


# ***A Good Guy with a Gun***

**by Steven Friedman,**

**Published: 2015**

\*\*\* \*\*

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Dedication</b>	<b>to My Father</b>
<b>March 16th</b>	<b>The Day of the Shooting</b>
	
<b>Chapter 1 ...</b>	<b>Three Months Earlier</b>
<b>Chapter 2 ... thru ... Chapter 19</b>	
<b>March 17th</b>	<b>The Day after the Shooting</b>
<b>Chapter 20 ...</b>	
<b>Chapter 22 ... thru ... Chapter 33</b>	
<b>March 21st</b>	
<b>Chapter 34 ... thru ... Chapter 38</b>	

## Aftermath

[Ed. Note: Chapter 21 apparently missing.]



## Dedication

Dedicated to My Father  
Barry Friedman  
1916-2014

This was our last collaborative project

***A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.***

Second Amendment of the Constitution

*The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. ...*

NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre

## March 16<sup>th</sup>

### The Day of the Shooting

At ten-sixteen, March 16<sup>th</sup>, the door to Emory High School's classroom 1-D burst open. A moment later, a camouflage-clad figure burst into the room. He stood at the threshold holding an AR-15 assault rifle with an extended banana ammunition clip in a firing stance.

For ten seconds the entire roomful — students, teachers — were in freeze-frame silence. Then someone whimpered. Still no one moved.

The shooter swept the rifle barrel until it reached the third seat, first row. A staccato of shots riddled the chest of the young boy in that seat. Only then, amid

horrified cries and screams, the other 20 students scrambled off their seats, frantically ducking under them or lying prone on the floor. The shooter took aim at the exposed back of a student in the fourth row splintering the desk and piercing his spine with a fuselage of bullets. The next victim was a boy in row five, then two in row seven, one in row eight, and on and on it went. One boy in a seat close to the shooter ducked under the shooter's rifle and ran head-long into the corridor amidst a hail of shots. The shooter continued to fire spasmodically at the rest of those in the room.

Clay Shupe, the school's newly hired Armed Guard had been standing near the back entrance to the school when he heard the shots. He raced down the hall toward the commotion with his Glock revolver out of its holster in fire ready position. The student who had escaped bolted toward him and Shupe fired hitting him squarely in the chest. Hearing cries from classroom 1-D he stepped over the fallen boy's body and sprinted to the classroom's door.

The shooter, who was standing just inside the threshold, turned to face Shupe. A grin crept over his face and he lowered the rifle barrel. Showing no emotion, Shupe raised the gun toward the shooter and fired point blank into his head.

Mercifully, the carnage had ended. At least eight students lay dead.

Police Chief Lewis Gibbons leaned against his patrol car watching the students and teachers file rapidly out of Emory High under the protection of shotgun-armed police with body shields. Practically everyone had a cell phone held to his or her ear.

He spoke into the mike on his epaulet. "Hank, is it all clear in there?"

"Yes sir. We're still not sure whether there was one shooter or two. We're looking into it now. We have eight people down now, I repeat eight people down; all appear to be dead. The guard says he thought there were two shooters. There's one down with an assault rifle in the classroom, and one down in the corridor. The guard said he shot the kid in the hall when he lunged at him. He said he saw a gun in his hand."

"Okay, we'll secure the area."

The street was now cluttered with police cars, their overhead bubblegum lights flashing red and blue. A SWAT team was crouched alongside the police cruisers waiting for a signal to go in. Horns blared from cars with frantic parents blocked by barricades at each end of the street.

Gibbons raised a bullhorn. "Everyone can relax now, folks. It's all over! I'd like the teachers to take the students to the gym and wait for the parents to pick them up."

"Got all your pictures, Sam?" Leslie Hart, medical examiner for Emery County called over to Sam Fowler.

Fowler gazed down at the body he'd been photographing. "Got all eight." He shook his head slowly. How could something like this happen again? What would it take to stop these massacres at schools, shopping malls, theaters?

He'd heard the rantings of those gun control nuts; *We've got to prevent mentally disturbed people from getting guns*. As though that was remotely possible..... Today, anyone can buy a weapon. Fowler let out a deep sigh. He wished he had the answer.

Forensic techs had drawn outlines around each of the seven students and the shooter. They lay sprawled in several areas around the classroom, except for the body of the shooter, which was draped over the threshold, and the other in the corridor.

Hart said, "Okay, bag 'em."

Homicide detectives Rick Woods and Grant Howell squatted, peering down at the partially ajar back door to the school. Although the door and frame were metallic, the area around the lock was bent and the door had been jimmed open. On the ground just below the door was a tire iron. Clay Shupe stood behind them and pointed. "You can see the marks where he must have jimmed this open."

Woods looked up at the guard. "Where were you when this was going on?"

Shupe's face turned red. "I was at the back entrance investigating this break in here. I can't be everywhere at once!" He shot back.

Woods held up a hand. "Okay, okay, calm down. No one's accusing you of anything."

The three men entered through the back door. Classroom 1-D was the closest to the back entrance. The bodies had been removed but the blood-smeared floor, splintered desk tops, bullet ridden walls, and the litter of books and papers made a gruesome scene. The horror was magnified by the drawn outlines of the bodies on the schoolroom floor.

Forensics had already picked up the empty shell casings and bullet fragments, marking the sites with small flags, red for the shell casings, white for the bullets.

While Shupe looked on from the doorway, the detectives counted the markers.

Woods said, "I've got fifteen shells."

Howell had another eight.

"There's another casing out in the corridor where the other kid was shot, but no sign of a gun." He glanced at Shupe who was tight-lipped, gazing at the floor. It had been from his gun.

After Howell had taken a number of pictures from different angles the men left by the back door.

As they approached their Crown Victoria, Woods turned to Shupe. "Do you know the names of the shooters or any of the victims?"

Shupe said, "I think the classroom shooter was a kid named Billy Edwards and the other one was a kid named LeVon something-or-other. I don't know who the victims were."

"Thanks. We've got a lot of work to do. We'd like you to come downtown and fill us in on everything you know. Give us a time line."

"Right now?"

Woods shook his head. "No, the school people will want to talk to you first. And I'm sure the media will too." He smiled. "Going in there, facing a kid with an assault rifle like you did was pretty brave. You're gonna get the real hero treatment."

"Look, I just did what I had to do. Anybody sees someone pointing a gun at them would do the same thing."

"So I guess the NRA got it right", chimed in Howell, "The only thing that *can* stop a bad guy with a gun is a *good* guy with a gun".

# Chapter 1

## Three Months Earlier

Florida State Representative Hugh Smith stood before the State Legislature, pleading his case for passing the new armed school guard initiative, referred to by most as *The Good Guy with a Gun Law*. It mandated stationing armed guards in every school throughout Florida's school districts.

"Look what's happened at Columbine, Wisconsin, Oregon, and now Newtown Connecticut, Smith went on. America is gripped in frenzy over these gun deaths, and the only thing that these *liberals* propose is to make new laws to take away our guns". He glanced down at the words in NRA brochure on the dais and paused, "The only way to stop a *bad* guy with a gun is to confront him with a *good* guy with a gun! Gentlemen, I think we've spent enough time debating this issue. We've heard from our liberal friends there on the left of the aisle who only want to strip us of our Second Amendment rights. With all due respect, none of their proposals will prevent evil or deranged individuals from killing off the young kids who represent our heritage."

"I call for a vote!"

"Hear, hear!" Shouts from the Republican-held majority rang through the chamber.

The Speaker rapped his gavel. "You heard the gentleman from Victoria County. Are you ready to vote?"

A chorus of "Ayes" filled the room.

"Opposed?"

A scattering of "nays" from the left side of the aisle made the point moot.

The Speaker banged his gavel. "The motion before this House is: *Armed Guards shall be placed in all public schools in the state*. Clerk, call the roll."

Half an hour later, the clerk turned to the speaker. "Mr. Speaker, the vote is 118 ayes and 2 nays."

The State Senate vote mirrored that of the House. The Good Guy with a Gun measure had passed.

Within a week of the State Legislature's vote, a special meeting of the Emery School District convened to affirm the hiring of armed guards at all the district schools. Theirs was chosen to be the pilot program for the new law. Of the sixteen school board members, there were only two dissenting votes. Maureen Scott, one of the dissenters, argued that "We need fewer guns in our schools, not more". She contended "We can't always know who is the good guy and who is the bad guy, sooner or later a good guy with a gun is going to shoot an innocent person!"

Her impassioned plea to the other school board members convinced only one other member. The others overwhelmingly supported the program.

## Chapter 2

Orange Grove, Florida is a small community ten miles east of St. Petersburg. It consisted of a number of orange groves that had been purchased by real estate speculators in the 1990's. They had built up the community during the real estate boom that followed and it now had two elementary schools, a middle school and a high school.

For most of that decade and the next, the community had been almost exclusively White. But, after the Real Estate Crash in 2008, a number of upwardly mobile Black families bought newly-foreclosed homes at the depressed prices.

By 2013, the population of Black students in Orange Grove schools had swelled to more than thirty. Race relations at the schools were for the most part good, but this was still the South. Some White families hurt by the economic recession, expressed strong anti-minority views. There was an undercurrent of resentment, encouraged by those in the Tea Party, toward anyone who felt the government owed them something—food stamps and healthcare being the most visible culprit.

The previous year there had been a few racial incidents within the school district—one at a football game with a rival community in which a fight between White students and Black students had forced the suspension of both teams for the rest of the season. There were also a growing number of home robberies that some had attributed to roving gangs of Blacks.

Politically, the community was solidly Red Republican, with strong support for the Second Amendment and guns. Any Democrat who proposed gun control had metaphorically put a gun to his head.

In 2013, Orange Grove became one of the pilot school districts to implement the *Good Guy with a Gun Law*. Originally, the governor wanted to permit teachers to carry concealed firearms into their classrooms, but after a resounding howl from the school teachers, they settled on hiring at least one armed guard for each of schools in Orange Grove.

In a tight economy with a large segment of the population out of work, the idea of a full time job, with benefits, that let you carry a firearm, was just too good to be true. Not surprising then, there were over 200 applicants for each of the four jobs. Although it was well into the school year, there was a lot of pressure from parents in Orange Grove, whose vivid memories of the Newtown shooting were still fresh, to fill the positions as soon as possible.

## Chapter 3

Harris Alton, Chairman of the Emery School District, leafed through a sheaf of job applications on the mahogany desk at which he sat. Facing him was Clay Shupe, a stocky well built man in his early fifties. His head was shaved, his chin jutted forward as he sat, his hands twitching in his lap.

Alton pointed at the papers. "It says here that you were in the Army."

Alton continued to read from the paper. “Iraq, Afghanistan—three tours.” He looked up.

Shupe nodded and shrugged.

“It says that you left the service after thirteen years.” He said continuing to read through the resume before him.

Alton puffed through his lips, “Well, it looks like you’ve got the qualifications we need to do the job—more than qualified.” He scratched his chin. “I’m a little puzzled though, with that kind of experience, doesn’t this job seem a little beneath your capabilities. I mean couldn’t you be a police officer?”

Shupe shrugged. “Sure. But nearly every community in Florida is laying-off police. This seems like a lot more secure job—given what’s been happening around the country these days”

“Hmm Hmm,” Alton mumbled.

“Then I got the job?”

“Well, I still have to run it through my board, but I think it should be a slam dunk.”

Shupe stood and extended his hand. “When do I start?”

Alton took his hand. “As soon as the approval goes through I’ll be in touch.”

Shupe started for the door.

Alton raised a finger. “Oh, one other thing. It shows here that you’ve had two other security jobs over the past three years. Why were you let go?”

“Economic factors sir. The one job at the housing development ended when they went belly up, and the other one at the chemical factory had to lay-off people—it’s the economy you know.”

Alton said, “Just curious.”

“That’s it?”

Alton said. “That’s all. We’ll be in touch.”

After Shupe had left, Alton sat staring at the paper on his desk. He’d done the math. Although the guy was obviously more than qualified for the position of armed guard at Emery High, something still didn’t seem to add up. But he had too many other important things to worry about that right now.

As Board Chairman Alton had predicted, Shupe’s appointment as armed guard for Emery High breezed through. A week after his interview, Clay Shupe, decked out in a khaki uniform, Smokey Bear hat, and dark-tinted sunglasses stood legs apart with his thumbs hooked into his gun belt, watching as the students filed into the school as they did each weekday morning, and then left the school at three each afternoon. The rest of the time, he either walked around the school building or lounged in his office. Visitors, even parents, who wanted to enter during school hours, had to show IDs. Anyone one who did not belong there was not getting in on his watch.

## Chapter 4

Billy Edwards sat propped against the wall of the parking lot partially hidden by a large sawgrass plant. His sort-of girlfriend Melissa sat next to him. Both had cut class preferring to hang out together than to suffer the drudgery of another history class.

Melissa looked behind her, “Do you think he sees us?”

“I don’t know. He seems to just be staring at us” mumbled Billy.

“Don’t you think we should move?”

“If he starts to come over we’ll run for it, but let’s just see what he does.”

Clay Shupe, the armed guard, stood in the shade of a willow tree, his eyes never moving from the couple.

“That guy is just creepy!” uttered Melissa.

Mostly he let the White students, like Billy and Melissa, alone—not that many of them cut classes. Some of the Black students found out the hard way, though, that you don’t try to cut classes at Emory High. If he found them in the parking lot during class hours, Shupe would collar them and lead them into the principal’s office.

Melissa and Billy were drawn together by being social outcasts. Neither one of them had siblings. Both lived with single moms— Billy’s father had left when he was eight, and his mom had to work two jobs to support them. That left Billy a latch-key kid most of the time.

Melissa also lived with just her mom. Her father had been sent up to the State Prison in Starke on an armed robbery charge.

Billy rated close to zero on the personality scale— in fact he rarely even spoke. Some of his teachers thought he might be autistic, but his IQ test results fell in the middle percentile. Because of what was perceived to be his moodiness, the principal at his last school recommended that he be evaluated by a psychologist, but his mom begged off saying they had no health insurance and the State Medicaid would not pay for it. Nothing further was done.

