



THE INDISTIGUISHABLE CON

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CHAPTER ONE

Walter checked his rearview mirror and watched for oncoming traffic before pulling onto the busy road. The familiar drive had a way of relaxing him, despite the unease he should have been feeling at that moment. The lulling hum of the engine caused his mind to wander like it often did, and thoughts of his past began to surface. It had been years ago he'd been a struggling young artist—desperate for money—when he'd decided to pull his first job. Walter could still recall the staggering anxiety he'd felt and how his fear of being caught threatened to bring him to his senses. He hadn't thought he could go through with it, but with help, it had been so easy.

Over time, Walter and Lucy had developed a flawless system. A few surprises still arose from time to time, but for the most part, the con seemed almost mechanical and mindless.

He began to slow and soon parked the stretched limousine alongside a tall building.

The massive sign above the structure identified it as *International Venture Tech INC.*. Walter stepped out of the vehicle and glanced towards the carved, granite stairs leading to the front doors, but failed to see Mr. Hughes. It was common for Hughes to keep his limousine driver waiting. The influential executive was often held up in last-minute meetings at the end of the day.

Walter took the extra time to observe the chaos of rush hour in the busy city. Every day at five o'clock he watched as the same herd of well-dressed professionals descended onto the city sidewalks and streets. Walter thought they looked desperate, chasing the fleeting time they had left to do something meaningful before it all started again the next day.

Too much time was passing, Walter noted, more than usual. As calm as he tried to stay, the instant he looked at his watch, he felt his heart begin to race. *Time's running out*, he thought. There was nothing he could do and that simple fact made his stomach churn.

“Unbelievable,” Walter said to himself. Two years of preparation and the success of all their plans hinged on whether Hughes walked out of those doors at the right time. Hughes was never *this* late. Was this going to be one of those surprises Walter arrogantly shrugged off?

He desperately concentrated his attention on the front doors, hoping, even praying, the pompous narcissist would come down those stairs. Suddenly, as if Walter had willed it to happen, Hughes exited the building. He held his leather briefcase in his right hand and a rolled-up catalog in his left. Walter sighed a breath of relief. Quickly, he opened the passenger door for Hughes.

“Good evening, Mr. Hughes,” said Walter with a pleasant smile on his face as he ushered him into the back seat.

“It certainly is, Walter. The Legacy Auction House, please.”

The privacy divider remained down, as it often did during their drives together. Hughes enjoyed talking to Walter. He would tell him about his day or what he and his wife did the night before. No subject was off-topic as long as it pertained to him and his extravagant lifestyle in some way. It was the sound of his own voice Hughes loved, a trait Walter looked for when choosing someone to con. Those personality types usually revealed everything Walter needed to know, and Hughes was no exception.

They were well on their way but just as Hughes was starting to mindlessly unload his weekend plan onto Walter, the limousine car phone began to ring. Hughes answered it. Walter seemed entirely focused on the road, but was listening intently.

“Hello Scott, I’m glad you called, the meeting went better than expected,” Hughes jeered. “It looks like you’ll be able to buy that house in the Hamptons next to Nancy and me after all.”

He chuckled while listening to Scott’s excitement on the other end. “The board members didn’t flinch when I told them about the layoffs we had last week,” Hughes said and then added, “I knew they wouldn’t. Here’s to you my friend. We are back on track for the quarter and your bonus is locked in.”

Typical, Walter thought. He couldn’t quite make out what was being said on the other end, but it was obvious the two were gloating about some sort of bottom-line victory.

“Uh huh... Well, I haven’t lost any sleep over the casualties, have you?” Hughes listened to Scott’s response. “I couldn’t agree more, those people were all dead weight, costing the company millions. It’s just business. No one can fault us for that.”

Walter strongly disagreed as he listened in but knew *he* could never voice his opinions. However, a slight smile emerged on his face when he heard

Hughes fumbling through the auction catalog he had been holding. Walter casually readjusted his mirror to catch a glimpse of the magazine sprawled open on Hughes' lap. The pages displayed a very unusual but richly colored painting of a young woman sitting at a table. She was depicted resting her head peacefully on her arms. The painting was labeled: *Jeune Fille Endormie* by Pablo Picasso. Of course, Walter couldn't see these details from where he sat, but he didn't need to. He was very familiar with *that* particular painting. Walter looked forward at the road but directed his true attention back to the conversation.

