

Greed
By Michael Danese
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Jeff rushed into the master bedroom suite. It was spacious and airy, with a canopy-covered king-sized bed, and a palatial bathroom with a tub large enough to seat six. For dinner. The bedroom balcony overlooks the pool and the marble hot tub. Jeff bolted to the dresser and opened the jewelry box. He emptied all of the rings, bracelets and necklaces into a bag, occasionally taking time to celebrate a diamond necklace or emerald earrings. Then he went to the man's dresser and took the rings and watches. He was thrilled to see a Rolex Submariner, knowing it would bring thousands.

Gary quickly entered the room and said, "I have a MacBook Pro and an iPad." They fist-bumped and headed to the back door where they had entered a few minutes earlier. Even though they tripped the alarm, they knew they were out in plenty of time.

They climbed into Gary's red Ford pickup and sped off. Soon they were melded into the local traffic.

Gary dropped off Jeff at his house and then headed for home.

He parked in the driveway slipped into bed next to Janet. She turned to him and hugged him. "Everything go ok?" she asked.

"Fine, uneventful, just the way we like it." He replied.

"Good. I still get nervous when you work security jobs." she said.

"I know dear, but the money is great, and we don't take any risks. It just ain't worth it." he said.

"Ok, well, get some rest, you need to be up in four hours." she said.

"I will. Love you." he said as he leaned over and kissed her.

A few hours later, Gary pulled up next to the sanitation department office where he met Jeff to begin their days work. They were both wearing gray overalls and orange high-visibility vests.

Gary and Jeff met in college. They are now in their early thirties. Gary is about six foot two, with thinning brown hair. You could tell that he will be bald by the time he's forty. He was a history major in college, and didn't really want to teach, so his job options were pretty thin. He met Janet in college too. She is also tall, with light brown hair. She is a real estate agent and sells houses on a regular basis. She knows how to couple her good looks with her selling skills and it's paying off for her. She has a bit of a challenge juggling work and caring for their two girls, Kera, six, and Haley, four, but she is managing it well.

Jeff is shorter and stockier than Gary. He was a philosophy major and his job options were even worse. His wife, Kathy is Janet's best friend. They were all friends in college and remained close. They have a four year old girl, Megan - AKA daddy's little girl, and twin two year old boys, Will and Tim. Kathy is a kindergarten teacher; she has shoulder length blond hair and a winning smile that elicits trust, especially when nervous parents drop off their kids.

Gary and Jeff struggled with career choices. They both had numerous job interviews, too many to list here. They are both "thinking men" and decided to put their heads together. Both felt that they have the potential to contribute to society, but society keeps pushing them away. Then, through a series of conversations over drinks, they found what they thought was the perfect way to color outside the lines and profit by society's loopholes.

“Ya know, I was thinking, who knows more about you than anyone? Banker teller, therapist, life coach, financial advisor? Sure they all know something about you, but one person knows your most basic behaviors – your trash man.” said Gary.

“Huh, do tell!” said Jeff.

Gary continued, “Think about it. When you got that new 65 inch TV, you put the box out to the trash, right? New fridge, computer, sound system, yep, all of the boxes go in the trash. Your old bank statements, bills, and junk mail, all in the trash. Yeah, I know, you’re supposed to shred that stuff, but most people just toss it. The trash man sees the mail overflowing your mailbox and the newspapers piled up in your driveway when you’re on vacation. He notices other signals of when you are away from home for an extended time. Things like the curtains left open in the master bedroom, lights left on or off, all signs that you are away. Signals that go mostly unnoticed, except to the person that is looking for the alerts.”

“Go on, you have my attention, where are you going with this?” said Jeff.

“Well, let’s say that two smart guys go into the trash business with the goal of tracking the behaviors of the people with too much money.” said Gary.

“And why do we want to do that?” quizzed Jeff.

“Okay, so we could learn who made large purchases, who just had a big gift-laden party, who is home and who goes on vacation when.” said Gary.

“Yeah, so?” said Jeff.

“Think about it Einstein! We know what’s in the house and when they are away – we rob the bastards!” exclaimed Gary.

“Come on, we aren’t criminals! There are so many ways that this is wrong and it’s too risky!” cautioned Jeff.

