

Iced

by Harry Hunsicker, ...

Published: 2018
in »Thriller 2«



Bijoux Watson's body slipped underneath the muddy waters of the Brazos River without a sound, a mangled pile of flesh that had once been the biggest purveyor of black tar heroin in all of east Texas.

Chrissie and Tom watched it float downstream, both breathing heavily after dragging the remains to the edge of the water. After a few moments the corpse rounded a bend and disappeared. Chrissie and Tom looked at each other and smiled.

Then they screwed, right there in the mud and gunk, tossing their clothes aside in a tangled heap, their bodies sweaty. Tom felt the crystal meth they'd smoked an hour before course through his limbs like a bolt of sunlight, his groin jonesing for Chrissie and her tight body.

Bijoux was finally dead.

When they finished, they lay side by side on the dirt and listened to the cattle egrets trill overhead and the traffic lumber across the bridge going to Bryan/College Station. The air smelled of water and decaying vegetation and sex.

Chrissie dug a rumpled pack of Virginia Slims from the pocket of her denim skirt. She lit one and blew a plume of smoke skyward.

“I love you.” Tom ran his index finger in a circular pattern around one of her breasts.

She sighed and pitched her cigarette in the river. “Daddy always said don’t get lovin’ confused with screwing.”

Tom felt needles cartwheel across his intestines as the last of the meth ricocheted across his battered synapses. He tried to remember what sleep was like.

“But, baby. You said—”

“Bijoux’s gone.” Chrissie stood and brushed the leaves and dirt from her body. “Things’re different now.”

Tom tried not to cry as she dressed, an enormous fatigue making his limbs as heavy and stiff as tree trunks. His skin hurt and his vision turned black at the edges.

Chrissie buttoned her skirt and tramped up the muddy slope without a word.

He lay there for a few moments, thinking about Chrissie and the way she contorted her face when she had an orgasm, the sinews and tendons in her neck and how they came to the surface of her silky skin. He thought about doing her again and about the last hit of Ice, the crystalized amphetamine, in his briefcase in the car.

Tom scrambled into his clothes and ran after her.

Two minutes later he stepped off the path and onto the asphalt parking lot near the boat landing on the east side of the river. Bijoux Watson’s lemon-yellow Jaguar was the only car visible.

Chrissie stood by the front passenger door with her arms crossed, staring intently at the smudged and cracked windshield.

Tom walked over and stood next to her.

Explosive residue, blood and liquified body parts coated the inside of the glass.

Bijoux had been in the driver’s seat, a two-kilo package of what he thought was Mexican skag sitting between his legs, when Tom pressed the button, detonating the ten blasting caps nestled in the bag of Piggly Wiggly brown sugar. He and Chrissie had been thirty yards away, underneath a live oak tree with their cigarettes. Bijoux, a loan shark, pimp and dope dealer, was a rabid antismoker.

Tom said, “Guess we didn’t think this through.”

“No shit, Einstein.” Chrissie closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose

Town was ten miles away. They’d ridden here with the dead man to make the transaction, claiming the stuff was hidden by the river.

“What’s your plan now?” she said.

Tom opened the front passenger door of the car.

A rank wave of hot air that smelled like blood and feces hit his face, making him gag for a moment.

He took a deep breath and grabbed his briefcase, dislodging what looked like a one of Bijoux's testicles. He plopped his carryall on the hood of the car, opened it and rummaged through the contents until he found the foil-wrapped nugget of methamphetamine. The pipe lay underneath some loan documents due at the title company a week ago, next to the Glock .40-caliber pistol he'd started carrying ever since he'd gotten tangled up with Bijoux Watson.

His fingers fumbled as he jammed the drug into the bowl of the pipe. With the battered Zippo his father had carried in Vietnam, he ignited the crystalized narcotic. Two big lungfuls and all the confidence, power and *cojones* on the planet coursed through his veins, as thick and fast and strong as the muddy waters a few hundred feet away.

Chrissie appeared at his side with a canvas bag she'd evidently found in the trunk. She opened it and pulled out a Ziploc sack full of dirty brown powder.

"Bijoux always traveled with a stash." She licked her lips and produced a needle and a blackened tablespoon from the bottom of the bag.

Tom offered her the pipe.

She grabbed it and inhaled deeply. Then, she set about cooking a dose of heroin.