Aside from Melissa, Billy wasn’t interested in girls. It wasn’t that he was gay; he just didn’t show any real interest in anyone or anything. He was usually passed along from grade to grade, doing just enough work to pass. Besides, none of the teachers relished the thought of having Billy in their class for two years in a row.

Melissa actually was smart and she had a natural aptitude for music and dance. The rest she could care less about. She liked the fact that there were now some cool Black kids at the school. All the others students seemed to be into Country Music or Rock and Roll. She liked Rap and Hip Hop. When she could, she’d sneak into the dance studio and try to make up dance moves to her favorite music. She dreamed of being chosen for a spot on the **So You Think You Can Dance** television show. Her mom worked long hours at the hospital in the laundry room. They were only barely able to afford the rent for their two bedroom apartment in Orange Grove. From time to time her mother would get depressed and then go on a drinking binge. Her mother’s working hours meant that the two seldom ate together let alone conversed. The two lead separate lives. In addition, her mother’s fondness for booze did not sit well with her daughter. Their fights were more frequent than their good times together.



She was only seven when her father was sent up and he wasn't around that much before that, so she didn't really have a lot of memories of him. She never went to visit or write to him in prison.

She hung out with Billy not so much because she was romantically inclined toward him, but because he was quiet and didn't put any demands on her.

She looked around again and said, "Is he still there? He just stands there staring at us. He's just creeping me out!"

On that note, she gathered up her backpack and left Billy alone in his spot against the wall.

Billy glanced over again and Shupe was still there, standing under a tree, just glaring at him. It was not as though this was the first time either. Over the past couple of weeks wherever he found a place to hang out, Shupe would be not far away, just staring at him. This time though Shupe walked over toward Billy.

"How ya doing son?" He said smiling.

What did he want from him and what right did he have calling him son? Billy thought of him as a cop and he wasn't sure if he was going to find himself in trouble with him. He struggled to his feet.

"I-I'm okay." Billy stammered.

"Why'd your girlfriend take off? Have a fight?"

"S-she's not my girlfriend, and we didn't have a fight."

"I noticed some of the other guys pickin' on you. Must bother you some, right?"

Billy wondered why this guy was paying so much attention to him. Wished he'd leave him alone.

"They don't bother me."

"Sure they do," Shupe countered. "How old are you, son? Sixteen? Seventeen?"

"Seventeen" Billy replied.

Shupe looked Billy up and down and said, "You know you sort of remind me of someone—Do you know who?"

Billy shook his head.

"Me! I was just like you when I was your age. Didn't have no friends. My old man was a drunk. He'd beat me up if I looked cross-eyed at him. I felt like a piece of shit, pardon the expression. Know what changed me?" Billy shook his head.

"The Army!" replied Shupe.

"The Army?"

"Yessir, the Army!" Shupe replied, "They put a gun in my hand and, man, that changed my life. I was no longer a piece of garbage anyone could kick around. I had a gun and I could fight back."

Billy was listening absorbed. This guy seemed to have him pegged.

The school bell rang and Shupe patted him on the shoulder.

"You'd better get going, but if anyone gives you a hard time, you come to me, hear?"

Billy stumbled back to the school entrance still perplexed after listening to that man treating him like a friend.

## Chapter 5

Wednesdays were the one day of the week Melissa most looked forward to. Although the school district had had massive cutbacks over the past three years, it was able to keep some semblance of an arts program going.

Emory High School had a dance studio complete with video recording equipment, and an arts/music teacher who taught there three days a week. Melissa liked her. The last music teacher she'd had at her previous school was a total yokel. All he cared about was *Old Thyme Country Music*. She could almost hear his twang now. Mrs. Watson though was different. She was new to teaching and had spent enough time in big cities to get a feel for the local Black culture. She understood Rap and Hip Hop music, although some of the raunchier stuff offended her. Most of the other White students at Emory weren't interested in that stuff. Melissa relished the chance to try out new moves to music in the dance studio.

She spoke up, "Mrs. Watson, could I possibly come in after school today and work with you on some of the new dance moves I've been trying?"

"I'm so sorry, Melissa," said Emily "but I have a teachers meeting today. Maybe we could do it later this week or next week?"

"Okay", said Melissa, her disappointment showed.

Emily Watson felt sympathetic toward her. She knew that Melissa was smart and talented, but just not motivated by the cookie cutter curriculum the high school offered. She also knew how hard things were at home, and she could tell whenever her mom had gone on a binge and fought with her. She really hoped that maybe she could help her.

## Chapter 6

About a week after their conversation, Billy found Shupe in his usual perch under the willow tree. This time Billy came over to talk to him,

"Not liking class much today?" asked Shupe, "That's OK, I didn't much care for that stuff either—all that BS they teach you in History class! They got it all wrong. The real Patriots are the ones that shaped this country, and someday will reshape it again."

Billy didn't hear much of what he said. He just kept staring at the handgun holstered on Shupe's belt.

He said, "C-could I look at your gun?"

Shupe looked down at Billy, "Don't call it a *gun*, it's a *handgun*. A *Glock nine millimeter, semi-automatic handgun* to be specific. It deserves the respect to call it by its proper name"

He glanced around to be sure no one was close by, then unholstered his sidearm and handed it to Billy, butt first. "This baby can stop anything!"

Billy carefully took the gun with both hands, holding it as though it were a poisonous snake. It was heavier than he thought.

“Is it loaded?”

“Yessir!” Shupe spoke up sharply. “Always point it toward the ground, and keep your finger off the trigger. Hold it with respect, like you intend to use it!”

“You ever fire a handgun?”

“No Sir” replied Billy.

Shupe pondered a moment, “How’d you like to come down to the shooting range with me someday after school and maybe fire off a few rounds?”

Jesus! Someone was offering him a chance to shoot a gun!

“Yes sir! I’d really like that!” Billy stammered.

Shupe took back the gun and holstered it.

“OK, maybe next Wednesday, after school. Until then you try and stay in class, OK?”

He added, “Oh, and don’t go telling anybody about this. A lot of people don’t understand about guns and get real upset about good honest people shooting them. So for now it’s just between you and me. Got it?”

## Chapter 7

The following Wednesday, Shupe pulled Billy aside as he came out of the door after school.

Quietly he said, “Be at the corner of Spruce and Fourth in about twenty minutes. I’ll be driving a green Ford pickup.”

Billy’s eyes opened wide. “We gonna do some shooting?”

Shupe nodded. “I hope you didn’t go blabbing about this to anyone. It’s bad enough I’m meeting you alone after school. If the people at the school ever got wind that I took you to a shooting range without your parent’s OK, I’d be toast.”

“No sir,” said Billy, “No one else knows about this, I promise!”

Twenty minutes later, Shupe pulled up to the curb where Billy stood waiting. They drove in silence for about twenty minutes along a paved state route east of Orange Grove. They turned off at a rutted dirt road and bumped along through a forest of slashed pine, and red mangrove trees. The dirt trail ended at a wire fence topped by barbed wire. A gate in the fence was secured by a chain and padlock. On either side of the gate were warning signs reading, *Private Property No Entry*, and *Trespassers Will Be Shot*.

Shupe got out of the pickup and unlocked the metal gate, then drove through and relocked it. They drove on for a few hundred yards coming to a clearing in which stood a gray two-story farmhouse. A pickup was parked alongside the house and a man sat on the dilapidated porch. As they drove up, the man waved at Shupe but Shupe didn’t stop or acknowledge him.

A few yards further they came to a cinder block three-sided shed with a tar paper roof in which sat a well scarred table. The open side of the shed faced a large open field.

In the field, about 20 yards in front of the shed was a row of five wood pedestals on each of which was mounted a black life-sized torso cardboard cutout. The bottom of each pedestal was fitted with crossed foot-long metal feet to steady it but still allow it to be moved.

Shupe reached into the space behind the pickup driver's seat and pulled out a gym bag. He and Billy got out of the truck and Shupe placed the gym bag on the table and unzipped it. From it he withdrew two earmuffs, one of which he gave to Billy.

"When we start shooting, you'll want to put this on so you don't damage your eardrums."

Next, he unholstered his Glock and pushed a button at the base of the grip to eject the magazine.

"This is how you load it."

He fed six rounds of 9mm ammunition into the magazine. Standing legs apart, he raised the gun with both hands, squinted down the sights at one of the targets, and fired off six shots in rapid succession. Six holes were in the center bull's-eye in the chest area on the target.

"Nice shooting Clay!" came a voice from the back. "Too bad we can't start shooting at the *real* targets. I hear they have about two dozen of them over at that high school you been babysitting!"

The man who spoke stood in the shadows. He was slender but well-built. He wore a blue work shirt with sleeves cut off exposing tattoos on both forearms. The one on his left read *Die Niggers*, and on the right, *White Power*. His greasy hair was down to his neck and he reeked of motor oil and body odor.

Shupe said "This is Billy, he wants to learn about guns and how to shoot."

The other man said, "Ya' gonna teach him about the other stuff too Clay? Like why we need the guns to protect ourselves from the niggers!"

Shupe turned and shot the man a glare. The man turned and walked away.

Shupe took Billy into the shack and showed him how to load the six rounds into the magazine and then slide it into the grip of the gun. He made sure that Billy knew where the safety was, and that it was in the safe position.

"Let me show you the proper stance for shooting a pistol, and how to steady the gun with both hands."

Standing behind him supporting Billy's arms, Shupe's fingers moved to the gun and slid the safety to the off position.

"Okay, now sight down the barrel and squeeze the trigger."

Billy squinted then pulled the trigger. A loud bang accompanied by the recoil that sent Billy's arms flying over his head. Shupe had anticipated this and braced Billy so that he didn't go careening backwards with the gun flying out of his hands.

Billy stood for a moment shaking his head and letting the ringing in his ears settle down. He had fired a gun, and a very powerful one at that! After a few more tries, Shupe told him to try it himself.

Billy steadied himself like Shupe had shown him and then slowly squeezed the trigger.

The first time the recoil flung his arms up, but by the third round, he was able to control it to the point where he actually hit the target.

“Wow! That was fantastic”, said Billy, “Can I shoot some more?”

Shupe loaded six more rounds in the Glock and carefully handed it to Billy. This time, Billy knew exactly what to do. He assumed the proper shooting stance with his arms extended and slid the safety to the armed position. He squinted down the sight and fired six more times in succession. He hit the target three out the six times.

As Shupe cleaned his weapon at the table in the shed, Billy asked him about other guns Shupe had. Shupe told him all about the different types of handguns he owned and about the semi-automatic assault weapons he owned. He told Billy about banana clips that could hold more than 30 rounds and allow a person to fire off 30 rounds in the span of 26 seconds. Billy listened to all this totally transfixed. Nothing in his life ever seemed as powerful and captivating as this.

As they drove back, Billy turned to Shupe and said, “What did that man mean by what he said about needing guns to protect against the niggers?”

Shupe kept looking straight ahead. “Pay him no mind, Billy. That Jess Banks just don’t know to keep his big mouth shut.”

“Does he own the range?”

“Naw, he’s just the caretaker. The whole property is owned by a bunch of us guys.”

“Like a gun club?”

“Exactly”.

They drove on in silence for another five minutes. Then Shupe said, “Did it bother you that he used the word nigger?”

Billy wasn’t sure how to answer. He’d always accepted without question the word of his teachers that the term was insulting. The publically correct term was African-American or Blacks.

Shupe said, “You have any friends who are ni....-Black?”

Billy snorted. He didn’t have any friends—good, bad or otherwise. To Shupe he said, “No, not really.”

They had reached the street where Billy lived.

“I’ll leave you off at the corner and you can walk home” uttered Shupe .

“Sure, and thanks again, Mr. Shupe. This has been really cool.” Billy replied.

“Just remember, Billy, this is just between you and me. *No one else* knows! You got it?”

“I promise Mr. Shupe”, said Billy, “Can we do this again?”

“We’ll see—maybe next week—Maybe I’ll let you fire my assault rifle next time.”

“Wow! Would that ever be great!”

“See you then Billy—Remember *not a word!*”

## Chapter 8

Billy walked the short distance to his home in a trance. *Wow was that ever great!* He thought to himself. He could just imagine over and over in his head the feel of power in his hands. *Shupe is an OK guy*, he thought, *he’s not creepy at all!*

Shupe pulled his pick-up into the driveway of his one story double-wide trailer house on the outside of town. He walked in and placed his gun in the locked cabinet in the hallway.

“Where you been Shupe?” His wife called out from the kitchen, “I had dinner an hour ago without you!”

“You been at one of your secret meetings again?”

“You shut the fuck up about that, woman! Mouthing off like that is going to get you nothing but a lot of trouble from me—and you don’t want that kind of trouble!” He growled threateningly.

“Now get me a beer! And where the fuck is that slut of a daughter or yours!”

Madge was a small mousy woman. She was afraid of him for good reason. He had beaten her on more than one occasion, and twice the police had been called but no formal charges were ever filed. Her daughter, Stephanie, was a love child by another man. Stephanie was eight when Madge met Shupe after he got out of the Army. He and her daughter didn’t get along much. Once he caught her flirting with an older Black boy and he beat her. In any case, he certainly was capable of anything. She’d made up her mind that she’d do what she had to do to protect her daughter.

Madge knew very little about the secret meetings that Shupe went out to from time to time. She just knew that they were with people she had no desire to ever meet. She had no idea what they did at those meetings or what they talked about, nor did she ever wish to. At least when he went to those meetings he’d be out of the house and she and her daughter would be safe.

## Chapter 9

Billy could not keep the pistol shooting lesson Shupe had given him out of his mind. He could hardly wait to see his new found friend again and maybe learn more about the guns he had. It was all he could do to keep from telling Melissa about it, but he kept to his promise.

The day after they’d been to the range, he spied Shupe at the school entrance.

“Hey Shupe! How’s it going!” Billy yelled.

Shupe strolled up to Billy. In a quiet, menacing voice, he said “Listen Billy, when I am at school, you don’t know me! You got it!”

Billy gulped, “Okay Shupe”.

Shupe modulated his tone “Look kid, it’s for both of our own good. You keep your distance while I’m on duty and I’ll still keep my promise about going to the shooting range with you”.