"Yes, how did you know?" Hughes asked a bit intrigued. "I'm on my way to the auction house now. There's a Picasso I've had my eye on," he bragged. There was a pause. "No," he responded, "Nancy wants it as a birthday present. The Art World is on fire, you know. I was told it's potentially a good investment, so I agreed." Hughes laughed. He then listened and just like that, made an unexpected suggestion to his friend, "Scott, you ought to come

down to Legacy and take a look. My chauffeur can pick you up.”

Walter again glanced in the rearview mirror, trying desperately not to show his concern. *Another surprise*, he thought. Walter held his breath, trying to anticipate Scott’s response.

With the phone to his ear, Mr. Hughes casually tilted his head back, staring through the sunroof as he listened. “You don’t know what you’re missing, Scott.” Hughes mocked.

Walter could breathe again.

“Alright, I’ll talk to you later.” Hughes said. Another pause. “Yeah... see you tomorrow, bye now.” Hughes hung up the phone. After that, he didn’t say much to Walter. He simply sat back for the remainder of the car ride and quietly studied his catalog.

Perfect, Walter thought.

It was a busy night at the Legacy Auction House. The renowned establishment was founded in 1878 and was known for auctioning some of the most famous art in the world. Billions of dollars had been

negotiated within its walls and that evening money would be exchanged in very healthy sums.

As the sun began to set, it brilliantly lit the east-facing building from behind causing the classical structure to show off its silhouette. Walter pulled in front of the shadowy entrance. He waited for the few cars ahead of him to maneuver out of the way before stopping the limousine completely. He then took a moment to adjust his chauffeur's hat and straighten his black tie, after which he calmly stepped out of the vehicle and opened the door for Mr. Hughes.

“Good luck sir, I'll be waiting right here when you return.” Walter assured him.

“Thank you, Walter, I can always count on you.” Mr. Hughes stated. And with that, he grabbed his briefcase, promptly turned around, and walked inside the building.

Without a moment to lose, Walter nearly stumbled back into the limousine and peeled out onto the road. Close by was a vacant parking lot neighboring a street of small businesses – all of which had recently closed for the night. Walter pulled in and

parked alongside a large, white, armored transport truck. Careful to not be seen, he stepped out of the limo and into the truck.

As quickly as Walter could manage, he pulled off his black blazer and hat while cramped in the truck's cab. Awkwardly, he threw on a simple black industrial apron labeled: *Legacy Auction House, Est. 1878*, over his crisp white Oxford shirt. Walter added the finishing touch to his ensemble by putting on a pair of smooth white cotton gloves. He then hastily removed a comb from the apron's front pocket, spit on it, and smoothed his hair. With pressure mounting, he was back on the road again driving the white truck towards the auction building.

Walter stopped at the first checkpoint near a large gate at the back of The Legacy building. The security booth on the left side of the gate was occupied by a large intimidating figure. Walter had to squint his eyes against the glare of the setting sun to see the guard's face.

"Hello sir, loading or unloading?" asked the security guard in a low booming voice.

“Both,” Walter answered. He then offered his security I.D. badge to the man. The badge identified Walter as *Heath Malcom*.

“Cutting it a little close, aren’t we?” The guard said in jest as he swiftly scanned Walter’s badge.

“You bet, traffic was unbelievable.”

“You can pull forward now, sir,” the guard responded dryly.

“Sure, thanks.” Walter replied.

Without much thought, Walter drove towards the loading zone. The scene before him was a sort of organized chaos. Men and women called “carriers” were dressed in matching uniforms identical to Walter’s. They scurried around similar-looking vehicles while loading and unloading countless pieces of art and other obscure items. The incoming inventory was being toted over to the next checkpoint by carriers and sent inside.

Walter slipped out of the van, unlatched the double back doors, and delicately lifted out a large painting. The colorful art, although wrapped in semi-

opaque protective wrapping, was undoubtedly the same painting Mr. Hughes intended to bid on for his wife. Walter neared the checkpoint.