"Baby, don't do that," Tom said. "Shit's bad for you, dirty needles and all that other stuff."

"Don't knock it until you've tried it." She lowered her voice. "It makes sex incredible." She pointed the needle at him. "Gimme your arm."

Tom looked at the syringe and then at Chrissie's face. Her eyes were wide with what he assumed to be anticipation. He wanted to say no, but because he had just ingested over a gram of primo Ice and had all the confidence, power and *cojones* in the world, he stuck his arm out.

Chrissie smiled, found a suitable vein and slid the needle in, giving him half the load. She then injected the rest into a blood vessel in her thigh. Together they sat on the grimy asphalt and leaned against the side of Bijoux Watson's bloody Jaguar. Tom felt like there was nothing he couldn't do, no task or challenge he couldn't accomplish. Except for the fact he had no energy, he thought at that moment he could climb Mount Everest.

Chrissie fell against him and said that just as soon as they came down a little, she'd fuck him so hard his toenails would hurt.

Later, it could have been thirty minutes or thirty seconds, Tom heard the crunch of tires.

He opened his eyes as a county squad car pulled up and stopped a few feet from the Jag.

A deputy got out.

Tom recognized him and struggled to remember the man's name. Dean something. Dean, Jr. had been in his wife's Sunday-school class a couple of years ago.

"Tom? Is that you?" Deputy Dean squinted in the afternoon sun and leaned down to get a closer look. "Whole town's looking for you. You ain't been to the bank in three days." The deputy rubbed one hand over his mouth, and his eyes got wide as he looked from Chrissie back to Tom. "You okay? What's wrong with your pupils?"

Tom nodded and pushed himself off the ground, the uppers and downers in his system making everything deliciously hazy and warm and happy.

"Dean, it's damn good to see you." He enunciated each syllable with extreme precision. "The bank. Um, yes, the bank. The bank. They need these very important documents. At the bank. Very soon, Dean. Can you help me with that?"

Tom turned his back to the officer and reached inside the briefcase

"Uh, yeah, sure," the deputy said. "Anything you need."

Tom remembered the man's last name. Chambers. Dean Roy Chambers, his wife and two children lived in a double-wide on nine acres just outside of town. Tom's bank had made the loan.

"Who is she?" the deputy said. "Are you all right, ma'am?"

"She's fine." Tom turned and smiled.

Then he shot Dean Chambers in the cheek, about a quarter inch to the left of his nose, with the .40-caliber Glock.

The bullet was one of those fancy armor-piercing hollowpoints the liberal gun-control freaks loved to whine about. It made a big hole exiting the back of the deputy's head.

Chrissie snapped awake as the blast roiled across the empty parking lot.

"What the hell?"

"Took care of the issue, baby." Tom squared his shoulders and sucked his gut in. "Goddamn, that's what I'm talking about."

"You fucking killed a cop." Chrissie stood up, legs wobbly. "That ain't taking care of no issues. That's making new ones."

"He'd seen us together, baby." Tom stuck the gun in his waistband. His heart thumped a disco beat in his rib cage, *whump whump whump*. "Couldn't do anything else. Besides, got us a ride out of here."

"Ah, Tommy. You're the greatest." She staggered toward the cop car.

Tom grabbed his briefcase and ran after her. "I—I love you, baby."

Why does any man begin an affair? Was it the impending fortieth birthday and the loss of vigor and sexual prowess traditionally associated with middle age?

Or was it the utter banality of living with the same woman for the past fifteen years, through the ups and downs of raising three children and a succession of overly precocious golden retrievers. Tom thought it something more profound, the need deep inside every male to experience one thing to the fullest, to nurture a spark into a roaring fire. To throw away the rearview mirror of life and press the accelerator to the floor. To be a man, dammit.

Chrissie sat in the passenger seat of the squad car, knees tucked under her chin, exposing the full length of her tanned legs.

Tom tried to concentrate on the road and not her thighs.

She said, "Where we going?"

"We need to get some more Ice." Tom lit a Marlboro Light with one shaking hand. "Then I figure we get the cash I've been giving Bijoux and head south somewhere. I hear you can live like a king in Costa Rica, with plenty of gringo dollars."

"Do you even know how to speak Mexican?" Chrissie scratched her left breast.

“We’re not going to Mexico, baby.” Tom pulled around a slow-moving pickup loaded with hay. “We’re gonna be the king and queen of Costa Rica. I’ll buy us one of those learn-to-speak-Spanish tapes and we’ll be fluent in no time.”