Billy sighed, relieved that he hadn’t offended Shupe.

“Ok, I’ll keep my distance at school!”

After a while, Billy ditched his one o’clock class and headed for his usual perch. After a few minutes, Melissa came over to where he was sitting and plopped down next to him.

“God I hate this school!” she let out. “If it weren’t for arts/music class I’d die!”

“What’s up with you Billy?—You seem like the cat that ate a canary. Do you want to tell me about it or let me guess?”

Billy just grinned and said “Sorry, its nothing I can share with you Melissa, it’s sort of personal.”

“What! Do you actually have a date or something? Maybe even a real girl friend?” Melissa teased.

“I just *can’t* say!” Billy said barely containing a grin.

“Anyway Billy, I need your help. I want to do a video of some new dance moves I’ve been working on and I need you to handle the video equipment.”

“I don’t know how to use that stuff!” protested Billy.

“It’s easy”, Melissa countered, “I’ll show you how to set it up and tape it, and then transfer it to DVD. They have a whole studio full of equipment in the dance room. You’ll get the hang of it in no time!”

“When did you want to do it?” asked Billy.

“We can sneak in there after school. The room is supposed to be locked, but Mrs. Watson usually leaves it unlocked for me to go practice in. So are we on for later today?” pleaded Melissa.

“Okay”, replied Billy.

Later that day, he kept his word and met up with Melissa after everyone had gone home. They opened the unlocked studio door and walked into the darkened room. Melissa turned on the lights and Billy stood astounded by the large mirrored dance studio before him.

“Wow! I’ve never been in here before! It’s huge!”

“Come over here Billy”, said Melissa.

Melissa went into another darkened room with a large glass window that faced into the dance studio. She turned on the lights revealing a large computer console and a video camera on a tripod.

Billy walked over the equipment.

“What do I do?” he inquired.

Melissa showed him how to manage the computer sound system, and then how to operate the video camera. After a couple of tries, Billy got the hang of it. She then showed him how to transfer the recorded video from the camera to a DVD in the computer.

Leaving Billy in the room to operate the camera and sound, she went back into the dance studio and twisted, turned and arched her body in warm up moves.

She called to Billy, “Okay, I’m ready. Cue up the music.”

For an hour, she performed her hip hop dance moves to the music, and then dropped into a chair, perspiration dripping from her forehead.

Billy came over with the DVD he’d made.

After they played it, Melissa threw him a high-five. “Great, Billy! Thanks.”

## Chapter 10

LeVon Ralston was a junior at Emory High. He had transferred there a year before when his family moved to Orange Grove from Cleveland, Ohio. He was tall, athletically built and very suave with the girls.

The previous year he had gone out for the football team and made first string varsity. That same year LeVon was involved in an incident at an away football game at another school that resulted in both teams' suspension for the rest of the season. After one of the opposing players repeatedly made racial slurs aimed at him, he began throwing punches. Other players on both teams got into the fight, and so did some spectators from the stands. The incident became a full scale riot and the police had to be called in to finally break it up. After that, many of the White members of the team resented LeVon for starting the fight that resulted in the team's suspension.

LeVon had grown up in Cleveland, Ohio. His family had only recently moved to Orange Grove after both of his parents got promotions at the insurance company where they worked. With their new higher incomes, they were able to afford a recently foreclosed home in Orange Grove.

LeVon's upbringing in Ohio left him with intolerance for racial slurs. This was not entirely shared with his fellow Black students who had grown up in the Old South. By now, they were inured to the occasional "dissing" to which they were subjected.

LeVon associated mostly with other Black students. The one exception to this was Melissa, whose enthusiasm for Hip Hop and Rap dancing made the two compatriots for whom the color line was erased. Their dance moves were met with enthusiasm by impromptu audiences of the other Black students.

"Hey girl! *Wassup!*" He said as Melissa came trotting up to him.

"You been working on those new dance moves I been teaching you?"

Melissa gave him a high-five hand slap.

"Yeah, *homeboy!* I've been working on 'em. What you been doing with your *Black ass* lately?"

To that the small group of Black students let out a howl of laughter.

"Boy, don't she even talk like a homey now!" one of them exclaimed.

"I heard you got in trouble the other day after a run in with Shupe?" said Melissa.

LeVon cursed, "*Sheeeet!* There's something not right with that dude. He been ragging on *all* the brothers here. I tell you that guy's a *redneck* and a *racist cracker!*"

"Anyway, what you got to show me girl?"

Melissa took the DVD that she had made out of her backpack and handed it to LeVon. "I made this last night in the Dance studio. Check it out."

"I will girl! Right after I get home, I'll do just that"

## Chapter 11



Billy raced to the rendezvous place to meet up with Shupe, who had promised to take him to the shooting range again today. All he could think about this past week was what it felt like to shoot a gun.

Shupe's pickup rolled up right on time and Billy hopped in.

"I got a surprise for you today, Billy", he said.

"How'd you like to fire a semi-automatic assault rifle today?"

Billy's eyes lit up, "Wow, you bet I would!"

They rode the rest of the way in silence. Billy mostly just thought about what he had learned the last time from Shupe. When they got to the run-down shooting range, Shupe brought out a large oblong gym bag and placed it on the table. He unzipped it to reveal an AK-47 with a large banana clip attached just in front of the trigger and pistol grip. He released the clip and showed Billy the 30 rounds it held.

"I faced down quite a few of these babies in Iraq and Afghanistan— mostly on the receiving end from a bunch of *towel-heads* who wanted to send me to *Allah*" he said. "I replied back in kind with my M-16—which is why we're talking here today."

"They used to make these babies *fully-automatic*, but ever since those gun hating liberals in Washington got in, they had to all be converted to *semi-automatic*. They even banned them outright for a few years until they repealed the law. Now they want to ban them again along with a whole lot of other weapons! Well not if I can help it!" he exclaimed.

He took up his stance at the firing line and shouldered the weapon. Then in rapid succession he fired off 20 shots in the span of under twelve seconds at the outlined target. Every shot went directly into the kill zone of either the chest or the head on the target.

"Ready to try it yourself?" he said to Billy with a grin.

Billy picked up the gun and felt its surprisingly light weight in his hands. Shupe showed him the proper way to stand and shoulder the weapon. He showed Billy how to toggle the safety, and how to aim down the top mounted sight. When he was ready, he stood back and let Billy go ahead and pull the trigger. There was a loud crack, but Billy held his stance without letting the recoil throw him off balance. Then he fired again, this time in quick succession until the remaining 10 shots were fired.

Billy stood speechless. He could not get over the raw power he had just wielded in his own hands. A few of the shots got into the target figure, but most went wide.

"Can I try it again? "I think I can do better", he exclaimed.

Shupe loaded the large banana clip and shoved it into the mount.

"OK, son, show me what you got" replied Shupe.

The time Billy fired 5 rounds in short succession; re-aimed and fired 10 more. He'd hit most in the human form on the target, with only a few going astray.

"Nice shooting kid!" came a voice from the shadows.

It was Jess, the grungy caretaker with the tattoos.

"You ready to join the up with the Army?" he asked.

"I'm too young to enlist", replied Billy coolly.

"Not in *our Army*", said the tattooed man slyly.

Shupe shot Jess a cold glance and muttered something menacing to him that Billy couldn't quite make out.

Jess then retreated back into the small office.

They were both silent for most of the drive back home. Then Billy spoke up.

"What army was that man talking about?" He asked. "It sounded to me that he didn't mean the US army".

Shupe was silent for a moment and then he spoke very solemnly.

"Billy, there are a lot of things they don't teach you about in that school because the Liberals and Blacks control the media. But there is another side to things that they don't teach you." He paused.

"Billy there is going to be a war soon! Right here in America! It's going to be a war that decides who controls everything; and it's going to be between the White people and the Black people"

Billy looked skeptical.

"Have you ever heard of the *Black Panthers* Billy?" asked Shupe

Billy replied "Vaguely, weren't they a militant group in the 1960's? I thought they were all gone now."

"Not on your life, Billy. They just went underground. Now they are arming up for the big war that's going to come...., just like we are." replied Shupe.

"What do you mean by *we are*?" asked Billy.

"Billy, there is a group of *true patriots*, White men like myself who are bound and determined not to let the Black Panthers take over this country. When the war starts, and the liberal pacifist government sits by helpless, we are the ones that are going to defend the White people in this country. Without us, it'll be the White people who will be the slaves and the Black people who will be the masters."

Billy sat uncomprehending.

Shupe turned onto the street where Billy lived and stopped. He reached into the back of the cab of the pickup and brought out a well-worn paperback book, and some pamphlets. He handed them to Billy and said, "Read these Billy and maybe you'll start to understand the real truth about what is happening in America now and who will be there to defend it."

Billy walked the short distance to his house still stunned. He had never heard any of this before. He really liked and trusted Shupe, but none of this made sense to him. He looked down at the title of the book Shupe had given him, *Changing America: The Inevitable Race War Between White and Black*, and a newspaper called *American Renaissance* put out by a group called American Front. He planned to read them so he could understand what Shupe meant.

## Chapter 12

The meeting was held in a room in the back of a small bar well outside of town. No one who wasn't known by the bartender got near the room.

When all twenty-seven men were present, Evan Hoyt, the leader, called the meeting to order.

Hoyt was a man in his late fifties, six-foot-two in his cowboy boots, receding gray hair and a trimmed gray goatee and mustache. He owned a fifty acre cattle farm outside Orange Grove. He told everyone to stand, place their hands over their hearts and recite the *White Power Pledge of Allegiance*.

When they were seated, he cleared his throat. "The day of the inevitable *race war* is coming soon. That *African nigger* the liberals installed as President wants to disarm all the White people in America, while all the Black people are arming themselves to the teeth. It won't be long before they'll try to pass laws to take the guns away from God-fearing White people under the guise of *gun control* unless we do something first."

"We've got to be particularly careful now because Federal agents are infiltrating groups like ours all over the country". He swept a glance over the group, most of whom wore the blue jeans and work shirts of farmers, construction workers and truck drivers. Several were dressed more formally and appeared to be shopkeepers or professionals.

He went on, "No one blabs about this group outside of this room. Got it?"

They all nodded.

He turned to Shupe.

"Who's this boy you been bringing to the shooting range? Can he be trusted?"

Shupe said, "He doesn't know anything about us yet, but I'm working on him. I think I can bring him around to our way of thinking and make him a recruit to our cause. He's a good kid and he knows how to keep his mouth shut."

"You just see that he does!" said Hoyt. "One of our boys got busted in Osceola County for gun possession a month ago. Apparently, he was planning to stage disruptions at Orlando City Hall. The Police report says he wanted to stir up *media attention* in order to try to gain new recruits for our cause. That's what happens when someone calls too much attention to the group".

After that, the group broke up into drinking and talking about guns, and how the Black Panthers with the help of their Black President were taking over America.

At its zenith in the 1960's the White Supremacists numbered in the thousands throughout Florida. But between the FBI infiltrations and the booming Florida economy in the 1990's, their number dwindled. Then came 9/11 and the real estate and economic crash. There was a quiet resurgence of these groups. Ever fearful of infiltration by the FBI, they were extremely secretive. Their new members were often drawn from Obama Haters, and anti-Muslim and anti-immigration activists.

In the Army, Shupe had secretly joined the *American Front*. They railed that the coming *race war* was soon to be upon us, and that White People needed to arm themselves for the coming apocalypse. When he returned from his tour of duties in the Middle East, he continued his association with them. It ended up costing him his job when one of the employees ratted him out at the chemical plant he worked at.

While no Florida politicians supported them openly, it was well known that a few in the state's legislature were sympathizers and Florida's NRA chapter was rife with them in high places.

## Chapter 13

It had been more than two weeks since Billy had videotaped Melissa's dance performance in the studio. She had not seen much of Billy since that time. Usually she could find him holed up in his usual perch outside the school, but he hadn't been there recently. Although their relationship was casual and purely platonic, she was surprised that she missed his company.

Today he came sauntering up to Melissa.

"Billy! Where have you been? I've been working on some new dance moves and thought we could do another video together," Melissa asked.

Billy pursed his lips and snarled, "Why do you listen to that nigger music Melissa?"

Melissa was taken aback. She'd never heard him use the n-word before. "*What did you just say Billy?!*"

"I said *why do you listen to that nigger music, and why do you hang out with them?!*" he seethed.

"You know the time is going to come when you're going to have to choose which side of the fence you're on; the Black side or the White side!"

His words hit her like a blast of cold air. She couldn't believe they came from the Billy Edwards she knew.

She had trouble squeezing out the words, "I don't know who's been filling your head with crap like that, but I don't like it one bit! What's gotten into you?"

Billy just turned away and said, "It's time you woke up to the truth Melissa. It's *us or them*".

Melissa just pushed him away, eyes brimming with tears. Even though she wasn't romantically attracted to Billy, she liked him—until now.

*How could he say such stuff? Who's been filling his head with crap like that?* She thought.

She wanted to confront him again to know who has been telling him all this stuff but the rancor he'd exhibited frightened her.

For more than a week after she'd been subjected to Billy's tirade, she avoided Billy whenever she saw him, but she still needed to know who he'd been talking to and filling his head with all this stuff. Today, she was on her way home when she saw him waiting on a street corner. She stood out of his sight, shielded by a bush, and watched as a green pickup truck stopped and Billy got in. She could see through the window though that Shupe was driving it.

*Where could they possibly be going together?* she thought.

She didn't trust Shupe at all. She knew he'd been hassling the Black students at Emory, and despite parents' and the students' protests, the school administration refused to do anything about it.

## Chapter 14

Melissa had still remained quite outwardly cool and distant toward Billy; at least until she could get to the bottom of this relationship he had with Shupe.

Just after the school holiday, she was standing on the periphery of the parking lot, when suddenly she saw Shupe come racing out from behind the parked cars. He lunged at LeVon, grabbing him by the throat yelling “*You goddamned motherfucking Nigger! What did you and your Black Panther buddies do with my guns!*”

LeVon fought to resist, but Shupe had him pinned on the ground and was on top of him.