Lucy, the Senior Auction Director, known by her peers as *Michelle*, was actively inspecting and scanning inventory when, out of the corner of her eye, she saw Walter standing in line. Once his turn, Walter accommodated Lucy by holding up his I.D. badge. Lucy scanned the badge without saying a word. She thereupon made eye contact with Walter, smiled politely, but then gave him a look as if to say, “Why are you so late? I’ve been flipping out.”

“Sorry,” Walter mouthed silently.

Lucy instinctively found the UPC attached to the artwork and scanned it too.

“Sharon, can you take over for me? I need to escort this one inside, it’s part of the Picasso collection,” said Lucy.

“Sure Michelle, but you’d better hurry. They’re probably looking for you in there, that auction’s already started,” Sharon warned.

“I’m well aware, thank you.” Lucy replied, obviously annoyed. She then motioned for Walter to follow. “Heath, come with me please,” she said.

Walter followed Lucy down a brightly lit hall. Unable to help himself, he admired his wife’s lean but shapely figure from behind. He enjoyed how the black pencil skirt she wore accentuated her small waist. He was even mesmerized by Lucy’s dark brown hair, trussed tightly in a high ponytail swaying back and forth with each step she took. Upon hearing Lucy’s black, leather, high heels clicking loudly on the hard marble floor, two security guards turned around to stop and gawk as well. *She is the perfect distraction*, Walter thought.

Walter and Lucy entered a spacious white room; faint echoes of the auctioneer’s brisk voice could be heard through its walls. Oddly enough, even though the room was full of neatly organized racks and shelves of artwork, Walter thought it had a sterile empty feel to it. All the art in the room was wrapped in clear packaging labeled with a lot number and UPC similar to the painting Walter held in his arms. Each

was assigned a location in accordance with its lot number. Because of this ideal cataloged system, Lucy knew exactly where to take Walter.

A door on the other side of the room opened abruptly. The unexpected sound caused Walter to nearly drop his painting. Two male carriers entered the room from the auction assembly hall and grabbed the next lot up for auction. To Lucy's relief, the men were entirely too busy to pay her and Walter any attention. The two men worked together harmoniously to unwrap the next lot. Once the art had been sufficiently prepped, they immediately hauled it out to be auctioned.

Walter and Lucy were soon alone again. Lucy immediately began surveying the floor, looking for something. Walter studied the security camera directly above him, trying to figure out its present point of view. Lucy stepped past Walter, lightly brushing against his shoulder, indicating she'd found what she was looking for. There, resting on the planked wood floor, three feet away, was a single copper penny. Lucy gave Walter a quick wink and

stepped directly over it. Her seemingly innocent behavior created a blind spot, exactly where they needed one.

Upstairs, on the second floor, sat Hank Guzman, Head of Surveillance. Though Hank cursed his job every day and was routinely bored out of his mind, he was diligent about keeping his eyes glued to the monitors. Hank knew Michelle, The Senior Auction Director, well, so seeing her stand directly in front of camera number five didn't bother him, but he was annoyed about not having a great visual of the man behind her.

What Hank *thought* he saw was a carrier placing a checked painting into its assigned lot rack and removing another painting that had been checked for delivery. He observed this routine many times each day, so there was little cause for concern. Hank was correct, Walter *did* place a checked painting into its assigned lot rack and he *did* remove another painting intended to leave the building, but what Hank *didn't* see, happened when Lucy stepped over that copper penny. Lucy not only stepped over the

penny but when she glanced down and saw that brilliant coin looking up at her, she bent over and picked it up. A simple but very effective distraction.

It was in *that* brief moment, as Lucy bent over to pick up that beautiful, brilliant, shiny penny, Walter made his move. He was certain, for the betterment of five seconds, Hank wouldn't be able to concentrate on anything else but Lucy and her tiny pencil skirt. Walter bet his life on it as he brazenly lowered his forged *Jeune Fille Endormie* and, like a cunning magician, switched it out for the identical but genuine Picasso. The swap was complete. Lucy stood up, smoothed her skirt with one hand, and flipped the penny she'd just picked up with the other. Looking quite pleased, she quickly caught it and showed Walter. "Hey, lucky me, I just found a penny," Lucy bragged.

