One by one, stunned bystanders began to crawl out from behind their cars.

Hauck looked around. *"Is everyone alright?"*

One man got up from behind a fuel pump, nodding uncertainly. Next to him a woman was still curled up on the asphalt, sobbing, shell-shocked.

"I'm a policeman!" he called again. *"Is everyone alright?"*

Amazingly, he didn't see anyone who appeared to have been hit. He turned back to the shop, the stench of smoke and cordite biting his nostrils. The caved-in storefront looked as if a missile had slammed into it. He had to call it in! Frantically, he dug through his jeans for his cell phone, his fingers fumbling on the keys, 431, the emergency code to the Greenwich station's front desk.

His gaze drifted back inside.

"Jess . . . ?"

Hauck's heart slammed to a stop, his eyes falling on his daughter. She was on the floor. Curled up. Inert. Not replying. The phone fell from his ear.

There was blood all over her.

CHAPTER THREE

"Jess!"

It may have only been an instant—the same terrifying instant in which he begged his lifeless legs to move.

But in the freeze-frame of that moment, Hauck was hurtled back.

To Jessie—only six. In a Teletubby T-shirt, cross-legged on the grass outside their two-family home in Woodside, Queens. Curled up there, she looked as clear to him then as she did now.

All they heard was her shriek. *"Mommy! Daddy!"*

He and Beth, rushing to the kitchen window. Knowing immediately that something was wrong, seeing only their white van as it bounced silently down the embankment and came to a stop in the quiet street.

Jess—too scared to even point or move. Just frozen there. His and Beth's eyes falling on the

tiny yellow tugboat that their younger daughter, Norah, had been playing with only moments before. The truth taking hold of them. Petrifying them. Beth's eyes already filled with terror and fleeing hope.

Oh, Ty, please, they said, *don't let this be happening. Please . . .*

Now Hauck fixed on Jessie and ran over to her across the glass-strewn floor.

His daughter lay motionless, crimson matted on her sweatshirt. He lifted her by the shoulders. Blood spatter was all over her cheeks and chest. Frantically, Hauck searched her limp body for a wound.

Oh, Jesus, Jessie, no. He peeled back his daughter's matted brown hair. *This can't be happening again!*

Like an answer to his prayers, he felt her stir.

Just the slightest murmur. She blinked and slit open her dazed brown eyes.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, baby, yes . . . !" Hauck's chest exploded in a spasm of joyful relief. "Oh yes, honey. Jessie, it's me."

Fright flared up in her. "Are they gone?"

"Yes, honey, they're gone! It's over. It's going to be okay." Hauck shut his eyes and felt tears stinging. Every bone in his body seemed to rattle

in a joyful exhale. He drew his daughter up to him, squeezing her. He brushed the specks of blood off her cheek. "They're gone."

Behind him, Sunil slowly rose from behind the counter.

Hauck looked up at him. "Are you okay?"

The manager nodded, his dark brown skin blanched almost pale. "I think so." Sweat glistened on his forehead.

"Call 911. Tell them there's been a shooting. Tell them I'm here and we need immediate medical support."

"Yes, Lieutenant, okay." With eyes as white as moons, he scanned around the store. "Gracious God in heaven . . ."

Hauck lowered Jessie back down. "You just lay there, honey . . . let me look. Where are you hurt?" He carefully checked over her clothing but couldn't find any wound. No signs of fresh blood seeping out.

"I don't know, Daddy."

"It doesn't matter. You just stay there. Help will be here soon."

He flipped open his cell phone and punched in the 431 line to the station that signaled *Emergency.*

The duty officer answered.

"This is Lieutenant Hauck. I'm at the Exxon station on Putnam and Holden. There's been

a shooting. The manager here just called in a 911. We have wounded. We need immediate medical response. Cars on the scene, EMTs, everything . . ."

"This is Reyes, sir. We're already on it. We should have cars there any second . . ."

"Listen to me, Sergeant, I want you to put out an interagency APB on a red F250 pickup, Connecticut plates, ADJ . . . 9 . . . That's all I could make out. Raised chassis, chrome rims. Shooter may be Hispanic and may be wearing a red bandana. When it left here it was headed south on Putnam. You get that out immediately, Sergeant, you hear?"

"I'm all on it, sir."

Hauck hung up. He yanked off his fleece pullover and bunched it like a pillow underneath Jessie's head. "You just sit tight, baby. Help'll be here soon."

She nodded hazily. "Okay . . ."

He checked her again. Miraculously, he couldn't locate any direct wounds. *Where the hell was all the blood coming from?* Slowly, he felt his heart crawl back into his chest.

As a droplet of blood fell onto her sweatshirt.

Scared, Jessie looked up. "Daddy, you're bleeding!"

Hauck felt for his neck, which was suddenly

throbbing. A sticky red ooze came off in his hand. He felt his stomach turn.

"Daddy, you're hurt!" Jessie said, lifting onto her elbows.

"Don't worry," Hauck said. But suddenly he wasn't sure. *"Sunil . . ."*

The manager, who was now on the phone with his family, ran around the counter. "Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Go and see if anyone needs medical assistance out there . . . Tell them ambulances should be here in a second . . ."

"Yes, sir." Sunil was about to run out, making a last broad sweep around the store. Suddenly he stopped. *"Merciful God . . ."* he muttered, gazing over Hauck's shoulder.

Hauck stood up, following the manager's crestfallen gaze. *"Oh no . . ."*

Suddenly it became clear where all the blood on Jessie had originated from. The man in the green down vest—who had smiled at them by the cooler and stepped up behind them in line . . .

He was on the floor, covered by toppled racks of magazines and candy, eyes like glass, his tortoiseshell frames thrown to the side.

In the center of his chest, dotting his brown Shetland sweater, were two dark red holes.