Shupe put his mouth to LeVon’s ear and snarled, “*When I find out who took my stuff, I’m going to finish them!*”

Three other Black students came to LeVon’s rescue and pulled Shupe off him. While LeVon struggled to his feet, Shupe brushed his uniform off and stormed away muttering curses.

Melissa just stood at the edge of the parking lot, totally aghast. She went up to LeVon who stood in the parking lot, still shaking.

“*What just happened, LeVon? Why was Shupe all over you like that?*”

LeVon could hardly speak. His hands were just shaking.

Finally, he managed to get the words out. “*I told you that honkey-redneck-motherfucker was crazy! I told you so!*” He said barely able to contain himself.

“He said that me and some other Black students broke into his house and stole his guns and stuff.”

“*Hell! I don’t even know where that motherfucker cracker even lives!*”

“LeVon, you need to report this to the principal”, said Melissa.

LeVon snorted, “*The principal! Hell he ain’t done nothing about all the harassment the brothers already been taking from that cracker. They’re all on his side! I tell you the next time that motherfucker tries to mess with me, he won’t be the only one with a gun!*”

## Chapter 15

Billy found Shupe away from his usual perch. Not wanting to break his promise about being seen with him at school, he kept his distance. But then Shupe saw him and beckoned him over.

“It’s started Billy”, Shupe said quietly.

“Those Black Panthers here robbed my place last night and stole my guns!”

Billy was taken aback. “Are you sure it was *them?*” he questioned.

“Damn right I’m sure!” Shupe swore. “And they’re gonna use them to start this war unless we stop them first. Are you in Billy, or are you out?”

Billy was startled. “I’m all in sir!” he said in a commanding tone.

“Okay!” said Shupe. “First I need you to meet some people who can get you a gun”.

Shupe instructed Billy to meet him that night at their rendezvous.

“Tell your mom that you’ll be staying out late to help at the school so she won’t worry.”

The last thing he said was “It’s time for you to join the *Army of the White Brotherhood!*”

## Chapter 16

Luke Cartright had always been a shady character. It was rumored that he once was a gun runner for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Although he did a stretch for gun possession back in the 1990’s, somehow his background check always came up clean. His stock and trade was selling guns and ammunition from the trunk of his car to who anyone who could pay. There was no need for background checks, no 10-day-waiting-period, and no restrictions for age, mental capacity, or prior history of violence.

The local police, chief Lewis Gibbons, knew all about Luke, but money under the table made him look the other way. As long as none of his guns showed up in bank robberies or homicides in his district, well hell then, he was just exercising his *Second Amendment Rights*.

A line of three pickups turned down the dirt road to where he was parked, and nine men walked out into open clearing in the wooded area.

“Nice to see you again gentlemen,” Luke chuckled. “What can I offer you today?”

Billy looked around in the illuminated glare of the truck headlights. There were eight other men besides Shupe. He didn’t recognize any of them except for the smelly tattooed man whom Shupe had called Jess.

One of the men whom Billy did not know spoke up. “We need some guns; semi-automatic assault rifles, Glocks and ammo.”

“I think I can accommodate you gentlemen”, Luke said sarcastically.

He opened his trunk to display a vast arsenal. He picked up an AR-15 and handed it to Shupe.

“Try that on for size?”

Shupe just motioned toward Billy and said, “Give it to him!”

Billy couldn’t believe his ears, “Me!” he exclaimed.

“If you’re going to be a soldier in the Army of the White Brotherhood, you’re going to need a weapon.”

“But I don’t have any money!” protested Billy.

“Don’t worry about it! Consider it a recruitment bonus,” said Shupe.

In addition to the assault rifle, he handed Billy 15 boxes of ammo loads for the rifle.

The other men bought guns too, and Shupe bought another Glock handgun and an AR-15 rifle as well to replace the one that had been stolen. Concluding their transactions, they headed back toward their respective pickups. Billy got in first and Shupe said “Wait in here.” He then turned to walk toward another man in the group. The man spoke in a low hushed voice that was out of Billy’s earshot.

“Are you damned sure that you can trust this kid? Anything that gets traced back to us can mean real trouble!”

“I’m sure,” said Shupe. “He’s one of us now. When the time comes, he’ll do the job!”

“Well then you better go check and make sure he doesn’t go emailing his friends or posting our plans on Facebook or Twitter or something. After this thing goes down the police are going to be all over his computer like white on rice!” he retorted.

Shupe thought for a moment and then said, “I’ll take care of that”.

Shupe walked back to the truck and got in. As they drove back down the isolated dirt road Shupe turned to Billy and said “We’ll have to hide that somewhere; we can’t let your mom go finding it under your bed or something. Do you know any good hiding places?”

Billy thought for a moment “Yes, I think I do! There is a closet in the dance studio. The teacher leaves the dance studio unlocked so that Melissa can come in and practice. No one goes in there so it’s safe. I can wrap it up in a blanket or something and no one will notice it even if they do go in there.”

“OK, Billy, that sounds like it should work.” He replied. “Oh, and bring your laptop computer by tomorrow, I want to show you some interesting Web sites for our Cause”.

On the day Billy and Shupe had obtained the assault rifle, Melissa went to the dance studio after school hoping to practice some new moves. As she was about to open the door she heard voices from inside the room. She instantly recognized them as belonging to Billy and Shupe.

*What in the world were they doing there?* She thought. She stopped and put her ear to the door. She heard Billy say, “I’m sure it will be safe in there.”

Melissa quickly retreated around the corner of the hallway out of sight until she heard the studio door open, close and their footsteps heading toward the exit.

After they had left, she entered the studio herself. She looked around but nothing seemed out of place. But the presence of the two together, particularly since it was evening puzzled her. *Could Shupe be the cause of Billy’s new found racism?* It started to all make sense. The clandestine meeting when she saw Billy enter Shupe’s pickup, the incident in the parking lot with LeVon, and now this. Something was going on here that wasn’t quite right. She’d try to talk to Billy about it and see if he would supply some answers.

## Chapter 17

Shupe found Billy after school as he had planned.

“Ya bring your laptop with you?” he queried.

“Yes Sir, its right here”, Billy said pointing to a black bag with a shoulder strap.

“Okay, let’s go into my office where we can have some privacy and access the Web”.

Billy followed Shupe into a small back office. When they were inside, Shupe closed and locked the door.

“We don’t want to be disturbed” he said to Billy.

Billy booted up his computer and placed it on Shupe’s desk.

“Go ahead and access the Web or whatever you call it. I’m not much good at these things” Shupe demanded.

Billy obliged and launched into Internet Explorer.

Shupe interrupted, “Say Billy, why don’t you go in the next office and get me some coffee. Just knock three times and I’ll let you back in.”

With the computer still running, Billy got up and left out of the same door he’d come in. Shupe then re-locked the door after he’d gone. He sat down at Billy’s computer and went immediately to the Browsing History option and hit the command to *delete all*. He then went into his email program and deleted all the messages there as well. He didn’t know if Billy had gone onto any of the *American Front’s* Web sites but just in case, he wanted no traces.

He launched Facebook and then Twitter. He didn’t see anything there so he’d have to ask Billy if he posted messages to any of these sights. The last thing Shupe wanted was for somebody to find a bunch of Tweets or Facebook posts that he might have put on there to blurb about their activities.

When Billy came back, he asked him, “Billy, do you ever put anything up on Facebook or Twitter?”

Billy replied sheepishly, “I don’t really have any friends in the real world let alone the virtual one, so what’s the use of Facebook or Twitter”.

This brought a smile to Shupe’s face. As he turned to the keyboard, he picked up the full mug of hot coffee intentionally shaking it so the hot coffee splashed onto the back of his hand. He immediately dropped the cup causing the entire contents of the coffee cup to get spilled directly onto the computer keyboard. Shupe grabbed it as though to move it out of the way and the whole laptop came crashing down onto the floor. Billy stood by helpless. He picked up the now lifeless laptop computer and put it back on the desk.

Shupe took out a rag and furiously wiped at the keyboard.

Billy tried to turn to the computer on, but not a sound came out of it and the screen remain dark.

Shupe looked down at a crest fallen Billy. “Son, I’m really sorry about that! I’ll see if I can get the school to buy you a new one. It was an unintentional accident . That’s all I can say”.

Billy shook his head sadly, and then put the lifeless laptop back into his case.

Shupe tried to console Billy “I guess we can’t do what we planned today, so let’s plan on meeting sometime this week to go to the range. You need to get better at shooting targets before you go up against the real thing.”

At that, he unlocked the door, checked to see if anyone was watching and shoed Billy out.

*Well, I guess that takes care of the computer*, he thought smugly.



## Chapter 18

A day later Melissa finally caught up with Billy. He was now the one who was intentionally avoiding her.

“Billy! Wait up!” She cried trying to run after him.

He just kept walking at a faster pace trying to ignore her.

“*Wait Billy!*” she cried.

Finally he stopped. She turned and faced him directly.

“Listen Billy, I’m sorry about how we ended things last time, really I am! I tried to email you, but you never responded”

“My computer’s broken”, he said forlornly.

“I’m sorry”, she said. “What’s been going on with you lately? I hardly ever see you—and’s what’s up with you and Shupe?”

At that and he turned red and glared angrily at her.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean I saw you getting into Shupe’s pickup after school.”

“Billy”, she said sincerely, “Shupe is not what he seems to be. I think the man is dangerous and you shouldn’t be associating with him. He nearly took LeVon’s head off in the school parking lot a week ago and accused him of robbing his house”.

“Well maybe he did”, retorted Billy.

“There’s no proof of that, and even then it would be a matter for the police and not for Shupe to go attacking a student like that. Billy please, tell me what is going on?” she pleaded.

Billy just looked down at his feet. “I can’t tell you Melissa,” he pleaded. “Soon things will come to light and you’ll understand, but I just can’t talk about it now”.

“Alright Billy”, she said caringly. “You are still my friend and I care about you. Just remember what I said about Shupe! Be very careful of him!”

On that note, she turned and walked away while Billy just stood there. He really liked Melissa, but she didn’t understand the Cause he was now swept up in. He’d have to find some way to make her understand – to bring her around to his way of understanding how things were.

## Chapter 19

He had gone out with Shupe several times now to the shooting range and felt comfortable with the AR-15. He could quickly fire off the entire clip of 30 rounds in about 35 seconds if he tried, but Shupe had urged him to fire in short bursts, and take careful aim at the target.

He knew he could do this! He had to show Shupe and the rest of the world that he was worth something; that he was a True Patriot!

On March 15<sup>th</sup> Shupe met him at their usual rendezvous site.

Shupe faced him and placed both hands on his shoulders. “Billy, the time has come. You’ve been the one selected to fire the first shots of the great race war that will decide the fate for America!”

He’d been selected! He could barely control his elation.

“Just tell me what I need to do sir”, said Billy.

“You need to take out that cell of Black Panthers in your ten o’clock class tomorrow”, ordered Shupe. “That’s when they’ll all be there together. We know for a fact that they are arming themselves to start the conflict soon and we have to beat them to it. Can you do that son? Are you ready for this?” Shupe asked.

“I’ll do it sir! I’m a *True Patriot*, and I won’t back down! You can count on me!” Billy said courageously.

“I knew I could count on you Billy”, Shupe said patting him on the shoulder. “I’ll make sure that the door is jimmed open so it’ll look like you came in from the outside. The dance studio should be empty at that time and I’ll make sure that you can get in to get your rifle and ammo without being seen. Once the shooting starts I’ll rush in and get you out!”

“You with me boy?” said Shupe commandingly.

“Yes Sir!” shouted Billy.

The rest of the day Billy sat alone pondering what he was about to do. He knew he could do it! Still he was mostly afraid that he’d lose his nerve at the last minute. School had let out hours ago and he still just sat there thinking. Finally, he got up. There was one more thing he needed to do.

## **March 17<sup>th</sup>**

### **The Day After the Shooting**

## **Chapter 20**

Keith Watson woke up drenched in a sweat. He’d had that dream again. Every time there was a new school shooting, it would trigger the same nightmare; just like the real one that he’d lived through nearly a decade earlier at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. He was just a senior in high school then when Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot and killed twelve students and one teacher. In his dream, he would always see the scowling face of one of the armed boys point his weapon at him and fire.

His wife Emily turned to him and asked “Was it that dream again?”

“Yes”, he said quietly.

Keith had graduated from Columbine High School and had received a Bachelor’s degree in journalism at the University of Colorado. While serving a one year internship at a Denver newspaper, he met Emily who was an arts and music teacher for one of the Denver middle schools. After a brief courtship, the two married. When a job offer came along for a junior reporter position at the St.

Petersburg Times, he took it. They packed their belongings into their two-year-old Subaru SUV, drove to St. Petersburg, Florida, and settled into a nice starter home in Orange Grove. Keith checked into his new job, while Emily had no trouble obtaining a position teaching arts and music at Emery High.

Today every news station in the country and several international ones all had their mobile broadcasting trailers parked around Emory High School. Shootings like this one always made headline news and journalists and newscasters were huddled in a hastily erected events tent awaiting a press announcement from the Orange Grove Chief of Police Lewis Gibson. The bodies had been removed from the school to the coroner's office awaiting positive identification by the devastated families.

Inside the school, in a teacher's conference room, an internal investigation was already underway.

"Mr. Shupe", the police chief asked, "Can you tell us again where you were when you heard the shots."

"Yes Sir, I was toward the back of the school investigating a report of a door being jimmed open. When I heard the shots I immediately ran toward the hallway where I heard the shoots come from."

"According to your initial report to Homicide detectives Rick Woods and Grant Howell, you said you then saw a Black student running toward you with a gun. Is that correct?"

"Yes sir", said Shupe. It appeared to me that he had a handgun in his hand and was getting ready to fire."

The Chief of Police interrupted, "Are you aware that no such weapon could be found?"

"No sir", said Shupe, "At the time it appeared to me that he had a weapon in hand. I also had received word from one of the students that the Black student in question had acquired a handgun and was planning on shooting me because I had suspected him of a robbery in the neighborhood."

"Wasn't that in fact a robbery of your house, and is it not true that handguns and other weapons were stolen from you in that robbery?"

"Yes sir, that is correct."

"When you saw him running toward you, did you challenge the boy to stop?"