Completely unaware he'd just witnessed a robbery, Hank shoved a powdered jelly donut into his mouth. He watched from his monitor as Walter and Lucy walked out of the room and away from camera number five.

Walter now had to carry their treasure back through the brightly lit hall, past the checkpoint, into his armored van, and out the gate. A seemingly difficult task, however, that night, no one batted an eye as the Senior Auction Director escorted Heath Malcom to the exit checkpoint, cleared him, and sent him on his way; and no one ever would.

Mr. Hughes held his breath with anticipation as he sat in the third row of the great assembly hall looking longingly at the beautifully displayed *Jeune Fille Endormie*. He had just bid all the money he could stomach on her and he fervently hoped it was enough.

“Sold,” shouted the seasoned auctioneer, “for ten million dollars to the enthusiastic, well-dressed man in the third row.”

“Yes!” Mr. Hughes blurted out before he could stop himself.

* * *

Later than usual that night, Walter and his young family sat around the dining table eating dinner. Christopher, age nine, tried to avoid eating his

peas by busily moving them around his plate and squishing them with his fork. After becoming bored of his game, Christopher looked up and saw a curious new painting hanging on the wall behind his father.

“Dad, that painting is really weird. Why do you paint funky stuff like that?” Christopher asked.

Before Walter could answer, Richard, Christopher’s older brother, took it upon himself to rudely interrupt and reply for their father.

“Chris, this is Dad’s replication of a cubism painting, originally painted by Pablo Picasso. And in case you didn’t know, cubism is the technique of using geometric shapes to create human forms in an impressionistic way,” Richard gloated in his usual know-it-all tone.

“Cube-a what’s-a? Richard, you’re a *dork*. I didn’t ask for a flippin’ history lesson, ya nerd,” Christopher mocked.

“Mom, did you hear what he said to me? Aren’t you going to do something?” cried young Richard. “I deserve more respect around here.”

“Richard, for the love... you’re twelve. Boys, please stop fighting and eat your dinner. Your father and I have had an incredibly long day,” Lucy warned.

Just then a confused look appeared on Richard’s face. He finally asked, “Dad, why do all your paintings look like art by other artists? Don’t you think it’s time you come up with your own ideas?”

“Richard don’t be rude,” scolded Lucy.

“It’s alright, Lucy,” said Walter pausing to wipe his mouth with his napkin, “Richard, Pablo Picasso himself once said, ‘*Good artists copy, but great artists steal.*’” He then gave Lucy a flirtatious wink, clapped his hands together, and said, “Now who wants dessert?”

CHAPTER TWO

Many, many years had passed since Walter and his family last gathered around their dining room table to enjoy one of Lucy's delicious home-cooked meals. Richard and Christopher were grown and gone and tragically, after a long and painful battle, Lucy had succumbed to illness and was gone too. Walter, now a downtrodden, sixty-three-year-old man, stood near the kitchen sink, all alone in his big empty home.

It was late when he'd finally stopped working to clean his paintbrushes and pondered what to make himself for dinner. Cooking for one never appealed to Walter much. The simple act only reminded him of what he'd lost and how lonely he really was.

Eager to relieve his hunger and weakness, the old man initiated his mundane routine of rinsing the same dish he used every day. He fetched the milk

from the fridge, wrestled open the last box of bland cornflakes from the bare pantry, and began to pour toasted cereal into his semi-clean porcelain bowl. Then, without warning, Walter's legs gave out from under him. His head brutally slammed against the marble countertop, knocking him unconscious as he fell to the floor.

* * *

Principal Richard Simon policed the halls of East Point High School like a modern-day dictator. Every weekday it was the same routine. Ten minutes after the morning bell he took it upon himself to personally deal with any mischief unfolding in the school halls. Richard enjoyed the thrilling sensation he felt when he caught a student loitering outside class.

Convinced his conservative appearance fostered more respect from his students, Richard went to painstaking lengths to ensure every brown hair was in place, his bowtie straightened, his sweater vest smoothed, and his trousers pressed to perfection. Richard's shoes were so vehemently

shined that they'd make the Queen of England uncomfortable.

