

February 27
2:45am

Northwest of Kerrville, along a winding dirt road cutting through overshadowing hills in the bleak darkness, Tate managed to locate the house Daniel had drawn a map to. At the crest of one hill stood a shabby, desolate looking one story that badly needed demolishing. Two hundred yards behind this shack by a monstrous oak tree stood a small shack made of corrugated tin with big red rust spots all over and a wooden door. Later inspection confirmed this tin shack was used as a drug lab. All the materials, tables, freezers, and every trace: gone. Someone knew to close up shop beforehand. Crooks could always sense a Cop nearby, almost like animals-seeing the unseen, noticing the unnoticeable, sensing evil around them.

Out front, a car door slammed, then spitting of loose gravel as a car reversed, transmission shifting, churning dirt road as it sped away. Tate hid behind the thick oak trunk spying the lanky man with a buzz cut hairdo walking up towards the house. He was Tate's height, but very little muscles. Black circles enclosed his sunken eyes, making him look zombie like. Underneath a muddy doormat, this giant nightmare took a concealed key, inserted, and opened the front door, which loosely hung on its hinges. Tate undid the safety of his 12 gauge, inserted a shell into the ejection port then pumped the fore-end: he was ready to rock-n-roll.

Clinging to the house's rustic painted boards that cracked and chipped away, Tate inched his way around the front, crouching under passing windowsills. The bathroom light flicked on followed by a flushing toilet and running sink water. At least he had enough manners to wash up afterwards, which didn't give him any brownie points since this man was a monster for creating narcotics. By the living room window, a T.V. clicked

on-it was loud and the station broadcasted something with Action News in its opening credits. The man froze for a second by the window- talking into his telephone receiver looking out-expecting someone. Tate remained motionless, slowed his breath, gripping the shotgun in anticipation. He moved away from the window, disappearing into another room obscured by the unlit interior.

In one hand, Tate raised the shotgun mid-chest level, the other jimmied the door handle-it was unlocked. Entering the unknown interior, the T.V. sat against the bottom left side of the room, a dirty, brown recliner in the upper right corner, a lamp beside the recliner. To the right was a bedroom, a dining room connecting to the living room, kitchen in the far rear. The only lights in the whole place emanated via the lamp and a hanging bulb with a pull cord above the sink. Tate moved about in sweeping motions, checking each corner before swinging around. Piles of outdated newspapers, books, catalogues, stacks and stacks of unopened mail littered the dining rooms corners, covered the scratched surface of the dining table in loosely organized rows.

To the right between the kitchen and the dining room, a cubbyhole housed two doors. One face Tate, the other faced the kitchen's direction. Anyone or thing could be behind them-waiting. Tate reached for the door facing the kitchen, but the rustle of a newspaper stopped him-the man lurked behind, knife drew back to stab. Tate surprised him by swinging around, the barrel of the shotgun aimed for his chest.

"Tell your cop buddies they can't make me leave that easily! I'm not going to let them bully me!" His was voice deep and fearless.

"Talk and I might let you go."

"Why should I? You're one of *them*. I don't trust dirty cops!"

Behind him, the glass shattered as an array of bullet fire ripped holes into the walls. The shells that didn't get absorbed into the sheetrock blasted through the lanky man's shoulder, tearing muscle and bone, spraying the air with red droplets. He dropped to the ground, so did Tate as that bullet whizzed by his ear. Blood continued to pour as he made for the kitchen, running out the back door into the night. Several more gunshots broke the night's silence, echoing across the hillside. Tate ran into the room adjacent to the living room. In the dark, he stumbled over the bed's leg, crashing onto the floor, the shotgun sliding from his hand. Shadows passed by the window. The hit squad worked their way inside, checking for any other witnesses. The bedroom door burst open, the light switch flicked on.

From under the bed, Tate could only see this person up to their ankles. Black dress pants and black lace ups. He looked around for the gun, now that the light was on. It lay in plain sight by a dresser.

"What do we have here?" The hit man said picking up the gun. Tate knew his voice from anywhere.

The door closed behind him, the gun in his possession. Tate knew he had to lay low or else he'd be discovered too.

"Did you find Tate?" A voice outside the door asked. He, too, knew that voice as well.

"No, but I found his gun. Our friend might have done the job for us."

"Let's hope so. If he did, look in the basement for a body. I'll stay up here and poke around myself. Tate dies tonight, no buts about it," said the person who seemed to be in charge.