"Sir, it has been my training that when confronted with a gun, I shoot first and ask questions later. I believe this is in keeping with Florida's *Stand Your Ground Law*, is it not?"

"Yes Mr. Shupe, it is."

"Turning now to the boy in the classroom", the Police chief spoke. "Was he known to you before the shooting?"

"No sir, Chief Lewis, I had no associations with him whatsoever. From what I understand he was not popular, and was suspected of having some mental and social problems at the school."

"Can you think of any reason why he would target only the Black students in the classroom?"

"No sir, I cannot."

“To the best of your knowledge, were you aware of any tensions that he might have had with these students, or had he been known to make any racist remarks in school?”

“No sir, I do not have any knowledge to that.”

“Turning now to the question of the assault rifle he used in the shooting”, the chief said, “I believe it was an AR-15 semi-automatic assault rifle with an extended ammunition clip capable of firing 30 rounds without reloading. Is that correct?”

“That is sir.”

“As a minor it would have been illegal for him to have obtained such a weapon. Do you know how and where he might have obtained this weapon?”

“No sir, I don’t know where he might have gotten this weapon or who might have aided him.”

“Thank you Mr. Shupe”, the Police chief went on, “While this has been a tragic incident, I want to say that because of your heroic efforts, many more deaths were avoided. We’ll adjourn now so that we can give a Press conference. We may need to ask you more questions as facts come to light.”

The panel of people including Shupe emerged from the school building and took seats at the table in the tent before the assembled crowd of reporters.

Keith Watson, representing the *St. Petersburg Times* was there holding his wife, Emily’s hand. Emily was beside herself in grief that something like this could have occurred at her school. Maybe if she’d known the boy, this could have been avoided.

The Press conference began.

“We are deeply saddened by the tragic shooting deaths that have occurred here. These are the facts of the case that we know as of today. The shooting was done by a single individual named Billy Edwards. He came into the classroom armed with an AR-15 assault rifle with an extended ammunition clip and fired 18 shots killing five individuals at close range. He was then killed by an armed security guard at the school who was able to prevent more students from being killed. At this time we do not know of any motive, and believe that he was a disturbed individual. Another student was killed by the guard in the ensuing panic. It is still unclear if that student was also armed, and was involved in the shooting. These are the facts as we know them and will present more facts as they come to light. We want to especially commend the heroic efforts of Clay Shupe who was the armed guard at the school and responded quickly to the shooting. Had it not been for his efforts, it is very likely that more deaths would have occurred. This case seems to also prove that Florida’s new Armed Guard School Security law, or as most of you know it by, the Good Guy with a Gun Law, does in fact save lives. Thank you all.”

Hands flew up from the crowd for questions. “Chief Gibbons, is it true that all of the victims in the shooting were Black?”

“Yes, that is true”, the chief responded.

“Chief Gibbons, do we know anything about where the boy acquired his weapon?”

“At this time, we do not have any information on this. As you know it is illegal in this state for a minor to own an assault weapon.”

“Chief Lewis, can you shed any light on the Black student who was also killed by the guard? Is it true that no weapon was found on him? Also did the shooter leave behind a note or tape that might shed some light as to his motive?”

“At this time we are still investigating these facts and will enlighten you as the facts emerge. Thank you all for coming.”

On that note, the police chief got up and the journalists departed to their respective trailers to file their stories.

Keith clutched Emily who whose tears were flowing freely now. *It was just like the last time at Columbine*, Keith thought, *another disturbed individual with a powerful assault rifle.*

He'd report back to his editor to see how his editor wanted him to follow-up on this story.

## Chapter 22

Keith Watson's editor beckoned him into his office, “I'm so sorry to hear about the shooting, Keith, I know your wife is a teacher there. Did she know any of the students personally?”

Keith shook his head, “She didn't know anything about the shooter, and only had passing acquaintance with most of the victims.”

The editor went on, “Listen Keith, I know this must be pretty hard on you as well, having lived through something like this personally at Columbine. I'd like you to do some background material on this. I'm going to have you meet with someone from Florida's Center for Violence Prevention Chapter. There's going to be a lot of renewed talk about gun control and new gun laws and she'd be a good source for it.”

## Chapter 23

At the Florida State chapter of the National Rifle Association, the chapter president Phillip Deschutes was on the phone to the governor.

“You see Governor, we don't need more laws to control guns, just more armed guards to confront the bad people with guns. This all goes to show that we were right along. You people in the state legislature, keep up the good work of fighting these new gun law proposals that the liberals want to foist down our throats.”

He hung up the phone and turned to one of his aides. “This should help increase the donations that come in to our cause”, he said. “We might want to even get that Shupe guy to speak at our national convention. A good guy with a gun saved lives!” he animated with his hands.

Back at the school, Shupe sat down in his office and locked the door. He's managed to pull it off so far with no one the wiser. In fact, now they think of him

as a real hero. He'd have to be careful about what he said from now on, but this would certainly advance his standing in the *Army of the White Brotherhood*.

*A shame about Billy, he thought, He was a good kid and a true martyr to the cause. Someday when this war is over, we can bestow upon him the true honor he deserves.*

In another room of the school, Detective Woods and the principle of the school Harold Miller were questioning Melissa.

"Ms. Hartwood, we understand that you knew Billy Edwards pretty well, is that correct?"

Melissa was in a state of shock. She couldn't believe that Billy could possibly be involved in such a thing. What could she say? Should she mention anything about Shupe?

"Yes sirs, I knew him, but not all that well", she replied.

"Do you have any information about where he purchased the gun he used?" queried the detective.

"I have no idea at all! I didn't even know he knew how to shoot a gun."

"Melissa, I want you to be very honest about this, because anything untruthful you might say now could get you into a lot more trouble," said the school principle.

*A lot more trouble?* thought Melissa, *What kind of trouble am I in?*

"We found a blanket in the closet of the dance studio that had gun grease residue on it matching the weapon that was used in the shooting", Detective Woods went on. "We know from other students that you and Billy frequented that room after hours. Did you help him purchase that gun, or know that he'd hidden it there?"

Melissa felt the blood leave her face.

*So that's what Billy and Shupe were doing there! Now they think that I helped him buy the gun,* she thought.

"No sir", she replied. "I told you before. I never knew anything about the gun. Billy just helped me video some dance moves in the studio, that's all."

"OK" said the principle. "Detective, do you have all the information you needed?"

The detective nodded and left the room.

"Melissa", the principle said as she was leaving, "Stay a minute."

He closed the door and turned to her. "There are a lot of people who are very upset about this, and know that you were Billy's girlfriend. They might want to take some kind of revenge out on you—especially if it ever came out that you had something to do with obtaining the weapon. It might be best if you transferred to another school."

Devastated, Melissa picked up her backpack and left the room.

## Chapter 24

The Florida Center for Violence Prevention office was in a two-story non-descript brick building. Keith opened the door and seated before him was a middle aged Black woman.

Keith introduced himself and she looked up and smiled. “Your editor called. I’ve been expecting you. I’m Leona Freeman.”

The modest one room office was furnished with an institutional metal desk, two metal chairs and a file cabinet.

When they were seated, Ms. Freeman said, “If you’re looking for the rest of the staff, I’m it. I understand you are here to gather some background information on gun control measures and how we can prevent occurrences of school shootings like the recent shooting at Emory High.”

“Thank you”. Keith responded. “Tell me; just exactly what do you do here Ms. Freeman?”

“Basically the Florida Center for Violence Prevention works to stop the rising toll of gun deaths through research, advocacy, education, and collaboration. The VPC believes that the answer to reducing gun violence lies in better regulation of the gun industry and private gun ownership to reduce the staggering number of deaths that occur each year through gun violence. We are completely funded by private donations. Now, what can I do to help you?”

“My main reason for being here”, said Keith “is to gather some background information on gun control measures and how we can prevent occurrences of school shootings like the recent shooting at Emory High.”

Ms. Freeman nodded. “Your editor told me you were raised in Colorado, and were a student at Columbine High School when that tragedy occurred. I imagine you have some pretty strong feeling about guns and gun control”.

“Yes, I was there” he said solemnly. “I still have nightmares about the shooting. I vividly recall the panicked screams and the pop-pop-pop of shots fired. I managed to get out, but as you well know there were a number of my classmates and teachers who didn’t. But the worst memory I have is that of Charlton Heston, days after the shooting, standing before a crowd of gun supporters in downtown Denver, raising a musket and proclaiming “...*Out of my cold dead hands!*...” After that I had no sympathy at all for the NRA or Second Amendment Rights groups.”

“Well Mr. Watson”, Ms. Freeman replied, “It may surprise you that I am a gun owner, and *do* support the Second Amendment. Unfortunately, the whole argument has been co-opted by radicals who insist that *any* form of gun control legislation will lead to the confiscation of *all* firearms.”

“Let me give you a little history lesson...” she continued.

“At one time the NRA had little interest in gun policy, and actually was pro-gun control right up through the 1960’s. Prior to the 1920’s all gun control measures were at the state level. Most laws were passed by Southern States aimed at keeping guns out of the hands of Black people. With the rise of bootlegging and the proliferation of gangsters in the 1920’s, the US Congress passed the **National Firearms Act of 1934** to stop the proliferation of Tommy Guns, and Sawed-Off Shot Guns. The NRA *supported* this legislation. In fact in his testimony, then NRA president Karl T Fredrick said:

*“I have never believed in the general practice of carrying weapons. I seldom carry one. I have carried one only when I felt it was desirable to do so for my own protection. I know that applies in most of the instances where guns are used effectively in self-defense or in places of business and in the home. I do not believe in the general promiscuous toting of guns. I think it should be sharply restricted and only under licenses.”*

“In 1938 Congress passed another law, the **National Firearms Act of 1938**, which required the licensing of interstate gun dealers and the keeping of a Federal Registry of gun sales. It also prohibited violent felons from owning guns. It was also supported by the NRA.”

Keith said surprised, “You mean there actually was a database of gun owners as early as 1938?”

“Yes”, she went on, “In fact, in 1968, after nearly a decade of assassination of political leaders, and riots in major cities, Congress passed the **1968 Gun Control Act**. This expanded the list of people who were ineligible to own guns to include people convicted of any felony, minors, and people adjudicated to be incompetent. It also created what is commonly known as the ‘*sporting purpose*’ rule for foreign gun ownership to limit the importation of foreign made guns such as the AK-47 which were starting to come into the country then. The NRA supported this legislation as well.”

Keith said, “Who enforced these laws?”

She went on, “The U.S. Treasury Department’s *Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms*. Before this, their mission was primarily to ensure proper revenue was collected on Alcohol and Tobacco, and to prevent moonshiners from selling illegal alcohol. So you see, the NRA has not always been against gun control. But in 1977 they forced out individuals within the organization who wanted its primary purpose to be promoting sportsmanship and gun safety. It began to aggressively challenge handgun bans and invoke the Second Amendment to challenge any gun laws in court. To this day, the NRA has failed to support a single major piece of gun reform legislation.”

“So the problem is the NRA opposition to gun legislation,” said Keith.

“It’s not that simple. The problem isn’t just the guns. There has been a whole proliferation of what is termed *Gun Culture* now in the USA. It’s been hard to estimate the actual number of guns that are out there but in 2009 it was estimated that there are 53 million guns in the hands of individuals, or 45% of the population. That’s an astounding number! White gun ownership makes up the majority, but Black gun ownership has also grown in the past 20 years, and is much more difficult to track because a large majority of the guns owned by Blacks are obtained illegally, or at least un-recorded.

“Another problem has been the lethality and power of street weapons. Before 1970, most Americans owned what would be termed long-barrel rifles which consisted of shotguns and hunting rifles or owned small caliber handguns. After the Vietnam War era we started to see a proliferation of what is now considered *Assault Style Weapons*. These are weapons capable of firing shots rapidly without the need to re-load.”

“They’re illegal aren’t they?” queried Keith.



“No, a *fully-automatic* assault weapon is still illegal in most states, but *semi-automatic* weapons which are just as lethal, are not; and their numbers have grown exponentially in the past 10 years. Recently ABC reported that there are an average of 30 gun related deaths a day!”

“Weren’t those weapons banned after the Brady shooting? I think they named it the *Brady Act*?” asked Keith.

“Actually, no, she replied. “the ***Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act*** dealt exclusively with handguns and required a five-day waiting period on the purchase of a handgun and required that local law enforcement agencies conduct background checks on purchasers of handguns. The ban on Assault Weapons came with the ***Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act***, commonly referred to as ***The Assault Weapons Ban Act***, that was passed later that same year. This act banned the manufacture and sale of new semi-automatic assault weapons, but did not apply to weapons that were *already* in legal possession. The law specified 19 weapons that have the features of assault rifles and also banned large-capacity ammunition magazines, limiting them to 10 rounds. While many gun control advocates wanted to make the ban permanent, the NRA succeeded in putting a sunset clause in the bill which would have it expire in 2004 unless Congress voted to extend it. By then, the Congressional shift to the Republicans ensured that the ban would expire. We are now seeing the consequences of that. The NRA and their Congressional allies have fought tooth-and-nail to prevent passage of any new gun legislation since then. They’ve even opposed the efforts of the CDC to simply study the impact of gun violence on American Society—a *study*, by the way, that was intended to study not only gun ownership, but also the impact of violent video games and gun violence in the media.”

Keith listened intently to her discourse. “What about the argument that there are already enough gun laws—that we just need better enforcement of existing ones?”

“That’s an interesting point”, she replied. “There are a lot of different gun laws, but they are scattered around the country between municipalities, states, and even counties. It’s very easy for people to simply purchase a gun outside their jurisdiction; and while it may not be entirely legal, few police officers go around looking for illegal guns unless they are used in a crime. With the rise of gun shows and internet sales, even basic background checks and waiting periods are omitted. The only *Federal Agency* tasked with enforcing national gun laws is the **ATF** (*Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms*) Agency. Unfortunately they have been understaffed for some time, and the NRA and their Congressional allies have blocked any additional funding for them. To date they still do not have a head, since any nominee has been opposed by this same group. In addition, some authorities see any enforcement of the existing laws as a violation of Second Amendment rights, and refuse to enforce them. So what we have become is a society of guns that is free of almost any real controls that can prevent the types of mass shootings that you have just witnessed.