Busted, he thought as he rounded a corner and spotted two students making out. Utterly disgusted by the young couple's blatant display of public affection, Richard noisily cleared his throat, hoping to draw their attention.

"Excuse me," he huffed.

Oblivious, or because they simply didn't care, the defiant teenagers continued their loud smacking kisses.

"I said, excuse me!" Richard shouted.

The kids stopped. They each looked at their principal, annoyed. The girl began giggling at Richard's glare then broke out into full-blown laughter when she saw her boyfriend's disheveled hair and her lipstick streaked across his face.

"Give us a break Principal Simon," said the teenage boy. "I was told this area was a safe space. We're clearing our heads of the stress in which this institution plagues us," the boy explained.

Richard tossed each student a pink tardy slip.

“Clear it a little faster in the future, junior. You’re both ten minutes late for class.”

“Whatever you say, Principal Simon,” the boy scoffed.

Sensing his sarcasm, Richard chose to enlighten the young couple with some hard-knock truth. “Have you ever stopped to think how lucky you both are to be enrolled in this institution, otherwise known as the public education system?” he asked.

Silence.

“I didn’t think so. It may interest you to know,” Richard continued, “in the early eighteen hundreds, nearly half the population couldn’t read. The fact is, before minor labor laws, many young people, such as yourselves, had to work sixteen-hour days to help support their families.”

Before either student could comment, Richard added, “Education used to be a privilege and a rarity. Look at you two, pissing your future away without a care in the world. Shame on you.”

“Dude, chill out! Don’t get your panties all in a wad.” The boy snarked. “We’re going.”

The boy's girlfriend burst into her familiar high-pitched laughter. Richard could feel his ears, face, and neck begin to turn red. He exhaled deeply, determined to stay calm.

"You've just earned detention with that wisecrack, sweet lips. Now get to class!" Richard ordered.

In unison, as if rehearsed, both students rolled their eyes. The boy took a detention slip from his principal, and they both meandered into class.

"Punks," Richard mumbled to himself while he huffed into the main office. He had barely shut the door behind him when he was greeted by his meddling secretary, Peggy.

"Good morning, Principal Simon. Oh my, you don't look so good, are you alright?" asked the chubby, rosy-cheeked woman who always managed to look gussied up by her outdated platinum bouffant of hair.

"Yes, I'm fine," grumbled Richard. "Panties in a wad," he snorted quietly to himself while rubbing

his head, in an attempt to massage out his developing migraine.

“What was that?” Peggy asked, confused.
“Pansies are a fraud?” She repeated.

“No...just, forget it,” said Richard, further agitated.

“Is there anything I can do for you this morning, Principal Simon?” she offered, “I’m worried about you.”

Unwilling to engage further in conversation, Richard walked into his office and slammed the door closed behind him.

“Guess not,” said Peggy in a befuddled tone.

* * *

In front of East Point High, a dirty white tow truck with the logo *Green Light Lube Service* painted on its side slammed on its brakes. After circling the parking lot many times without success its driver decided to park in the bus zone.

What are they going to do? The diver thought. *Tow me?*

A sloppy but attractive man with dirty ash-blond hair stepped out of the truck and pushed its heavy door shut. On the left front pocket of his gray jumpsuit were the words printed in bold letters: **Chris, Lube Manager**. Chris reached into his breast pocket, briefly fished around, pulled out a long cigarette then lit it. After inhaling smoke into his lungs and savoring it for a while, he blew out a cloud of fragrant vapor and watched as the wind carried it away. Chris nestled the cigarette to the side of his mouth and entered the building.

Peggy had just taken a bite out of her cinnamon Danish as Chris sauntered inside the main office. Embarrassed, she concealed her mouth with her hand, indicating she was chewing and couldn't speak. Chris waited, puffing away at his cigarette. Peggy soon swallowed and shrieked in horror, "You can't smoke that in here! This is a school!" She scolded.

Chris took one final inhale, smothered the bud into his calloused palm, and flicked it into a nearby garbage can.

Peggy wasn't impressed. "Can I help you, sir?" she asked, annoyed.

"Yeah doll, I'm here to see my brother," answered Chris.