“Let’s just get the Ice and the money first, huh?” Chrissie drummed her fingers on the dash and looked out the rear window. “Then we’ll figure it out.”

Chrissie had arrived in town one month before, on a one-way bus ticket from Shreveport, vague about her past except it involved a crazy ex with a mean right hook. She’d just gotten a job at the local vet’s clinic when Tom had brought the dog in for a bath.

The attraction was instantaneous and electric, beginning with furtive glances and then an accidental brush of their hands when Tom handed over a check. A volley of double entendres ended up with Tom asking her to lunch. To his horror and amazement, she said yes.

He’d persuaded the vet to keep the dog for the remainder of the weekend. He then called his wife and told her an old college friend had gotten thrown in jail in Waco and he was going to bail him out. He’d be home in time for dinner. Probably. It was early Saturday afternoon, and he could tell by her voice she had started on the second bottle of white zinfandel and only really cared about number three.

They went to a barbecue joint one county over and then on to a room at the Shangri-la Motel on Highway Six. The first time they did it, right as he started to come, Chrissie grabbed his balls and gave ’em a good squeeze. Tom had never felt anything as intense and pleasurable and thought he never would again.

That was before they met the next weekend and Chrissie brought a foil package of Ice, the greatest substance known to mankind.

Thirty days later, Tom was in a stolen squad car driving toward a tar-paper juke joint called Jolie’s, looking to score enough meth and money to get them to Costa Rica and a new life. Tom took a deep breath and smiled. *This is living, man.*

The squad car slid to a stop in the gravel parking lot of the bar. Mid-afternoon on a Wednesday and there were only a couple of other vehicles present. A smidgen of the drug remained in the bowl. Chrissie and Tom split it, sucking on the pipestem until their lungs hurt. They hopped out of the auto and pushed their way into the neon gloom of Bijoux Watson’s only legitimate business enterprise.

The place was empty except for an old man in overalls at the bar, drinking a sixteen-ounce can of Schlitz Malt Liquor, and the mulatto bartender, an ex-pimp named Teabag Johnson. The jukebox in the corner played Marvin Gaye’s “Sexual Healing.”

Tom felt the meth track through his body and thought about how appropriate that song was to the situation at hand and how he sure would like to take Chrissie back into Bijoux’s office and nail her on the desk, right next to the safe, which reportedly held enough dope to get half of Texas strung out.

Teabag wiped a glass dry and looked at the door behind them as if expecting the owner to arrive.

Tom and Chrissie sat at the bar. Tom ordered two Miller Lites and two shots of Jose Cuervo Gold.

“Where’s Bijoux?” The bartender set the drinks down. “Ya’ll give him the shit you supposed to?”

“He’s been... delayed.” Tom downed the tequila in one gulp. “Said for me to get some stuff from his office.”

“He told you to get something out a his office?” Teabag frowned and leaned against the bar.

“Yeah.” Tom took a sip of beer to cool the fire in his mouth. He nodded toward Chrissie. “Ask her. She was there.”

The bartender looked at Chrissie.

“I always thought you were pretty cute, Teabag.” She ran her tongue around the rim of the shot glass. “Bet you know how to treat a lady right.”

Tom spluttered on a mouthful of beer.

Teabag kept his face impassive.

“I don’t truck with no whores no more. The preacher says that’s the road to hell.” Teabag reached under the bar. “Y’all is way messed up, been smoking too much crack or sumshit.”

Tom’s vision blurred with anger; the man called his baby a whore. He reached into the waistband of his slacks and pulled out the Glock.

Teabag’s hand came out from under the bar with a sawed-off shotgun.

Tom yanked the trigger and missed, from three feet away.

Chrissie threw her beer bottle at Teabag and connected, a solid blow to the forehead.

The bartender raised a hand to his face and pulled the trigger on the shotgun.

The weapon was pointed about a foot to the right of Tom, away from Chrissie, and only a small portion of the quarter-inch-diameter pellets hit their intended target.

The noise was enormous, like a thunderclap in a cave, and Tom felt a chunk of lead tear into his left bicep and another hit the fleshy part of his side, just above the hip.