“It is interesting to note as well, that between 1966 and 1998, mass shooting were fairly rare; the most famous one being in 1966 at the University of Texas where a lone gunman holed up in the tower and started shooting students at

random with a high powered hunting rifle. He was able to kill 14 people and wounding 32 others. It took 90 minutes till police were able to subdue him. It still remains today as one of the worst mass shootings in US history; and that was with a single shot rifle.

“It wasn’t until 1998, that we saw another school shooting. That was at Jonesboro, Arkansas where two boys aged 11 and 13 shot their teachers and schoolmates as they ran outside in response to a fire alarm the boys had pulled. Four students and a teacher were killed and 10 others wounded. When they were finally apprehended authorities found in their possession thirteen fully loaded firearms, including three semi-automatic rifles, and 200 rounds of ammunition. All of the weapons were taken from the family's *legally* owned personal arsenal.

“Columbine followed that a year later, which I hardly need to remind you of the details. Since that time, there have been over 61 Mass shootings in the USA, many of which were committed with large arsenals consisting of multiple semi-automatic assault rifles or handguns with large ammunition clips and large rounds of ammunition. Most all of these were purchased *legally*. While these numbers reflect the most notorious and publicized cases, every day there are shooting deaths among Black and Hispanics that go under-reported.”

Keith looked somber. “What do you say to the argument that *‘the only way to stop these mass shootings is to let more people carry concealed weapons?’*”

She smiled, “You mean the *good guy with a gun principle*? I’ve heard a lot of that lately, especially after Newtown, and of course what just happened at Emory. Despite this claim, there is scant evidence that just having someone nearby with a gun will stop a massacre. In the Tucson, Arizona shooting of Gaby Gifford, there actually was a man in the crowd who had a handgun. He almost shot the person trying to subdue the actual killer. The NRA loves to tout these stories, but in almost every case the person who actually subdued the killer was not armed, or was a trained off-duty police officer or security guard, not your average Jill or Joe with a gun. They actually conducted a live study at one school in which they had students and a teacher in classroom and outfitted them with paintball guns and safety equipment and told them in advance that at some point during that class someone would burst in and start shooting. Even with the advance notice, the students in the study ended up shooting at least 10 of their fellow classmates, and only one was able to hit the shooter. Even at Emory High School who had a trained armed guard on site, seven students were still killed. The idea that more guns are needed is a huge step backwards, and is a myth perpetrated by the same people that are adamantly against any form of real gun control.”

Keith was nearly speechless now and couldn’t wait to leave. The whole conversation just dredged up all the old memories of Columbine. Still he asked, “So what is the answer?”

“The *answer...*”, she replied forcefully, “is a *real dialogue* and meaningful *national legislation* on gun control.

“That just isn’t going to happen as long as the NRA can pull the strings and bankroll campaigns against anyone who opposes them. Much of their money is coming from the gun industry itself, which is now a hugely profitable industry. They can pump undisclosed dollars into the NRA who in turn can fund campaigns for or against anyone running for office. They can rally hundreds of people seemingly

at will to put on *Gun Appreciation Days*. Anyone who even tries to bring up a reasonable discourse is shouted down with the single most used argument ‘*Because it is my Second Amendment Right!*’”

## Chapter 25

Emory High School was officially closed until the investigation was completed, and then of course until after the seven funerals. Emily Watson was walking back toward her car in the school parking lot when she spotted Melissa crouched in a fetal position by the wall sobbing.

She couldn’t bear to ignore the girl who’d been the outstanding student in her class.

She walked over to the poor sobbing girl “Melissa, I’m so sorry about Billy and LeVon, I knew you were their friends. Sometimes we just can’t know what people are really thinking or capable of.”

Melissa looked up at Emily, “Ms. Watson, I know Billy couldn’t have done this on his own!” There are some things you don’t know about Billy and that guard Shupe, but I’m afraid to tell anyone! They think I was involved in getting him the gun, and now they want me to transfer to a different school.”

Emily looked startled. “Melissa, is this true?”

She shook her head.

A concerned look came over Emily.

Even if it weren’t true, this poor girl was in a very fragile state right now. The last thing she wanted was another death in this school. Emily had to do something to console her.

“Come on Melissa”, she said, “let’s go grab a cup of coffee over at Starbucks and we can talk.”

They drove the short distance to a local Starbucks. Emily ordered two Grande Lattes and then found a small alcove where they could talk quietly without being disturbed.

Melissa poured out her heart telling Emily about the change she started seeing in Billy; how she saw him getting into Shupe’s pickup one night, and then later the two of them in the music studio after hours a week before the shooting. She also told Emily about the fight between Shupe and LeVon and the threat that she heard Shupe make in the parking lot.

“Something just isn’t right Ms. Watson, and I’m scared that if I tell anyone, they’ll come after me! I’m not exactly popular around here, and they can find any excuse just to transfer me away.”

Her voice broke and tears streamed down her cheeks. “I need to be here with you—otherwise I’ll never get a chance to dance professionally.”

These were astounding revelations. Emily had a gut feeling that Shupe was not as innocent or heroic as he appeared. But this was beyond belief! She knew Melissa was quite right not to say anything to the principal. The School Board

wanted this investigation closed and sewed up tight. The last thing in the world they wanted was for their new found public hero, Shupe, to come under scrutiny.

“Melissa”, said Emily, “Come with me. I want you to tell what you’ve just told me to Keith. He works for the St. Pete’s Times and he might be able to help you”.

“I’m just scared Ms. Watson, but if you think he can help, I’ll talk to him.”

An hour later Keith walked in the door to his home after spending the afternoon with Leona Freeman. He looked depressed.

“Well it seems like the NRA pulls all the strings in government these days”, he said discouragingly. “Practically all the State Legislature representatives are like puppets on their strings.”

He hadn’t noticed that there was a guest present.

Emily spoke up, “Keith, I brought Melissa here. She’s one of my students. There is something you need to hear from her about the shooting.”

They all sat down at the kitchen table and more coffee was passed around. Melissa again retold her story of Billy’s strange transformation and seeing him with Shupe in the same place that they say the rifle was kept. She told him too about the parking lot incident and Shupe’s attack on LeVon and threat to him.

Keith sat listening without comment, transfixed. Finally, he spoke up. “I thought the investigation seemed a bit too pat. Shupe denied even knowing Billy and made it seem that LeVon had *threatened him!*”

“I agree” said Melissa, “things most certainly do not add up!”

“Melissa”, Keith said, “you said that the last time you spoke to Billy, he said something like ‘*You’ll see, things will come to light that will make you understand*’. Is that correct?”

“Yes”, said Melissa, “But I don’t know what he meant.”

“You know”, said Keith, “One thing that has always bothered me about this thing is that he left no note or tape or video. Even at Columbine, Eric and Dylan left a video on the Web and diaries. Nothing was ever found from Billy, and it turns out his computer was broken as well. They were able to recover the hard drive, but there was nothing like that on it. That just seems strange.”

“Did he call you at all the night before?” asked Keith.

“I don’t know, Mr. Watson, I can’t find my phone. I was so upset I must have misplaced it somewhere”.

Keith sat without comment. Finally he spoke up, “I’m going to see if I can find out more about who this Shupe character really is. Melissa, keep looking for your phone. It’s just possible he may have tried to call you and you just missed the call. That could be very important to finding out the truth of this matter.”

## Chapter 26

The next day Keith drove into his office at the Times. Keith knocked on the glass door separating the newsroom from the editor’s office.

“Come!” yelled his editor.

“Mr. Gross, I’d like to ask a favor”, Keith said. “You know, I’ve been working on the Emery High shooting.”

Gross nodded and added, “And you did a great job! Now that the Investigation is over it’s no longer news.”

“That’s just it. I’m not sure it really is all over” replied Keith.

“What!?” his editor replied, startled.

Keith wasn’t sure how much of the information he’d gotten from Melissa to divulge. “I’d like to do a follow-up to see what led to the shooting. Do some background on Billy Edwards and Shupe.”

Gross turned up his hands. “Look Keith, what’s there to see? The kid was a disturbed loner who shot a bunch of other kids. That Shupe guy, the armed guard, was the hero; he killed the shooter before he could shoot up more kids. End of story—*period!*”

Keith said, “You know my wife is a teacher at that school. One of her students came up to her with a story that makes me wonder if there might be more to it than that. I’d just like a few days to do some investigating.”

Mr. Gross sighed, “Okay kid, knock yourself out. There’s not much going on here anyway. I want you back here though next week!”

Keith returned home after getting his editor’s permission to follow-up on the shooting.

“How’d it go?” asked Emily.

“He wasn’t happy but he gave me a few days to work on it,” replied Keith.

“Is there anything I can do help?”

“I’d like to know just where Shupe came from and who he worked for before he was hired at Emory. I can’t go into the school and ask a lot of questions about him. If I do, they’ll button things up tight. Emily, is there some way you could get into the employment records at Emory without the principal knowing about it and find his file and make a copy?”

Emily thought for a moment. “I’ll have to think of some excuse, but I think I could do it.”

“Great Emily! Meanwhile I want to talk to the police chief in charge of the investigation and see if I can find out a bit more information from him. I want to find out what they know about where Billy got his gun.”

## Chapter 27

Police Chief Lewis closed the door to his office. He picked up the phone and dialed the number from his private book.

A voice at the other end simply said “*Speak*”.

“Luke, its Lewis. I hope to hell you didn’t have anything to do with this shooting here! Now I’ve got some reporter snooping around wanting to know about previous investigations and arrests for illegal gun sales. If this gets back to you, it could get back to me, and that could mean a lot of trouble for both of us.”

“Don’t worry Lewis, they’ll never trace it back to me.”

“*Christ!* Cartright, they better not! If you ever want to sell another gun in this county again, you better be real damn careful from now on whom you sell your *wares* to.”

Chief Gibbons disconnected and then dialed another number.

“Florida Chapter of the NRA, Jim Hendricks speaking.”

“Jim, its Lewis. I just want to let you know that I had a visit from a reporter from the St. Pete Times. He wanted all the transcripts from the investigation, the detective’s notes from the shooting, and a copy of robbery report from that Clyde Shupe guy. I don’t know what he’s looking for, but just wanted give you guys a heads up.”

“Who’s the reporter?”

“Guy named Keith Watson.”

Jim Hendricks put down the phone and turned to his associate.

“Do you think there is anything to this?”

Walter Miller, Chapter VP for the NRA shook his head.

“No, I think he’s just fishing for anything they can use to make gun owners look bad. All the same, we can’t be too careful. Let’s put our investigators on him, just to make sure he doesn’t uncover something we don’t want to come out. This new *Armed School Guard Law* can be really big for us. Its proof that more armed citizens can stop bad armed men. Our sponsors wouldn’t like it either if their gun sales started declining because of some gun restrictions.”

## Chapter 28

Emory High was now surrounded by yellow Crime Scene plastic strips. Emily parked at the school and ducked under the tape.

“Hold it ma’am!”

A young police officer walked up. “Sorry Miss, the building is closed.”

He pointed to the tape. “There’s an investigation still going on and we don’t want anyone contaminating the crime scene. I’m afraid you’ll have to leave.”

Emily was not about to be put off so easily. She smiled. “I understand, officer. I’m Principal Miller’s personal assistant, and he asked me to get something important from the personnel files for the detective who is conducting the investigation back at the station. I’ll just be in there a minute.”

The police officer scratched his head. “Maybe I ought to check with my chief.”

She didn’t need this. “Look, I know just where the file is. I won’t touch anything else, I promise.”

The police officer thought for a moment and finally said, “OK ma’am. Don’t go anywhere else except the office though. I’ll be right outside!”

Emily hurried in before he changed his mind. She went to the door marked Principal and entered to a receptionist’s office. Beyond it was a door marked Private. Not sure where the personnel files would be kept, she first went to a four-drawer file cabinet in the receptionist’s office. Leafing through the folders, she saw

only receipted bills, handwritten letters presumably from parents, and lists of names of students arranged in years.

The personnel files would have to be in Principal Miller's private office. The door was unlocked and she cautiously went in. The carpeted, paneled room contained a polished mahogany desk fronted by a pair of upholstered chairs. The wall was decorated with diplomas, merit certificates and photos of Miller with people she assumed were celebrities.

Alongside the desk was a small mahogany cabinet. She went to open top the drawer. "*Damn!*" she cursed, it was locked. She thought for a moment and then opened his top desk drawer and spied a small key with a round label on it marked *Personnel Files*. She took the key and unlocked the file cabinet, and began searching through the large office files. Finally, she came to the one marked "Shupe, Clay". She took it out and went into the main part of the office over to the large copy machine. She placed the pages in the in tray and ran off a copy of all three pages. When she was done, she slipped the file back into the cabinet and re-locked it. She then replaced the key in the desk and walked out.

She walked briskly to her car. "Thank you officer", she shouted as she got in, "I got what I needed. I hope you complete your investigation soon, we all just want to get back to our normal routine of teaching again."

Back at their home, Keith was waiting. He took the three pages and started to go over them.

*Hmm it says he worked at two other jobs here in Florida as a security guard, but was laid-off; the last one after less than a year on the job. He indicated it was for economic reasons. I wonder though....*Keith thought to himself.

"Emily", he called to her from his paper filled dining room table, "Would you be upset if I left for a day or two? I want to go up state to Osceola to check out some of his past employers myself."

Emily wasn't thrilled with the idea of him leaving her so soon after the tragedy, but she had friends who could spend time with her to take some of the edge off the strain of the recent events.

"Okay, Keith, do whatever it takes to prove Melissa's story. You take the Prius. Leave me the Subaru."

Osecola was eighty miles from St. Petersburg. Keith programmed his auto navigator, and backed his Toyota Prius down his driveway and drove down the driveway. A short distance away, a Southern Telephone Company utility truck was parked and two men were working at the utility box.

## Chapter 29

Keith parked his Prius and headed for the main office of the Anaconda Chemical Company. He approached the woman seated at the reception desk.

"Hello, I'm Keith Watson from the St. Petersburg Times. We're doing a feature on Clay Shupe, the armed school guard who saved the school kids down at Orange

Grove. I was wondering if I could talk to someone here about what he did when he worked here.”

