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I KILL
by Tim O'Connor

Hopping down off the bus, toolbox in hand, I find myself in a frenzy of three piece suits. Morning pedestrian traffic in the big city, nothing could be worse. Nearing the paper box on Third and Oak, I reach through the slit in my coveralls to find the thirty five cents in the bottom of my pants pocket. I've always wondered why someone doesn't just steal all the papers out of one of these things for thirty five cents. I guess you can only read one at a time. But I don't have time to read the paper just yet. It will have to wait in the top of my toolbox until later. Right now it's off to work.

For the past two weeks I've been working in the Cambridge building across from the Justice Center. It's an old twenty-two story building in the middle of a group of brand new skyscrapers downtown. It seems very meek and humble among the surrounding giants. Walking up the front steps, I feel a little awkward surrounded by all these business people with me in my coveralls, but my security badge gets me past the guard at the front desk just the same. The lobby of this old building is small and the elevators are very slow, but it has a relaxed atmosphere about it and no one seems to mind its antiquity.

Anyone that tells you that they have never considered, or at least thought of suicide, is a liar. They are lying to you and themselves. Three years ago I thought of committing suicide. They use the word commit as if it's a terrible thing to want to escape this insane world. I decided that throwing my life away served no purpose. But I felt that in order to justify my life I had to find a way to create purpose for myself. I felt a need to contribute, or at least equalize the negative. I felt like the character Emilio Estevez plays in the movie Wisdom. No matter how hard a person tries, the good never seems to outweigh the evils of all man's sins. I found my hands tied at every junction. In freeing myself to do something positive I would be breaking rules of the system. So, it was back to suicide.

The advantages of starting work later in the morning is the elevators are not as crowded. Still, the elevator seems to stops at every floor. When it finally reaches the twelfth floor, I get off. Across the hall I get on the other elevator which takes me to the twentieth floor. Again I get off and cross the hall back to the other elevator. This takes me to the twenty-second floor where I go to the house phone and pretend to call someone. It's always bugged me when people who are faking phone conversations sit there and act like they're listening; only making affirmative grunts every once in a while. I prefer to make it more convincing. So, here I sit conversing with myself into the phone until the people coming out of the elevator disperse from the corridor.

At the end of the hall, the door enters into the stairwell. I look over the railing for a moment, staring into the vast abyss of spiraling handrail below me. Up the flight of stairs above me is the ladder to the roof. My first week here I cut the lock off the roof hatch and replaced it with one of my own. I also got a lock to lock it from the outside. That ought to slow them down this afternoon.

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At the end of my personal debate, I modified the general concept of suicide so that it met my needs. I decided to kill the part of me that felt the need to follow all the rules, no matter how inhibiting of justice those rules seemed to be. I decided to live above or outside the law, to work around the system instead of with it or through it. Now I've found my purpose. Now I can contribute. Now, I kill.

After I close the roof hatch and secure the padlock, I sit back on the hatch to find it pleasantly warm from the morning sun. Enjoying the warmth of the hatch, I take two plastic bags out of my pocket and put them over my shoes, holding them on with rubber bands. Across the roof, on the south side, is the elevator machine room. I'll wait in here till it's time. I'll be out of sight in there and I can sit and read...
my newspaper.

Inside, there is a small desk for the maintenance guys. This is where they usually take their (on the clock) coffee breaks. Sitting down at the desk, I take out the newspaper and start to read.

You're probably wondering what that song and dance was with the elevators. It will remove a lot of witnesses later. No one person will know exactly where I came from and where I went. The plastic bags on my feet will erase information such as shoe size and other debris from my shoes that might be traceable. I love to make things difficult. Looking at my watch, I see I have an hour to kill. No pun intended. On page nine, I find the article I've been looking for. It reads "Brutal Murderer Up for Parole." Five years ago, Jim Nelson forced his way into an elderly couple's house. He told the police that he was only there to rob the place, but when he found the couple home, he bound them and then executed them. One bullet to the head. Their five-year-old granddaughter whom they were babysitting was found a few miles away in a ditch in about the same condition. The gun that he used was never found, which weakened the case against him. Now, after fifty-two months in jail, some parole board may be just as sick as Jim, thinks he has paid his debt to society. Not by my watch he hasn't.