“Well, not if we are careful and not too greedy. I’ve been thinking about this for a while. We could create a spreadsheet with the best candidates. We could track their behaviors, their vacations, weekends at the beach or mountains, major purchases, everything. We can know more about them than they know about themselves. Then, when the time is right, we can relieve them of some of their excess wealth.” said Gary.

“I think you might be onto something here!” said Jeff, coming around.

So they applied for jobs at the sanitation department and, with their lofty educations and strong work ethic, they were quickly hired and excelled in their new jobs. They showed up on time and worked hard. With every can they emptied, they applied their examination skills and eventually identified their first candidates. When a house appeared ripe, they cased it with drive-bys and determined if the job was “a go” or not.

When they knocked over their first house, they were *very* nervous. Jeff almost backed out, but Gary convinced him that it was a sure thing. And it was. They secured their ski masks and broke in through a side door. They knew that they had at least five minutes before the police could respond to the alarm.

Jeff went to the master bedroom and Gary to the others. They rehearsed their moves down to the minute. They knew how much time it would take to get in, cover a room, then a second room, then get out quickly and safely. The key was not to get greedy. Get what you came for and get out. They left that first house with lots of jewelry and some cash. A few small electronic devices were bonuses.

When they got away clean they found themselves drunk with self-admiration. They found a winning ticket and they knew it. They high-fived and went to a local bar. They were smart enough to celebrate quietly, without drawing attention to themselves.

The robbery was the lead story on the news and the big headline in the morning papers. They laughed when they saw the estimate of how much they got away with; almost three times more than they actually stole. So the poor, suffering victims even made out fine, since it was all insured.

They spaced out their activity, usually waiting six or eight weeks before making a strike. The more they applied their trade the more they learned about their prey. It turns out that teenaged kids tend to hide valuables and secrets from their parents. They made it a point to spend an extra minute in the kid's rooms. Many times they found stashes of drugs; pot, cocaine, ecstasy, and the like. They usually passed that stuff onto the other trash men, saying that they found it in someone's trash. This "kind" act kept them popular among their fellow haulers. Kids also tend to stash cash. One time they found a box stuffed with nine thousand dollars hidden in the top of a kid's closet.

For almost two years they played out their scheme, and it paid off handsomely. They decided that they could probably do this for years, but, sticking to their theme of not being greedy, they said that within the next few months they would "retire". They thought about investing in their own business, one that isn't as physically demanding as being trash men. They knew they would have enough money to open a business to keep them honestly employed for the rest of their lives. They constantly kicked around ideas; a restaurant, a store, a Primo's Hoagies or Pizza Hut franchise, even a funeral home. They said that any of these ideas would allow them to see their former victims from time to time. This idea entertained them to no end.

They were also entertained by the media, because they seemed to be getting some notoriety. One TV news station even gave them the moniker "The Midnight Burglars" and they *loved* that. The more press they got the more they realized that the law wasn't on to them in the least. But they agreed, a few more months and that is it.

As they were driving through their route on a secluded cul-de-sac, Jeff noticed one of their favorite sites - a pile of newspapers in the driveway.

"Check it out, buddy!" he said.

"Yeah, I always loved this house," said Gary scrolling through his iPad. "They have three kids, but the oldest girl left for college in September. They usually go away three or four times a year, mostly for a week, and lots of weekend trips."

"Well, it seems that this is one of those weeks!" said Jeff. "We have dinner plans tonight with Kathy's parents, but after that we can take a closer look. I'll let Kathy know that we have a security job for ten o'clock. Work for you?"

"Ten it is. Won't take long." said Gary.

Later that night they scoped out the job. The house was dark, except for a single light in a hallway. The back door was secluded yet accessible. There was a "*Protected by Reliable Security*" sign on the front lawn, and another in the back. They knew this company figured they would have the usual five minutes. They could see where the master bedroom was, and where the kid's rooms were located. They spent some time planning their moves and it all looked like taking candy from a baby. They decided to "take the job" and scheduled it for the following evening.