She went into the back office and a short time later came back with a short, fat, bald middle-aged man.

“Hello I’m Oliver St. Martin. I’m the head of personnel here at Anaconda. I understand you want to do a story on Clay Shupe?”

“Yes, I’d like to know a little bit about him when he worked here”, Keith replied.

“Well there isn’t too much to tell, he was only with us for a short time. I believed he was one of our security people at the plant.”

“Can you tell me if he was well liked here? Did anything stand out about him?” asked Keith.

The little man turned pale. “Well, I really don’t know anything about him. After all I’m only the personnel manager”.

Keith was not going to be so easily put off. “To your knowledge did he ever have any run in’s with the Black employees—anything like racial slurs or the like?”

“The man turned even paler, “Like I said, I really didn’t know the man.”

“Can you tell me why he was let go?” Keith continued.

“Mr. Watson, is it? I’m really not at liberty to discuss these matters, but I seem to recall that he left voluntarily to care for his sick mother. Isn’t that right Susan?” he said turning toward the receptionist sitting at the desk.

Susan appeared startled. She looked at her fingernails and in a quiet voice uttered, “I really don’t know Mr. St. Martin.”

Keith and St. Martin looked at each other for a moment, neither speaking. Keith knew he was hiding something. Finally, St. Martin said, “I’m sorry, I have to go see about some important matters. Susan, can you please show Mr. Watson out.”

Keith started to walk through the parking lot toward his Prius when out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of a stocky Black man wearing work clothes beckoning him around the corner of the building. He looked around to see who might be watching and then walked over to the man.

The man spoke to Keith in a hushed voice “I know why you’re here. Meet me at six o’clock at O’Grady’s Tavern on the edge of town. Don’t mention this to anyone!” Then he walked briskly away.

## Chapter 30

At quarter to six, Keith Watson pulled his Prius into the lot of O’Grady’s Tavern on the edge of town. He parked next to the only other vehicles, two pickups and a sedan. He walked in to the musky smelling barroom and sat down at the bar. Two other men in the bar were playing pool and just gave him a passing glance.

“What’ll ya have”, yelled the bartender from the bar.

“Just a Bud”, Keith replied.

The bartender came over with a foaming glass of beer and placed it in front of him. “Not from around here are you?” he asked.



“No, just passing through” replied Keith. “Ya know any good places to stay for the night? I’ve got to get back to Miami tomorrow”.

The man pondered for a moment, “Most people stay at the Travel Lodge by the Highway—unless they’re looking for more than just a bed”, he cackled.

Keith nurtured his beer until a man walked through the front door and looked around. He took a booth in the back where no one else was around and motioned for Keith to come over. He motioned to the bartender. “Bring me a PBR, will ya Al?”

Keith picked up his glass sat down in the booth across from the man. Neither spoke until the bartender had placed the beer on the table and walked back to the bar.

“I know why you’ve come” he instantly said. “It’s to find out about that Shupe guy, isn’t it?”

“Yes, who are you?” Keith asked.

“My name’s Clive Howard. I work the night shift over at the plant. Who are *you*, and why do you want to know about Shupe?”

Keith introduced himself. “I’m a reporter from the *St. Petersburg Times*. I’m doing a story about Shupe. The people in Orange Grove consider him a hero, you know.... saved a lot of kids from being shot.”

Howard just shook his head. “*Sheeet!* You really believe that?”

Keith said. “I’m not sure what to believe. Do you know something different?”

Clive paused a moment giving Keith a good look-over. Finally he spoke up. “I remember that Shupe guy real well. He was a real *cracker!* He always be harassing us Black workers calling us *niggers* and writing us up while he let all the White guys get away with anything. The final straw came when he started to pass around some of his *American White Brotherhood* trash around to the White workers—telling em that there was going to be a race war and all; how they needed to take sides and start buying guns to prepare for it. After that, the management canned his sorry ass. He threatened to have his *White Brotherhood Army* blow up the plant when he left, so they just hushed things up. I didn’t think too much about him until I read in the paper about the shooting at Emory. Only Black kids got shot by that one lone White boy.... and then Shupe coming in like some kinda superhero and saving the day!”

“I’ll bet you Shupe put him up to it—him and his *White Brotherhood Army*.”

Keith was stunned. “You mean he was a member of a *White Supremacist Group?*”

“Damn straight—a *real nigger hater!*”

The pieces were beginning to fit together in Keith’s mind. Keith recalled Melissa saying that it was after she saw Billy Edwards with Shupe that Billy started to trash talk to her about nigger music and being on the right side of things.

“Mr. Howard”, said Keith, “I can’t thank you enough for what you just told me.”

“Don’t thank me. You just make sure that his sorry White ass gets found out and thrown in jail as well as the rest of his *White Brotherhood*.”

After Keith left the bar, one of the men who had been playing pool at the bar with a large *White Power* tattoo his upper arm picked up a cell phone and tapped out a number.

“Shupe, this is LaGrange from the chem plant. I just saw that nigger Clive Howard talking to some guy who looks like a reporter. I heard him mention your

name just now. I think he's been at the plant asking questions about you." Then he hung up.

## Chapter 31

Melissa had gone home, still upset but feeling slightly better after finding an ally in Keith and Emily. She wondered though about her phone, and where it might be. She looked around in her room and it was nowhere to be found.

"Mom", she yelled from her bedroom, "Have you seen my phone?"

Her mom entered the bedroom. It was clear she'd been drinking but had not yet become inebriated.

"A police detective came by here yesterday looking for it. I decided it was best for him not to find it, so I hid it. I don't know what kind of trouble you're in now, but whatever it is, I want no part of it. Your phone is in the cookie jar."

Melissa retrieved the phone from the cookie jar and tried to turn it on. The battery had died. She'd need to re-charge it before she could tell whether there were any voice messages left on it. While she waited for the phone to charge she tried to remember the words that Billy had said to her before her last meeting...*things will come to light that will make you understand*. She definitely did not understand. What had caused Billy to change like that and then go completely off the rails and kill people? It just was not like him. She still didn't know what Shupe and he were doing together. Finally after about 30 minutes her phone revved back to life. Immediately the icon showed she had one missed call. She pressed "1" to listen to her voice messages.

*"Melissa, this is Billy", she heard. "I know you don't understand a lot of things — about me and about Shupe. He really is not a bad a guy. I've left you a video that will explain everything. You probably won't see me again after tomorrow, so this is goodbye. You've been a good friend to me and if all goes as planned maybe we can meet in again in a new society that I'm going to start to build tomorrow. Goodbye Melissa"*.

Melissa put the phone down quite stunned. *So he had tried to call me! But he said something about a video? What video?*

Immediately Melissa picked up her phone again and dialed the number to Keith and Melissa.

Keith had just gotten home from his trip upstate and had started to tell Emily about the conversation he had with Clive Howard about Shupe when the phone rang. Emily answered it.

"Emily", Melissa said urgently, "I need to speak to Keith!"

Emily handed the phone to Keith with a very concerned look on her face.

"This is Keith, what is it Melissa?" Keith said concerned

"I found my phone; and yes Billy did leave me a message! Listen...." She then played back the strange voice message from her phone from Billy.

Keith spoke up, "Melissa, were you able to find the video he mentioned?"

“No, Keith. There’s no video here!” She relied desperately “Mom’s a bit too out of it to remember clearly, but I’ve looked in the apartment and there’s nothing here!”

“Can you come over right now?” asked Keith “There are some things that I discovered on my trip that you should hear.”

“I’ll be right over!” she said.

Then she hung up the phone.

Meanwhile, listening in on the conversation a short distance away were two private-eyes who had placed a tap on the Watson’s phone.

They intently listened to the playback and said “We’d better phone this in.”

## Chapter 32

Melissa hopped on a bus that took her to within walking distance of Keith and Melissa’s home. She knocked on the door and Emily let her right in.

“How are you Melissa?” Emily asked very concerned “Is your mom drunk again?”

“Not yet, but she probably will be by the time I get home.”

“Melissa, if you’d like you can spend the night here. It might be better than trying to go home tonight”.

“Thank you Emily, I’d really like that”, said a grateful Melissa.

“Now can I get you some coffee or something?” Emily asked.

“That would be great”, she replied.

Keith entered the room and both he and Melissa sat down at the table.

“Emily, I just got back from Osceola, and spoke to the chemical plant manager there about Shupe. He was very evasive and totally contradicted the reason Shupe said he was let go. As I was leaving, one of the Black workers approached me clandestinely and asked me to meet him at a local bar. There he told me that Shupe had been a member of a *White Supremacist Group* called the *Army of the White Brotherhood*. He told me that Shupe would frequently harass the Black workers there, and tried to recruit the Whites for what he called the inevitable *Race War* to come. The management sacked him, and when they did, he threatened to have his group blow up their plant.”

“That explains a lot”, said Melissa, “the sudden change in Billy, the racial slurs. It must have been Shupe who orchestrated this whole shooting and made Billy the fall guy for it!”

“Yes, Melissa, it sure appears that way. And then shot him dead to keep him quiet!” added Keith.

“What do we do?” asked Melissa.

Keith thought for a moment. “Right now there is no hard proof. If we try to take this to the authorities now, they are just going to pin it on a fantasy of yours. Even with the information about Shupe from the chemical plant, we have no solid proof of anything. The only thing that can make this story believable is if we can somehow locate that video Billy said he sent to you.”

## Chapter 33

At the NRA chapter Jim Hendricks hung up the phone, and then placed another call to an unlisted number.

Evan Hoyt answered the phone, "Hoyt here."

"Hoyt" said Hendricks, "You have a problem! It appears that that kid who Shupe recruited for the Emory School shooting left a little farewell video to his girlfriend that he said '*would explain everything!*'"

"Were you able to get the video?"

"No, our PI's just relayed the phone message they heard from a girl named Melissa to somebody named Keith Watson. Do you know who they are?" asked Hendricks.

"No", replied Hoyt, "but I intend to find out! We need to make sure that video never sees the light of day or this could fry us all!"

Hoyt put down the phone. "I better call up Shupe and the boys and do something about this right now", he said aloud.

## Chapter 34

Keith, Melissa and Emily sat around the table trying to think where Billy might have sent that Video. Maybe it was in the mailbox, or maybe her mom might have seen it and hid it like she had done with the phone. Anyway, it would have to wait until morning.

Emily took Melissa up to the upstairs guest bedroom and laid out a pair of spare pajamas for her to wear. "Thank you again Emily, for being my friend", she said with tears in her eyes.

Emily could hardly contain her own tears at this. *This kid really needed a break* she thought, *this is why I went into teaching in the first place.*

In the middle of the night, the phone rang.

"Who could be calling at this hour?" Keith groaned drowsily.

He picked up the phone. "Mr. Watson, this is Sargent Grason from the Orange Grove Police department, could I please speak to Emily Watson?"

A panic went through him, "What now?" he thought and he handed the phone to a very shaken Emily.

"This is Emily Watson, what's happened?"

"Ms. Watson, we are trying to locate the whereabouts of a Melissa Hartwood. Do you happen to know where she might be? We tried contacting the school and they suggested that we should contact you since you seemed to have an association with her."

She could barely contain the panic in her voice "Is she in some sort of trouble? Has something happened?"

"Ma'am, do you know where we can locate her?" Sargent Grason reiterated.

“Yes, she is staying here tonight, I’ll get her.”

Emily hastily ran upstairs to the guest room and woke up Melissa.

“Melissa, the police are on the phone trying to contact you. I don’t know what it is about, but no matter *what*, we are here for you.” She said barely containing the anguish in her voice.

Melissa ran into Keith and Emily’s bedroom and picked up the phone.

“This is Melissa Hartwood”, she said breathlessly.

“Ms. Hartwood, I’m Sargent Grason from the Orange Grove Police Department. Apparently, there has been a fire over at your apartment. Your mother was in there when the fire started. We were able to get her out, but she’s in the intensive care center over at the Orange Grove County Hospital.

“Do you know anything about how this fire might have started?” asked Melissa.

“We think she might have been drinking and possibly left something on the stove and forgot about it. Our investigators are looking into it now. Are you alright Ms. Hartwood? Would you like us to send a squad car over to pick you up?”

Melissa said "No, I have someone who can take me there", and then she hung up.

She looked at Emily and flung herself on her in uncontrollable sobs. Emily held her and tried her best to find some words to comfort her.

Keith looked at both of them and thought, we are now all in danger!

## **March 21<sup>st</sup>**

### **Chapter 35**

Melissa looked into cubicle where her mother lay attached to tubes, monitors and oxygen. She could hardly hold back her tears.

A nurse approached Melissa and said “Are you her family?”

“Yes”, said Melissa, “I’m her daughter”.

“OK”, said the nurse, “you can go on in, but I can only let you stay a few minutes”.

Melissa walked into the darkened cubicle. “Mom?” she said in a soft voice.

The frail figure in bed turned to look at her. Melissa reached out and grabbed her hand.

“Oh Mom!” Melissa said unable to contain her sobs.

“They threatened your dad”, said Melissa’s mother in a barely audible voice.

“He called me from the prison. He said some inmates from the *Aryan Brotherhood* threaten to kill him if you said anything or showed that video to anyone. Melissa what are they talking about? What have you gotten into? Melissa, I’m so sorry I let you down.....”

At that she faded out. The nurse standing in back of the cubicle beckoned her to come out.

Waiting in the hallway was a police officer.

“Ms. Hartwood”, he said, “We’re still not sure what happened there. Originally we suspected she got drunk and left something on the stove, but her neighbors reported that they heard some people rifling her mailbox, and shortly after that they saw the apartment ablaze. That’s when they called the fire department. She was lucky they got there in time. She was out cold on the couch.”

“Are you by any chance the girlfriend of the boy who shot all those high school kids?” he asked.

She shook her head meekly.

“Could it be possible someone was trying to get revenge for Billy through you?” he asked.

She just sobbed and shrugged.

“Well in any case, are you going to be alright? You can’t go back to the apartment, it’s totally destroyed.”

With that, Emily spoke up to the police officer. “Sir, I’m one of her teachers. She was with staying with us tonight, and we can keep her with us until things get sorted out.”