Here's another article about the greenhouse effect. It seems silly to me that the slogan for the campaign is "Save the Earth." The Earth appears completely indifferent to what the little fleas on its back do. A proverbial scratch of the itch and life goes on. Millions of species have come and gone from the face of the Earth. It just continues to exist with apparent disregard for these happenings. And yet we have the audacity to think that it matters in the big picture we live or die. Only to ourselves. The slogan should read, "Save the environment to save your own ass."

Another look at my watch tells me I have ten minutes to go. Opening the bottom of the toolbox, I take out the barrel and receiver of my rifle. With one locking twist they're together and I'm ready for the stock. After tightening everything down, I check the optics and the laser sighting systems to make sure everything is working the way it should. I'm ready to go.

The newspaper goes in a stack of papers next to the desk. I put it near the middle of the stack so it won't be noticed. The toolbox goes on a shelf above the desk with two other toolboxes just like it that the maintenance men keep on hand.

Near the northeast corner of the building, there is a three-foot by four-foot vent opening. The vent leads all the way to the kitchen in the basement of the building. Reaching over the edge of the vent, I grab the rope that I had secured in the vent earlier in the week. The figure eight I had laced into the line I hook onto the D-ring on the climbing harness under my coveralls. The plastic bags over my shoes will also keep the greasy grime from the sides of the vent from getting on my shoes as I repel down into the vent. The vent goes to the stoves down in the kitchen, so the warm air that is rising from below me smells like a mixture of burnt food and grease.

Once more I check my watch. They should be coming out any minute now.

With my full weight on the line, I cut the middle fold of line in the double sheep shank knot near its anchor. About ten feet down I come to the first knot in the line. Passing it through the figure eight, I continue down. At the second knot I tie myself off. I've descended about thirty feet from the opening of the vent. In the side of the vent, an opening has been made to allow moisture to drain from the walls of the vent down a down spout on the exterior of the building. Through this small opening, I can see the Justice Center across the street.

The top of the vent, along with the rest of the parapet around the roof's edge, is capped with a copper flashing that hangs down about two feet on either side. When I anchored the rope here earlier in the week, I pulled part of the flashing back and anchored the rope up under it. I used a double sheep shank knot through the anchor eyelet. The double sheep shank is used by climbers and rappelers to retrieve their rope after climbing down from a rock structure. The knot consists of a fold in the rope that is secured at both ends with two or three half-hitch knots. After putting weight on the rope, the part of the rope that doubles back can then be cut and the
knot will hold as long as there is tension on the rope. Once the climber is down, a simple shake of the rope loosens the knot and the rope drops leaving only a couple feet of rope at the anchor point.

Once more I check my watch. They should be coming out any minute now. About two floors below me, in the Justice Center the floor is enclosed only by chain link fence. The prisoners are brought down from the above floors to get their exercise on this playground seventeen stories up. They have access to weightlifting equipment, basketball and volleyball courts, etc. Hell, if I ever were to get busted, I believe my life would improve in a place like this.

On second thought, I hope that someone like me will take care of business. Humans are not meant to be caged up; not in the gray walls of a prison doing time, nor within the walls of their own homes, afraid to venture beyond those walls, fortifying them against intrusion.

There they are. The inmates are starting to come down on the elevators. The target gets off the elevator with the third group. He settles in with the same group as usual near the weightlifting equipment. I range him at eighty yards. This should be no problem.

The optics, mounted on top of the rifle, are used for general acquisition of the target. Once this is done, the laser sight mounted below the barrel narrows the focus of the shoot on the target—"drawing a bead" it’s called. The laser targeting system has proven to be very effective at shorter ranges, and the optics used for general acquisition reduces the amount of time the red laser dot is visible on the target.