Peggy looked at him suspiciously. "Okay, and who might that be?" she replied, confused.

"The big honcho who runs this place," he replied, hovering over her desk and making the secretary feel uneasy.

"Excuse me?" she inquired.

"You know... the principal, *Richard Simon*."

Enlightened by this new information, Peggy's countenance began to relax. She smiled and laughed with great delight.

"You're Principal Simon's brother? Now *that's* unexpected. You're nothing like him, are you?"

Chris stood up, surprised by her reaction. "What makes you say that?" he wondered.

"Your brother, Principal Simon...he's a bit of an uptight fellow, if you know what I mean?" whispered Peggy. "What was he like as a child? I can't

imagine him as anything else but a serious administrator,” she teased.

“Tell me about it. When we were kids, I’d be playing baseball outside with my friends while Richard was inside polishing his Rubik’s cube collection. I swear that kid even slept with a calculator under his pillow and a telescope near his bed just in case.”

“Just in case what?” Peggy had to know.

“In case he happened to spot an asteroid,” joked Chris. “He’d be able to gauge its impending distance and alert the authorities in record time. What a *dork!*” he concluded.

Peggy howled with laughter to hear such things about her boss.

Richard sat at his desk filling in paperwork. After noticing the loud commotion coming from outside his door, he stopped and looked up. “What is going on out there?” he mumbled to himself. Curiosity got the better of him, and he decided to see for himself. Richard stepped away from his desk and cracked open his door. While peeking out, Richard became puzzled by who he saw.

“Hey, there you are!” Chris exclaimed, motioning for his brother to come out. Confused, Richard walked towards Chris’ out-held hand. Unsure what to do, Richard went ahead and clutched his brother’s palm.

“How’ve you been? Oh Captain, my Captain,” mocked Chris.

Before Richard could answer, Chris pulled him in for a hug but went for a punch in the gut instead. Richard bent over and winced in pain, panting to regain the wind knocked out of him.

“Stop it Chris, not here!” Richard gasped, as a brotherly struggle ensued. Peggy watched in disbelief, not knowing what to do.

Richard was finally able to get the upper hand and trap his brother in a tight headlock when a look of bewilderment emerged on his face. “Wait, why are you here?” he asked.

“Let go of me and I’ll tell you,” choked Chris, cranking his neck to look up at his brother.

Richard released his hold and in return, Chris was able to untwist himself. After not seeing each

other in over two years, the two brothers stood face to face. This unexpected reunion caused Richard to sense something was wrong.

“What is it? Tell me.” Richard insisted.

“It’s Pop. I got a call from the hospital. Apparently last night his neighbor found him unconscious on the kitchen floor and called an ambulance. I’m assuming it was Linda Brown.”

“Is he alright?” Richard asked, concerned.

“The nurse told me he’s stable with a nasty bump to his head. She said he wants to see his sons. So, here I am. Are you coming with me or what?”

“Why you? Why didn’t Dad have them call me?” Richard complained, his ego bruised.

“Please Richard, Pop probably figured you were too busy browbeating young cheerleaders into memorizing the periodic table. How the hell should I know?” Chris joked.

Richard spun around to face Peggy, ignoring his brother’s ridiculous insult.

“Peggy, reschedule my appointments for next week and the faculty meeting this afternoon... I’m not sure when I’ll be back. I’ll call you.”

“Yes sir, I’m so sorry,” remarked Peggy.

Minutes later, Richard and Chris left the school together soon veering in separate directions.

“Hey, where are you going? My truck’s parked closer, let’s ride together.” Chris suggested as he lit up another cigarette. “I’ll bring you back later,” he added.

“Chris, I’d rather take my own car. I’m not getting into your smoke-infused lube mobile.” Richard replied in disgust.

“Man, you haven’t changed a bit, have you? Just shut up and get in, ya pompous jerk.”

Richard rolled his eyes and decided it wasn’t worth fighting over. “Alright...fine,” he reluctantly agreed.

It started out as a quiet drive. Neither man felt there was much to say with so little in common. Richard contemplated this fact for a while and

wondered if it was normal to feel like a stranger around one's own brother.

