

Planning:

Before I began writing I first looked into where Heineken was most popular, I found it was sold in many different countries so I settled on having my story take place in the US. I checked to see what year it started to be sold in the US, which was 1933, three days after prohibition ended. I decided on the state of West Virginia as the name Mountain Inn feels like a place you could find there. I then got the idea to use prohibition as a central point of my story and considered having it take place towards the end of prohibition, I checked to make sure that car radios existed at this time, which they did, having been invented in the 1920s. I then realized that hot wings hadn't been invented until 1964 and weren't widely popular until the 1970s and 1980s. Also, if it did take place during prohibition a bar wouldn't be something so normalized, so I decided to change the time period to the mid to late 1970s to avoid any continuity errors.

Things were slow that day at the Mountain Inn. I had just finished with the lunch receipts, and Andrea was taking care of the two customers at the bar and the four softball players at the corner table who were well into their third pitcher of beer and their second plate of hot wings. So I made a rare decision to take the rest of the afternoon off.

Driving home, I kept the window down to enjoy the crisp October air and the sunshine playing off the cumulus clouds. I could barely hear the song on the radio, one that sounded oddly familiar, like a dream you wake up from, only remembering a vague outline. But I didn't feel like turning the volume up any louder. I passed the golf course, where a few people were already taking advantage of the reduced afternoon greens

fees, driving their golf balls out over the glittering lake by the second tee. I remembered being younger on afternoons like this, wanting nothing more than for the sunshine and breeze to go on forever, wanting to get lost in all of it.

When I pulled into my driveway, the house looked like it always did: small, comfortable, tucked into a neat corner created by two small hills. I pulled my keys from my pocket, unlocked the front door, and stepped inside. And that's when I saw him there, sitting on my living room couch smoking a cigarette, with a half drained bottle of Heineken on the coffee table. "Hey now," he said, "I bet I'm the last person you ever expected to see today."

I froze for a moment before slowly shutting the door behind me, making sure to lock it as subtly as I could. "What the hell are you doing here? How'd you get in?" I asked, glaring at him.

He took a long sip from his beer, taking his time setting it back down on the table before answering me, "What? I can't pay an old friend a visit?"

"We aren't friends, you know that," I said as I placed my keys on the small hook by my door, making sure to not take my eyes off of him. "Besides, you clearly broke in, I could get you arrested just for that."

"You and I both know you won't call the police, not yet, anyway." He said as he picked up his beer again, this time chugging what little remained in the bottle. It felt odd, seeing him not savor it, it was always his favorite brand of beer.

I narrowed my eyes, as much as I hate to admit it, he was right. If I tried to make a call, I'd leave myself vulnerable. There's no way he was just here to chat, no, he's finally managed to track me down, and he wants me out of the picture, that has to be it.

He sighed, lifting his cigarette up to his mouth again. He seemed annoyed by my silence, though I'm not sure what he expected. "You've certainly kept a low profile, I figured after you won all that settlement money, you'd be living it up in some fancier house."

I scoffed, shaking my head as I made my way across the living room, taking my eyes off of him for the first time since I walked inside. "You say that like what happened was a good thing, like that entire mess helped me," I said, then pausing and turning around to face him again, placing my hands on my hips. "Is that what you're here for, the money? Is not spending the rest of your life in jail not enough?"

He went quiet for a moment, tapping his cigarette against the ashtray which had to be one he brought. I haven't smoked in years, I just couldn't tolerate the smell after the accident. "No," he said quietly, "Not what I'm here for, not sure you'd even understand."

I raised a brow, looking him up and down. "I think I have a right to know, considering that you broke into my home."

He looked up at the ceiling, avoiding my gaze as he twisted his now extinguished cigarette in his fingers, "I came here to do something I should've done a long time ago, something that should've happened right when everything went to shit."

I tensed up, my eyes growing wide. He wants me dead, there's no other explanation. On the night of the explosion in the lab, one I'm damn sure he created, we were the only two to survive, but the courts didn't see that. No, they believed it was an accident, but I know what I saw, he was the only one near that reactor, the only one who could've caused it. "After all this time..." I said, "you'd throw your life away for what? Revenge? What happened wasn't my fault, there's only one person to blame."

He didn't say anything, just continuing to stare up at the ceiling. He seemed somber, like he didn't want to do this, but maybe it was to get me to let my guard down. But I can't take any chances, I'm just finally beginning to live my life, I won't let him take that away from me.

As he sat there silently, I quietly made my way over to my kitchen, thankfully not far due to how small this house. "So what's your plan when you're done? Go into hiding? You aren't exactly doing a good job at leaving no evidence." I said, gesturing to his beer and cigarette despite him not even looking at me.