“Ms. Hartwood”, he inquired, “Is that OK with you?”

Melissa just nodded.

The nurse then spoke up “We’ll let you know if there are any changes in her condition. I expect she’ll be here a while.”

With that, Melissa, still clutching Emily as close as she could, and Keith walked out of the Intensive Care wing and into the elevator. When they drove off in their car, Melissa fell immediately asleep in the back.

“What do you think happened?” asked Emily in a quiet concerned voice.

“I don’t know, but I doubt it was revenge by any students. Somebody’s gotten wind of what we’re after and they wanted to make sure it wasn’t ever found—even if they had to kill someone to do it.”

“Emily, he said again, “I think we are all in real danger from whoever these people are”.

As they pulled into their driveway, they didn’t notice a green pickup parked nearby with a man watching intently their every movement.

## Chapter 36

The next day, Keith went back into his office and Emily called in sick so she could stay close by Melissa. She tried to put on some upbeat music, but Melissa just sat in a trance most of the day, deep in thought.

When she finally spoke she said to Emily, “Emily, mom said that they threatened to kill dad in prison.”

Emily was taken aback, “How do you know this?”

“Mom told me in the hospital that she got a call from dad from the prison. She said they threatened to kill him unless I shut up or if I showed the video to anyone.”

“Emily, I’m so scared right now!” she said as she broke into a new round of sobbing.

Clutching her, Emily could only just stroke her and say “It’s going to be alright Melissa, we’ll make sure no one harms you or your family.”

Keith got home later that evening to find Emily and Melissa sitting around the table. Melissa had calmed down a little by now.

“How are you Melissa?” queried Keith in a quiet voice. Melissa just shrugged.

Melissa then told Keith about the threat that her dad had gotten from the Aryan Brotherhood in prison.

“We’re you able to find out anything new Keith?” asked Emily.

“No”, said Keith. “Apparently the mailbox had been rifled before the fire, but we’re not sure if they found anything. Your mom didn’t seem to know anything about the video, but someone does. That’s why they’ve been trying to find it, or at least make sure it never gets found.”

“I’m still puzzled by this”, said Keith, “Billy said he made a video for you Melissa, but how? His computer was broken so he couldn’t have done it with that. I want to listen to that phone message again to see if we can discover some clues.”

Keith cued up the digital recording he’d made of the message on Melissa’s phone and played it back. They listened intently, rewound it, and played it again; this time at a higher volume. Suddenly Melissa jumped up with a shout! “The music!” She said “He’s playing the tape from the dance routine we made when we were in the studio! That’s where he made the video!”

Keith thought for a moment. “Melissa, the video cameras they use there, don’t they have a memory chip in them that records things first? When you want to make a DVD, you just play back the contents from the recorded memory chip, isn’t that right?”

Melissa pondered this and said, “Yes, that’s right! That would mean that if the memory chip is still in the camera, it would still have Billy’s video on it! We might have the proof we need!” she shouted.

“We have to get in there and get that memory chip from the camera before they figure out that it might still be there”, said Keith.

“Emily, do you have a key to get into the school and dance studio?” asked Keith.

“Yes, I do!”

“OK, let’s go!” said Keith.

## Chapter 37

As they pulled out of the driveway in their Prius, they failed to notice the green Ford pickup following behind them. When they got to the school, the man in the pickup watched them go in and then placed a call on his cell phone. A short while later another pickup arrived. Shupe got out of it with a Glock pistol holstered in his belt.

“Thanks Jess, I’ll take it from here. “You keep an eye out and tell me if they slip out a back way.”

He entered the building through the back door, making sure he wasn't heard.

Meanwhile, Keith, Melissa and Emily had entered the darkened music/dance studio. Emily locked the door behind them, and then they all walked over to the video recording studio. Keith opened the door and went over to the video camera still mounted on its tripod.

"I think the memory chip is here", he said, opening the compartment in the video camera.

He then withdrew a small black square chip. Placing the chip into the computer console, he loaded the Windows Media player and hit play. The screen went fuzzy for a while and then a solitary seated figure dressed in green camouflage holding an AR-15 assault rifle appeared into view.

The seated figure looked into the camera and spoke.

*"Melissa, I hope you are seeing this so you can understand what I am about to do. Shupe isn't a bad guy like you think. He and I are patriots to a much bigger cause. He bought me this rifle and enlisted me in the White Brotherhood Army so that I can be the one to lead the charge to wipe out the Black Panthers at this school. That will begin the great Race War to cleanse this country. Shupe and I will both be heroes after this is over, you'll see. Maybe when this is all over maybe we can be together again in a new safer White America. I love you Melissa, but I have a higher cause now. Please try to understand."*

With that the recording stopped. They all stood speechless. Finally Keith spoke up. "There's our proof."

Just then, they heard a door open into the darkened studio.

## Chapter 38

Melissa, Keith and Emily lay crouched in the darkened video recording studio as the figure emerged in the doorway into the still blacked out dance studio.

"It's Shupe!" exclaimed Melissa.

Shupe crept quietly into the darkened room. It was obvious that he did not know his way around since he clung close to the wall away from the video studio.

"It looks like he's going over to the closet where Billy stored the gun", whispered Melissa.

The closet door was slightly ajar.

"He must think we're hiding in there", she said.

Shupe slowly drew his Glock, which sent chill down Keith's spine.

"What do we do?" whispered Emily.

Keith thought for a moment and whispered to Melissa. "We need to create a distraction, Melissa. Can you cue up some music so that it will blare really loud when I tell you to?"

"I think I can", she replied.

"Do it very quietly. Then when I tell you, hit the switch", whispered Keith.



Melissa could just make out the controls by their illuminated dials. Shupe still hadn't seen them and was going past the studio toward the closet in the back. He had his Glock drawn in firing position.

Keith looked at Melissa and Emily, "When Melissa hits the music switch, make a run for the door!"

Shupe was still advancing toward the closet. His concentration was focused on the slightly opened doorway.

Keith whispered to Melissa, "Now!"

Suddenly the room blared with loud music. Shupe jumped and fired two shots at the direction of the sound. In that time Melissa, Keith and Emily bolted out of the door to the studio and the Music room into the dark hallway. Shots rang out after them, barely missing Keith.

They darted around the corner toward the exit. Keith tried the exit door, but it was locked. "*Damn!*" he cursed, "we'll have to find another way out."

They rounded the corner and hid behind a large display case of trophies that Emory had won in football. Keith could see the main entrance at the far end of the hallway, but it would be a stretch for all of them to make it without Shupe being on top of them.

A voice rang out.

"I know you're here!" shouted Shupe! "Just give me the video and you can all go home."

*Fat chance of that* thought Keith.

They could just make out the reflection of his shadowy image in the glass case they were hiding behind. He'd be on top of them any second. There was just no way they'd get away from him.

"I'll try to make a run for it and see if I can distract him", said Keith desperately.

"No!" Emily whispered, "He'll kill you, and then us".

"We've got to try something!" Keith shot back.

He stared at the metal trophies in the case.

"Melissa, can see if you can get your hand in the trophy case and slide the door open? I'll reach in and grab one of the metal trophies and then toss it down the opposite hallway to see if it might draw his attention."

Quietly Melissa slid the door to the case open just enough so that Keith could get his hand in and pull out one of the metal award cups. Shupe was still walking down the hallway searching, but getting closer to them with every step. Keith, clutching the cup, hurled it with all his might down the corridor. There was a clang of metal and then a shot.

"*I know you're there!*" yelled Shupe "We can end this real easy. Just give me that video! How about it?"

His footsteps were getting closer. The diversion hadn't worked and now they were done for. There was no way for them to escape! They huddled together desperately trying to think of something, waiting for the inevitable.

Just then the back door bust open.

"*Police! Drop your weapon!*" a voice shouted.

Shupe turned, catching the full beam of police officer's flashlight in his face.

He held up his hands facing the officer, still holding his Glock.

"*Drop it I said!*" the police officer said menacingly. Shupe laid down his weapon.

In that split second, Keith saw his chance, and bolted for the main entrance along with Melissa and Emily.

“*Halt!*” yelled the police officer, but they were safely out the door of the building and into the street and the parked Prius.

The police officer then turned his attention to Shupe who stood in the hallway with his arms raised.

“Officer”, he said, “my name is Clay Shupe and I am one of Emory High’s security guards. I got a report of some people breaking in the school and headed over to investigate”, he lied.

The officer didn’t seem fluxed, “Let’s see some ID Mr. Shupe”, he said.

Shupe fished out his wallet, and produced his school security ID.

The officer took his time looking at it while Shupe fidgeted impatiently.

“Sir,” the officer spoke up. “In the future, if there is a break in, let the police handle it. We don’t want any more kids getting shot at this school.”

He then handed Shupe back his wallet and Glock.

Shupe turned and walked out of the building knowing that his prey was now long gone.

Jess caught up with him as he walked out toward his parked pickup.

“We’re blown!” he said to Jess. “We need to get out of town fast and warn the others before that video gets into the hands of the police.”

Both pickups then sped out of town.

Emily and Melissa were still shaking as Keith gunned the Prius as fast as he could to the local police precinct station. They ran in the door breathlessly.

The desk clerk, who was just having his late-night snack, looked at them.

“We need to see Detective Woods or Howell. I don’t care if you have to get them out of bed. We need to talk to them now!” demanded Keith.

“Calm down”, said the desk clerk “What is thus all about”

“We have critical new evidence about the Emory High School shooting that they need to see immediately! It’s a matter of life and death!” he added.

The desk sergeant looked at the three of them and decided quickly that they were not nut cases or pranksters. He dialed the private cell phone number to Detective Woods.

“Woods, this is the desk clerk over at the precinct, I’ve got three people here who seem pretty desperate to meet with you *right now*. They said something about having some new evidence about the Emory School shooting. They said it can’t wait till morning—It was a matter of life and death!” added the sergeant.

The Sergeant put down the receiver. “He said he’ll be right over. Why don’t you find some chairs in the break room and help yourself to some coffee. You look like you need some”, he said nonchalantly.

Still shaking from the ordeal, they waited in the break room until Detective Woods came in.

“I’m Detective Woods from the homicide department. I recognize Ms. Hartwood here but don’t know who you two are.”

“I’m Keith Watson, a reporter with the St. Petersburg Times and this is my wife Emily, a teacher at Emory High”, said Keith. “We have some new evidence in the Emory High shooting that you need to see immediately. Is there a computer someplace that we can use?” asked Keith.

Woods led him to a conference room and plugged in a laptop computer. Keith put the chip into the SIM slot and it immediately launched into Windows Media Player. Together they all watched Billy's confession on camera. Then Keith told Woods about the information he had about Shupe from the chemical factory in Osceola. Melissa also told him about the run in Shupe had had with LeVon in the school parking lot and the threats Shupe had made to him. When they were done, Detective Woods picked up the phone and placed a call to the State Patrol. After he hung up, he said, "One of our officers was standing watch at the school tonight just encountered your man Shupe in the school tonight. The officer said he responded to shots fired in the building. Mr. Shupe said he was just chasing some vandals, so they let him go. We had a squad car sent over to where he lives and his wife said he went out, didn't say where he was going, and hasn't been back since. She also seemed somewhat relieved that he was gone. I've put out an APB on him with the State Patrol. I don't think he'll get too far."

Keith let out a sigh of relief. At last they finally had the evidence to put Shupe behind bars.

Emily just held Melissa tightly who sobbed unabashedly in her arms.

## Aftermath

Just after dawn, a chevron of squad cars descended upon the clandestine farm house on the edge of the everglades. They had been tipped off by one of the *Army of the White Brotherhood* members as to where they could find Shupe and the rest of the brotherhood in exchange for immunity. Despite the arsenal they had stockpiled in the house they all decided to surrender without a fight.

"Clay Shupe", the deputy spoke solemnly as he was led out to the waiting State Patrol car in handcuffs, "You are charged with two counts of first degree murder, seven counts of conspiracy to commit murder, and three counts of attempted murder. Read him his rights!" he shouted to the other deputy.

A few of the other brothers were also led out to waiting squad cars. Evan Holt, and some of the other brothers had previously bolted and left the state. Warrants were issued for their arrest as well in conjunction with the shooting.

The next day the *St. Petersburg Times* ran an exclusive "*Un Masking The Good Guy With A Gun*" by Keith Watson. In the story, Keith revealed the entire plot and coopting of Billy to be a pawn in the *White Brotherhoods* fantasy race war.

Luke Cartright, the man who had sold Billy the gun disappeared. It was rumored he was now in a border town in Texas running illegal guns for the Mexican Drug Cartel.

Later that month the Florida State legislature repealed the "*Good Guy With A Gun Law*" until better safe guards could be put in place, much to the howling of the NRA. The State legislature also agreed to hear several bills that would put in force stricter background checks and mandate stricter enforcement of illegal trunk gun sales.

A few weeks later Melissa ran up to Emily and wrapped her arms around her with un-abashed tears in both their eyes.

“How are you holding up Melissa?” asked Emily.

“Mom is getting out of the hospital pretty soon,” Melissa replied. “She will have to go into rehab then to recover from her drinking habit but the governor has personally sponsored an early release for my Dad. Because of that dance video that I made with Billy, I’ve been accepted into a Magnet School for the arts near Tampa. One of the teachers has even offered to let me live with her while I go to school; at least until Mom gets out of rehab and we can start a new home.”

“Oh Melissa I’m so happy for you,” said Emily. “I knew you had it in you!”

Emory High School re-opened again after a memorial ceremony to the seven people who died in the shootings, although Billy Edwards was intentionally omitted from the ceremony. Keith and Emily attended the service and Keith spoke out against gun violence and the need for sensible gun control. He also spoke out about the need to come together as a school and community and not let those social outcasts on the fringes fall into the depths of mental illness or fall prey to powerful people with misguided ideas.

He also hoped that someday, these students’ nightmares would go away as would his own.

Keith, Emily and Melissa got out of the car and walked the short paces to a headstone placed over a new grave site. They stared down at the grave in silence. On the tombstone were the words

Billy Edwards  
1996 - 2013  
A Good Young Man  
Killed with a Gun