The next night they showed up around 11:30. They parked the truck around the corner in the most secluded spot they could find. They entered the property through the back yard, pulled down their ski masks and Jeff raised the ax to the back door. Now, this door was stronger than most, but not really a problem. On the third blow it swung open and then entered slowly.

They were greeted by a brilliant light in their faces and then a nasty, painful stinging in their eyes. They both screamed and fell to the floor clutching their faces. Then their heads were bashed with something heavy and blunt and they both faded out.

After what seemed like an eternity, but was really only several minutes, Jeff came to. It took him a while to figure out where he was and what had happened. His head was bleeding and the pain was only eclipsed by his still stinging eyes. He tried to rub them with his hands, but couldn't. The more he put it together, the more he realized his horror. He soon heard Gary calling out with terror in his voice.

After a minute or two the blinding light was back in their faces. They found themselves prisoners, they were sitting in arm chairs, and their legs, waist, chest and arms were tightly wrapped with three – inch gray duct tape. They were completely immobilized, probably had concussions and could hardly see.

Then they heard a woman's voice from behind the light. "So you two thought that you could just waltz into my house and do what? Rape me? Rob me? Or probably both!"

Gary spoke up, "There wasn't supposed to be anyone home. We were sure of it. We were not going to hurt anyone."

"No, we were gonna be in and out in five minutes. Why aren't the cops here?" asked Jeff.

"Right, the security company called right away, and I told them it was a mistake, apologized and entered my code. So, no cops, just us." said the woman. "And, let's face it, you two scumbags are lucky to be alive, at least for now. If my husband was home they would be scraping you off of the walls!"

"So...what are you going to do with us?" Gary asked sheepishly.

"Do? What am I going to do? I'm still working on that." she said. "My initial plan was to use my handcart and put you both in the shed out back, cover you with gasoline and toss in a match! And I still may end up doing that!" she said.

"Come on lady, we weren't going to hurt anyone!" pleaded Jeff.

"Too late! You violated the sanctity of my home, the home of my family, in my heart you *already* raped me. I would be justified in blowing your head off, and in this state I would be a hero, and you know it!" she said.

"We checked it out, no one was supposed to be here...no one is ever home." said Gary. "So why are you here?"

"If you must know, my husband took the kids to Disney World while I was on a business trip. I got home earlier tonight. I was exhausted and went to bed, until I heard the bang on the back door." She said.

"And what's in our eyes, mace?" asked Jeff.

"Nope, wasp spray. Much better than mace. Accurate to 30 feet and it can quickly put a man down, obviously. I have my parents to thank for that tip, and it works! Then I hit you with this iron skillet. I thought I killed you, and was happy that I didn't. This is where you should be thanking me that I don't believe in guns." she said.

"Ah, yeah," Jeff agreed, "I'm glad to, I thought..."

"Shut up! I know who you guys are! It was bugging the shit outta me, but now I know! You're the trash men! You bastards! I gave you guys very generous Christmas checks for the past few years, and you took them and smiled, probably giving me the finger behind my back! I oughta conk you again!" she said with anger.

"It's not like that..." said Jeff.

“Yeah, it’s all coming together for me now, you said, “no one is ever home” and that’s it. You guys are the Midnight Burglars! I caught the biggest crime ring in this area in years!” she said, all full of herself.

“Now I really wanna burn you up! You robbed two of our friends and one of them ended up in therapy!”

“Come on lady, just call the cops!” pleaded Gary.

“Cops, really? Why? So they could charge you with breaking and entering? You didn’t even get a chance to steal anything! You don’t even have guns, so you won’t even be charged with attempted armed robbery. And, there is no evidence about the other robberies, so you would be back on the street in no time. No, sir, you guys are gonna suffer and I’m gonna enjoy it!” she said in a rage.

She left for a few minutes and grabbed an electric chainsaw, a pair of razor sharp pruning shearers, a large drop cloth and a blow torch. Before returning she hit the audio record button on her iPhone and slipped it into her pocket. She came into the room and turned off the bright spotlight that was trained on the guys. She flicked on the room lights. That was the first time that they actually got a look at her. She was about forty, firm and fit, with shoulder length brown hair. She was wearing a short cover up that probably served as her robe. She was barefoot. But the only thing the guys saw was the chainsaw and shearers.