He jerked the trigger on the Glock as fast as he could. About half the bullets hit Teabag in the chest and head, the remainder colliding with the bottles of liquor on the shelf behind the bar. For one brief, surreal moment the area where Teabag stood was a virtual waterfall of liquid, a mist of blood and booze, eerily illuminated by the neon beer signs on the wall.

The Glock clicked empty.

Teabag coughed once and fell to the floor, dead.

Tom placed his gun on the bar and clamped a hand over the oozing hole in his arm. He felt no pain, only a mild sensation of pressure deep inside the muscle. The old man drinking beer was nowhere to be seen.

“He shot me, baby.” Tom grabbed a bar rag and wrapped it around his arm.

“It’ll be all right.” Chrissie helped him tie the makeshift bandage. “We get in the office, I’ll give you dose of medicine, okay?”

Tom grabbed the gun, stuck it in his waistband and picked up the bottle of Cuervo from the bar. Together they headed to the office in the back.

Two weeks after their first encounter at the motel, Bijoux Watson, resplendent in a pink warm-up suit and enough gold chains to outfit an entire rap band, showed up in his office at the bank. He talked his way past the secretary

and told Tom he needed five grand or the whole county would know about his little split tail and their love shack over at the Shangri-la.

Tom, on the downside of a two-day bender, put the bank's chairman of the board on hold, in midcomplaint about his president's increasingly erratic behavior, and said, "Who the hell are you?"

Bijoux leaned back and put his Reeboks on top of Tom's desk. "I'm one of those niggas you don't never see, lest we cleaning up your house or serving you a drink at the country club."

Tom hung up on the director.

"I don't know anything about a motel."

"Your gal's name is Chrissie." The man in the garish warm-up suit pulled a piece of gum out of his pocket and stuck it in his mouth. He dropped the wrapper on the floor. "That shit y'all been smokin'. Comes from me."

Tom started to reply but the man held up his hand.

"My place out by the lake. Jolie's." Bijoux stood up. "You be there tomorrow. Noon. With five large in cash."

That had been two weeks and two hundred thousand dollars ago. Money was missing from the bank and people were starting to ask questions. Three days before, they'd hatched a plan to kill Bijoux. Surprisingly, he had fallen for their story, that they had stumbled on some heroin and wanted to use it in lieu of a payment. Tom had said he'd foreclosed on a property and he'd found it when he inspected the place. The rest of it, the blasting caps and the remote-control device... well, it's amazing how resourceful one could be when one had a couple of grams of pharmaceutical-grade meth surfing through one's body.

Now they were in the inner sanctum, Bijoux's office, a place of utter depression for Tom on his five prior visits. They stood by the door for a moment. There was a battered metal desk in the center. On one wall was a set of bookshelves filled with grimy three-ring binders. Another wall was dominated by a big-screen television set. In the corner sat a large, metallic-gray safe. Tom took a swig of tequila.

The safe had a complicated-looking combination lock. It also had a small key sticking out of the middle of the dial. Tom's brother had a gun safe similar to this one. The key was to hold the handle of the safe in the open or closed position. Not nearly as secure as using the combo but, without using the dial, a lot easier to access the interior. Tom twisted the key, then the spoke handle and tugged.

The door swung open. A tiny light popped on and illuminated the interior of the safe, exposing stacks and stacks of plastic bags and cash.

"Holy shit." Chrissie's voice was low, respectful.

Tom gulped.

"I bet it's skag." She grabbed a bag at random and slit it with a letter opener from the desk. "Oh, shit. There must be twenty pounds in here, uncut I'll bet."

Tom ignored her and pulled out a similar size pack, but wrapped in darker plastic. The contents crunched as he massaged it. Butterflies bounced across his stomach as he thought about what might be wrapped in the black covering. He grabbed the opener from Chrissie and cut the container, exposing a couple of hundred tightly bound foil packages.

"Baby, it's Ice." His eyes filled with tears. "We got enough to get us through. We're gonna make it."

They laughed and cried and danced together until Chrissie noticed the blood from Tom's wounded side.

"Let me fix that." She pulled up his shirt and examined the damage.

"Uh, yeah. Okay." Tom unwrapped one of the foil packages. "Let's get high first."

They smoked the whole pack, trading hits, until the world was right again and they'd both forgotten about Tom's injuries.

"It's time to split." Chrissie paced the small room.

"See what's out there." Tom piled cash on the desktop and nodded toward a metal door on the back wall of the office.