I fall into a deep, steady pattern of breathing. At this range he fills the entire eyepiece. A deep feeling of relaxation overcomes my entire body. A slight pressure on the trigger activates the laser sight. The few seconds that the dot is on his chest seems like an eternity. I add the minutest additional amount of pressure on the trigger. The trigger seems to travel an excessive distance. Without warning, the rifle rocks me backwards slightly as a whisper of gasses escapes the end of the barrel.

Some may find it hard to understand how a person can take the life of another living creature. Many people would pose this question to me about hunting when I was younger. In the case of my friend Jim, and others like him, it could be said that psychological failure is to blame in all cases where a life is taken. Under this definition, even I couldn’t escape the guilt. Not to justify myself, but I feel this view is too limited. I would argue that humans are predators. The eyes face forward. The teeth are sharp. The ears face forward, fixed in place, not working independently of one another. All of these facts and more are characteristics that place the human race in the predator family.

Only when we as predators learn to live in harmony with our prey can we learn to co-exist with the other predators of the planet. Because when the predator destroys its prey the predator is in turn destroyed. We seem to have lost our respect for the animals that we attempt to co-exist with. Even the hyena, who is subject to the more powerful lion, will respectfully rub against a dead lion or stray cub before eating it.

I could hear the dull thud of the bullet as it hit the target.

I believe that people like Jim have lost this respect for life in general, not just for other animals, not just for other predators, but for other humans as well. Where he kills with disrespect to destroy life, I kill out of respect for that life to maintain that life.

I could hear the dull thud of the bullet as it hit the target. As he fell, I noticed that there was no blood on the wall behind him. The bullet would have had enough energy to penetrate through the ribs and since it didn’t exit, I must assume that it lodged in the spine. I’ll take that as a confirmed kill.

Slinging the rifle over my shoulder, I release the rappeling line. Continuing down another hundred and thirty feet, I stop at the bottom end of the rope that has been connected to the wall with an anchor and a d-ring. Taking the weight off the rope by putting my foot on the anchor, I give the rope above me a whip to release the sheep shank knot at the roof. The rope falls past me with a swish. From here it’s a straight shot down to the top of the oven vent. At the next knot down, the one I had passed

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through the figure eight at the beginning of the descent, I know that I’m at the bottom. I can see the lights from the kitchen coming through the seams in the vent’s ductwork. I fumble with my flashlight and finally find the maintenance panel that leads into the utility room behind the kitchen. Removing the panel, I peer down into the little room below me. Everything’s clear.

The plastic baggies over my shoes I discard on top of the hood vent. The excess rope that is coiled up below me on the hood vent I tie up so that it won’t melt and stink in the kitchen. After climbing through the opening in the duct, I replace the panel. Underneath the desk in the corner of the utility room is the toolbox I left there last night before I went home. After changing coveralls and putting the climbing harness in the bottom of the tool box, I break down the rifle and place it on top of the harness.

Walking out into the lunch crowd in the hallway, the excitement of the past few minutes is drawn out by the hustle and bustle of the unaware people. Following the sub-street tunnel to the parking structure, I whistle the tune to a slow sad song to calm my nerves. My “borrowed” car is waiting on the third level to take me west.

I push my worn out tape of Pink Floyd into the cassette player in the car. Driving out of the garage, and listening to the sirens of the emergency vehicles the next block over, my mind seems only to have feelings and no pictures as the words of the song seem to say what I think: “When I was a child I had a fever. My hands felt just like two balloons. Now I’ve got that feeling once again. I can’t explain. You would not understand. The child has grown. The dream is gone. I have become comfortably numb.”

It’s a challenge to me to dream up these little adventures, and I take pride in completing them successfully. Still, I wish this would be my last one. I might have just saved your life or the life of someone very close to you. You can go on enjoying your life, but think of me the next time you hear of them setting another killer or rapist free, ‘cause I’ll be there not enjoying mine.