“Hold on, what are you gonna do!?” said Jeff with a quivering voice.

“Well, that’s all up to you. My guess is that one of you will lose at least a hand and the other likely a few fingers.” She said with a wicked glee as she spread the drop cloth on the floor around them. “This is so you don’t bleed all over my hardwood floors.”

“Why the torch?” questioned Gary nervously.

“Like I said, I don’t want you bleeding all over the place. I’ll cauterize the severed parts with the torch. It’ll stop the blood. Probably hurt like a bitch though!” she said.

“It doesn’t have to be like this, please, anything, we will do *anything!*” begged Jeff.

“Yes,” she said, “*I know you will!* So let’s start at the beginning.”

“Okay, we will tell you everything! You’re right, we have been called the midnight burglars!” said Jeff.

“We started a little over two years ago. We never hurt *anybody*, we only entered when we knew that the houses were empty.”

“Go on.” she said as she plugged in the electric chainsaw. She hit the power button and the sound was terrifying to the two captives.

“We robbed the first house, the Andersons, and it was as easy as could be.” said Jeff.

“I wanna know every name, every house.” She said, moving the saw closer to Gary.

“In the truck, in the truck!” Jeff said. “My iPad in the truck has everything. Every house, what we got, everything!”

“Truck?” she said.

“Yeah, my red Ford pick-up is parked around the corner.” said Gary.

“So, once you got the stuff, then what?” she said.

“We gave it all to Tod. He has a shop in city and he was able to take all of the jewelry and watches. His friend Paul specialized in the electronic stuff.” added Jeff. They gave us a good price for whatever we got.”

She turned off the chainsaw and picked up the torch. Then she left the room for a minute. While she was out she turned off the iPhone recording. When she returned she lit the welding torch.

“And how did they pay you? Cash?” she asked.

“Naw, this ain’t the nineties ya know!” said Gary, “it was all done by direct deposit and wire transfers.”

To where, exactly?” she asked.

“We have accounts that they would add to.” said Jeff.

“Which accounts, where?” she asked.

“Non-traceable accounts in the Cayman Islands.” said Jeff.

“You guys aren’t your average trash men!” she said. “You thought this through to the last detail!”

“So, tell me more about those accounts.” she said as she put the glowing blow torch on the table facing Jeff. She slid open a drawer and pulled out her iPad.

“W-What do you want to know?” asked Jeff.

“*Everything*” she whispered as she leaned into him, just inches from his face.

“Let’s start with the url of your account.” She said to Jeff.

“No!” said Gary. “Call the cops. This is getting crazy.”

“NO!” she exclaimed, “that will cost your buddy a right arm!” she said reaching for the chainsaw.

Jeff quickly rattled off the web address. She let out a wry smile and typed it into her iPad.

“Ok, username and password.” she demanded.

He quickly gave her the info that she wanted.

“Great, I’m in. Jeez, you guys have been busy! There is almost a half a million dollars here!” she exclaimed. “OK, and you?” she said to Jeff.

He gave up his information quickly as he stared at the burning torch.

“Excellent, so between you there is almost a million dollars here!” she said. “Lucky for you I have a financial background, so I know just how to deal with this!”

“So, that’s it, you’re gonna double cross us and steal all of our money!” said Jeff.

“Look around, shithead. Do I look like I need *your* money? I just want to make sure that *you* don’t get it! Let’s see, for you, I think an anonymous donation to the American Red Cross will work just fine!” she said while tapping away on her iPad. “And for you, I think the American Cancer Society can make good use of your money!”

She reached over and turned off the welding torch. The guys slumped into the chairs that held them prisoner.

She then picked up the phone and dialed 911. The voice at the other end asked, “What is your emergency?”

“Hi, this is Ann Tamini, I’m at 22 Wagonwheel. I need someone to come to my house and take out the trash.” she said.

“Huh?” asked the woman on the phone.

“I have the so-called “Midnight Burglars” captured here in my house. They confessed everything.” she added.

Within minutes the house was crawling with police and media types. She explained how she captured them, the confession and about the pick-up truck.

Jeff and Gary were relieved to be in police custody and out of those chairs. One of them made a remark to the other about being just a little too greedy.

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