Chrissie flipped open the dead bolt and peered outside. "There's a truck... and it looks like some kinda road leading into the woods." Tom stopped shoving money into the small duffel he'd found on the floor and joined her at the door.

"It's gonna work, baby." He hugged her, his hand sliding up under her sleeveless shirt to the smooth flesh covering her rib cage. His groin ached and his words spluttered forth, as fast as the bullets from the Glock.

"We'll go to Austin. Then we'll get new IDs. Saw it on a movie on HBO one time, about how people can do that. Then we'll get on the Internet and find us a place to rent in Costa Rica and we'll buy some clothes. A-a-and—"

"That's a real swell plan." Chrissie slipped from his embrace and faced him in the doorway. "But we need the keys to that truck out there. Unless the folks at banking school taught you how to hot-wire a late model Chevy."

They looked at each other for a moment and then raced back in the office. The Ice made quick work of it. Tom found a cigar box in a file drawer. At the bottom was a GM key and a remote control. He clicked it, and the truck outside chirped.

They smiled at each other and slapped palms across the top of Bijoux Watson's desk.

Chrissie found another duffel and filled it with the speed and heroin while Tom finished loading the money. When they were done, Tom poured them each a shot of Jose Cuervo. They toasted themselves and their cleverness.

"Here's to us on the beach." Chrissie poured another round. "Drinking little fruity drinks with parasols in 'em. Who would 'a thought it?"

Tom downed his fourth tequila of the last half hour and felt it burn all the way to his toes. The Ice kept him alert but not sober. He looked at Chrissie's breasts beneath the thin cotton of her blouse and at her legs, long and shapely underneath the dirty denim skirt. He put his glass down and lurched toward her.

"Baby, let's do it here, before we leave."

"Sure, Tommy." Chrissie held up a hand and smiled. "But first we gotta take care of that hole in your gut."

Tom looked at his left side and saw that it was wet with blood to the middle of his thigh.

"Sit here and I'll patch you up." Chrissie pulled out the chair from behind the desk.

He did as requested.

Chrissie pulled the shirt away and dumped some tequila in the wound. The pain knifed through his side like a sling blade, burning through the last of the heroin in his system.

He struggled not to scream.

Chrissie patted the wound dry with a paper napkin she found on the floor. She fashioned a bandage out of Tom's handkerchief and fastened it over the injury with Scotch tape. The movement and activity were agony and made Tom nauseous.

He burped and tasted alcohol and cigarettes. He wanted to nail Chrissie but it hurt too much.

Finally she was finished. She fixed another hit of Ice and held the pipe to his mouth. He took a couple of puffs and felt the vigor return, though not as strong as last time.

"It hurts," he said.

"I know, baby." Chrissie got out the spoon and dumped a thumbnail portion of heroin in it. After a moment's hesitation, she added a little more. Using Tom's lighter, she heated the drug until it was liquid, then drew it into a syringe.

"Here you go, Tommy. This'll make everything better." She took his arm and injected the full load. He'd never felt anything like it in his life. The alcohol, speed and heroin combined to make him alert but nearly unable to move. Not like he cared to go anywhere. He was warm and comfortable in the padded leather chair, glowing with confidence and power and euphoria.

After a while, he was vaguely aware of Chrissie carrying the duffel bags outside. He kept his eyes open but didn't really see anything until the television set across the room turned on.

Chrissie dropped the remote control on the desktop. The noise startled him.

He blinked and found himself staring at the talking head on the big screen. She was one of the anchors for the station in Waco, the one with the bad permed hair.

The image on the screen shimmered and became the parking lot by the Brazos. A shot of Bijoux Watson's Jaguar and a pair of EMTs loading a body onto an ambulance. That dissolved into a photograph of Tom, his wife and their children. Their Christmas card from last year.

"I—I—I love you, baby." Tom looked at Chrissie, standing in front of the desk with the keys to the Chevy in her hand. His voice was barely above a whisper.

She didn't reply. Her image grew hazy in the dull light of Bijoux Watson's office.

Tom managed to turn his head back to the TV.

The cameras showed his house, the flowers in the front beds he and his oldest son had planted last month. His wife appeared on-screen, mumbling to the reporters, words too indistinct to comprehend. Tom knew he should be sad but wasn't. His breathing became shallow, but it didn't matter. Tom summoned what energy he could and forced his head to make the long slow turn back to where Chrissie stood.

But she was gone.