He looked back down, since I had moved to the kitchen, he was now sitting with his back to me, though he didn't seem worried at all despite me now knowing what he was here to do. "I don't have a plan for after," he said in a matter of fact tone.

I glanced back at him to make sure he was still sitting and facing away from me, quietly searching around in the kitchen. I know I have it here somewhere, I always kept that shitty old revolver in case the worst happened, and now seemed like the worst. "Really?" I asked, trying to stay quiet as I searched, not wanting him to figure out what I was doing.

He chuckled, sitting up on the couch, causing me to freeze for a moment, although he didn't turn around to face me, "Yeah, really," he stated, lifting his empty beer bottle to rock it back and forth, as if trying to see if there was anything left. "You know, despite what you and all those reported thought about me... I did feel bad about what happened, it's haunted me, you know? For a damn long time."

I cautiously resumed my search, my eyes now glued to him. "Guilty huh? I always figured those tears were for yourself," I said, my hands now finally finding the small safe I had built into one of the drawers.

"Hm, I can't lie, a lot of them were," he muttered, now sitting the bottle back down, "But the damage I caused... all those lives lost, the lives of our friends. Who wouldn't cry at that? Especially after being blamed."

I tried to keep my eyes on him as I attempted to put the combination in, glancing down every so often. Though my shaking and now sweaty hands made it near impossible, I was far too afraid to take my eyes off of him. I didn't want this to be it, I didn't want him to get the last laugh and finish off our entire team. No, I had to live, if not

for me, than for the others. “Well, of course you were blamed, you didn’t exactly do a good job at being sneaky,” I said, before looking back down at the lock after having messed it up again, “If you hadn’t spewed your sob story, you’d be locked up right now.”

He sat up, causing me to freeze for a moment, although he just looked at the floor, leaning his elbows on his legs. “I didn’t want to avoid punishment, I know what I deserve. I only wanted to stay out of prison for my family...” he trailed off, just staring at the ground for a moment before continuing, “but that didn’t exactly work out... My wife left me just a few years after the case, guess all that negative attention thanks to me was just too much for her.”

I couldn’t help but feel bad for him, but just for a moment, cursing myself once I snapped back to my senses. “I’d say I’m sorry, but you know I don’t mean it... especially with what you plan to do here.”

He chuckled, shaking his head back and forth slightly, “Yeah, you know what? You’re right, you shouldn’t feel sorry for me.”

I gulped, freezing for a moment as I watched him, although he didn’t move or say anything else. God, why am I being so clumsy with this lock right now? If I take any longer, surely he’ll grow tired of his rambling and just finish the job already.

He began to straighten his posture, reaching a hand into one of the inner pockets of his jacket. “I’m really sorry, I hope you know that...” he said somberly, “I never wanted to hurt anyone, and I definitely didn’t want to hurt you.” He slowly pulled his hand out of his pocket, although his back was to me, I knew what he was holding. It was only confirmed for me once I heard the click of the gun’s hammer being pulled back.

I looked straight down at the safe, my hands shaking as I tried once more to put the combination in, now fully focusing on it. Finally! I managed to unlock it, I threw it open, no longer caring for being discreet. As I pulled the revolver from the safe, a bullet already loaded and ready to fire, I looked up. He was now standing, facing me as he pointed his hand gun at me.

I watched him pull the trigger, hearing a shot almost at the exact same time I lifted my own, firing at him. Even with my inexperience, I managed to hit him, straight in the chest. He stumbled back, the gun clattering out of his hand as he collapsed onto the low coffee table I had in the middle of my living room. For a moment, I stood frozen, just staring straight ahead at what I had done, still having my gun raised.

I'm not sure how long I stood like that, frozen as I gazed forward. When I finally lowered my arms, letting the revolver rest on my counter, I gasped. "Shit," I said to myself as I looked down, checking myself for any injury. I heard him shoot, I just know it, there was no way he missed, he's definitely a better shot than me. But there wasn't a mark on me, I was perfectly fine by all means. I sighed in relief, then turned around to see where his bullet had managed to land, but there was nothing. The rest of my kitchen was untouched, only marks showing the age of all the cabinets and walls rather than any bullet holes.

"What?" I wondered outloud, rubbing my eyes to make sure I wasn't just seeing things. But my eyes weren't lying, there was truly nothing.

I took a shaky breath as I turned back to look at where he had fallen, slowly walking over. I had never shot anything before, not even animals. The sight of him made my skin crawl, it felt like something straight out of a movie, but without the comfort of

knowing none of it was real. I slowly leaned over him, he wasn't moving or breathing, so at least I was safe, but this wouldn't be fun to explain to the police. I then looked at his gun, slowly picking it up off the floor.

I looked it over, it was definitely fired, the barrel still warm and the hammer snapped forward. But there was no bullet casing, he had fired a blank.