He always regretted not having a better relationship with Chris, especially when difficult situations would arise, like the death of their mother, or the unfortunate fall their father had the night before. The thought of his father's fall began to make Richard feel uneasy as he contemplated what would cause such an accident?

Out of the corner of his eye, Chris noticed his brother thinking about something. In an effort to ignite conversation, Chris began quizzing Richard in his usual tactless way. "You're being so quiet over there, Captain. What's calculating in that huge head of yours?" Chris asked.

"Chris, don't you get tired of all the wise cracks? Dad is in the hospital, and we don't know why. Doesn't that concern you at all?"

"Sure it concerns me," Chris answered in a defensive tone, "but what am I supposed to do about it? It's too early to get all worked up, I'm sure he's going to be fine."

“Let’s hope you’re right,” Richard replied, worried. He could see the hospital three blocks away. Every time Richard saw that building a feeling of dread and uneasiness washed over him. He couldn’t help it, it reminded him of the last few days of his mother’s life. He recalled how distraught his father had been: so unbelievably grief-stricken he’d stayed home during the funeral. *That was hard*, Richard thought. “It’s been seven years since Mom died,” said Richard. “Life’s been tough for Dad since then. I think the grief has taken a toll on his health. It’s hard for me to even check in on him.”

“What do you mean?” Chris asked, looking over at Richard while coming to a stop at the red traffic light.

“He isn’t the same. The loneliness and despair that fills the home we grew up in is...”

“Depressing,” interrupted Chris. “I get it. I’ve gotten to the point where I have to block it out completely. Look at us Richard... Dad isn’t the only one with little to look forward to. What happened to us?”

“Speak for yourself,” said Richard defensively, “I have plans.”

“Yeah right, Richard. Bingo at the Livingston Retirement Center doesn’t count,” mocked Chris, as he flicked his used cigarette out the driver’s side window. “Seriously though, remember when we were young? All you ever wanted was to be an archeologist and run a museum. Instead, you run a high school, kind of lame,” Chris teased.

Richard laughed. “You’re one to talk, *Lube Manager*, whatever the hell that is?”

“It’s harder than it sounds,” Chris said, unconvincingly.

“As I recall,” said Richard, “you wanted nothing more than to be a racecar driver. What happened to that dream? Even as a teenager, you’d play with your toy cars.”

“Shut-up, I did not,” smirked Chris.

“You did! I walked in on you once. You were laying on your stomach with a miniature Porsche in one hand and a Ferrari in the other. You were sixteen

and I saw you rolling your hot wheels around in a heated race like a toddler.”

“Oh yeah?” Chris grinned, “Watch this!”

Chris revved his engine loudly. Once the light turned green, he popped the clutch, peeled ahead of traffic, and left a large cloud of smoke behind in his wake. Jolted by the unexpected power of the old truck Richard grabbed onto whatever he could to brace himself.

“Chris, you souped up your tow truck? You’re insane, slow down!” Richard said as he saw the next approaching traffic light change from yellow to red. White knuckled and rigid, Richard was convinced his brother was going to speed right through it. To his great relief, however, Chris screeched to a halt.

“I hope you’re buckled in, Captain...because you haven’t seen nothin’ yet,” cautioned Chris. He then punched the gas again, surging through the light illegally.

“Are you out of your mind?!” Richard shouted with immense unease. “I knew I shouldn’t have gotten into this truck with you...Watch out for those

speed bumps!” He warned, pointing, as they neared the hospital parking garage.

Chris took Richard’s warning as a challenge and gunned it even further, confident his newly-installed suspension could handle it. Richard continued to protest as the truck hit a large speed bump with such force the vehicle launched into the air and then hit the ground with a deafening crash.

“Chris, you lunatic. You’re going to get us killed!”

Fixated on his final maneuver, Chris sped into the parking garage. He cranked the suicide knob attached to his steering wheel forcing his truck into a sharp, one hundred eighty degree turn. This momentum allowed him to slide his truck backward into a nearby parking space. Once the duo came to a jolted stop, they sat frozen for several seconds.

“We’re here.” Chris announced.

“I cannot believe you just did that,” gasped Richard.

Chris gave his brother a cool smile and cut the engine.

