

PROLOGUE

“So... you don’t have a resume, you haven’t a single job qualification, and you didn’t even attend high school, though it is amazing you have the guts to admit it,” said the police chief on the brink of busting into laughter. “Tell me, Alex, what made you think you could ever get a job as police man?” I reply after a moments pause, “Well, two things. First, I could easily get past a couple of Detroit’s finest men so diligently guarding this place with only smooth talk, but the second reason is kind of a story. Do I have your permission to continue, sir?” Stunned at my confidence, he mumbles a “yes”. I smile and tell him, “This ones long, so get cozy in your chair.”

THE HIDEOUT

It all began with me looking for a job. Should I search for hours again today for a decent job or just walk into the alley to the Donovan gang’s hideout? It’s not much of a hideout; it’s more of a meeting place for gang members to talk about their cars or just hang out.

So who am I, in case you’re wondering? I was born on November 21, 1996 and I lived with my parents until I was 13. That is when my world collapsed. My parents were shot down, killed, and stripped of their belongings in the cold streets of Detroit. I was at a friend’s house when it happened and when the police told me what occurred, I guess I bolted and ended up on the streets. That was four years ago, but I don’t think I’ll ever get over what happened. I’m no Batman and I’ll never try to take revenge against whoever killed my parents. In fact, I don’t believe in super heroes, God, or anyone that’s supposed to protect people from the cruel realities of humanity. If they exist why didn’t they help me? After thinking of my past, I decide that no one would help me out either way and I decide to walk into the ally. Those fateful steps I took that day still remain in my mind, haunting me.

The alley was dark, making my heart pound and drops of sweat role down my face. Out of a shadow, I spotted a small, shiny, sliver of metal swing upward and stop with a click. It was a switchblade, the weapon of choice for low-ranked gang members. I shouted, “Hey, don’t hurt me, I’m only here for work. The boss knows me,” I lied. The dark figure says, “Oh, hey you the guy from L.A, “Ferdinand the Firebomber” right?”

Not sure what to respond, I simply tell the man, “Yeah, I’m here for the job”. I take a deep breath in case I have to sprint out of there if what I said was the wrong answer. I guess it

must have created an awkward scene because the man doesn't reply for a couple seconds. He finally asks if I want to meet the boss and I answer yes with a nice fake smile.

As the guy leads me out of the alley, I notice he has multiple small scars on his face and has a tattoo on his right arm that has the letters DG and chains around it. I follow him into a van where he places a blindfold on my eyes and carefully ties my hands in duct-tape, while he mumbles, "In case you from the PD". After ten minutes in the car, he suddenly says, "Hey boss said you was a twenty year old or something. You look way younger man." Being only 17, I felt very lucky that he was not the smartest guy around. "Um, Yeah people call me baby face all the time back in L.A." The amount of improvising that I would have to do in order to not get caught will probably be immense over the next few days.

The car halts to a stop and as soon as the door opens, I'm grabbed by a man who rips my blindfold off and cuts the tape around my sore wrists. "Thanks" I tell the man and I squint because my eyes have not yet adjusted to the sudden light. After I can see better, I look around to see what the place looks like. We are in front of the first guy with two guards standing in front holding pistols, obviously a step above. He stays near the car but laughs the words "good luck". The new guy hears it and gives the first guy a sharp look and whispers with coldly to me, "You gonna need a lot more den luck to get by joining the Donovan Gang." I begin to regret.

I try to be polite and say, "You guys have a nice hideout." The sketchy-looking guys turn their heads and give me a bad look. Some raise their middle fingers. They must have thought I was being sarcastic. Okay, I think to myself, no niceness, I have to fit in. I realize that this is my last chance to get a job of any kind so I go ahead with some tough acting. I raise my middle finger back at them and top it off a cold steely look. The man with big hands pulls me back and smiles, "You ain't seen nuthin' yet, but you certainly got guts, Ferdinand, but the question is, how long will it last?"

As he knocks on a metal door and shouts, "Hey boss! 'Ferdinand the Firebomber' is here!" I look back at the gruff men and their mouths are wide open in awe. I guess this Ferdinand has quiet a reputation.

The doors opened and I feel a blast of cold air, bright neon lights, and death.

THE JOB

The boss's room is like a private nightclub filled with the perks of getting a 50% share of such a big gang's blood and drug money.

The boss doesn't bother to get out of the chair and instead pours me a glass of whiskey from a very expensive looking bottle. Unlike the other teens on the streets, I never drink (well I couldn't afford it even if I wanted to)! So when I taste the hard alcohol, I scrunch up my face and put the glass down, a big mistake. "You don't like whiskey?" He asks with a little suspicion, "No thanks, I'm more of a wine person honestly." "Ah, I see, Clara get ma special \$2,281 Domaine Leroy Chambertin Grand Cru" Concluding the boss's bit of bragging, I smoothly reply, "I couldn't, the most special wine goes to the most important person, and that would be you."

"Okay, lez talk business", he says after lecturing me briefly about wine and whiskey. "How much you want for the firebombing job next month?" "Well, tell me exactly what I have to do and why, I always get a full overview from my employers before I do what I do." "Of course, as ya'll ready know, we want you to bomb the church down on Clayton road cuz they keep convertin' our guys into useless Christens an we can't take no more of it!"

This is bad. I may be a misfit, but I would never bomb a church. I don't believe in higher power or any of that, but the people that go there and work there are not bad people. I know because they have dropped ten-dollar bills into my jars sometimes.

"Uh... you wanna gimme your answer already? You been sittin' there for five minutes jus starin' at the table" "Oh um... sorry yes of course, I was thinking about \$100,000 for the job?" The boss stared at me wide-eyed with his mouth open, but managed to mutter, "Fine man, you cost a lot... Better be worth it though." "Hey one o' you boys go show where Ferdinand will be staying for a month." As soon as I get to my new room, I know I will I prepare for long nights of planning on how I should run with the money.

A short man with a limped walk took me to my room and told me where everything was. The room looked like it was designed to impress millionaires instead of criminals. It wasn't as gorgeous and lavish as the boss's room but it came pretty close. "The boss told me he would buy your supplies, so if you can think of some, please just name them." I later found out the short man was called Joseph and he was one of the only men in the warehouse area that hadn't spoken with a bit of street speech. I took that as a sign that he was one of the smarter men in the rotten building.

I responded that I wanted a pound of flash powder, three plastic tubes, and three bottles of kerosene, just to make sure I seemed like a was actually planning to do the job. I asked him to leave me so I could plan how to make the bombs. After he left, I locked the door and took a sheet

of paper from a stack of them that were placed on the oak desk that I was provided with. I worked on my plan for a couple hours and I came up with one that would evolve me actually making the bombs but run away once I arrive at the church. I was happy at the fact that my plan was nearly complete considering the short amount of time it took. I was smiling at my own ideas when I heard knocks at my door and a gruff voice calling, “Hey! Dinner is served pretty-boy!”

The dinner table was in the room next to the boss. The room itself was yet again fancy but this time it looked like more of a big meeting area than a place to eat. The food tasted like what I usually find on the streets however, and looked disgusting to put it mildly. I politely started to eat the food, while listening to the boss talking about past jobs that he and his gang did. He would exaggerate so much that it made everyone at the table look down to hide laughter. Then, he mentioned a cocaine drop-off he would make this week. He laughed about how the people in the streets of Detroit relied on the drugs so much that they would collect the coins on the street and pay for just a tiny amount instead of eating, and even sometimes drinking. I felt sick at their laughter so I started to shake in rage. If I didn't have a firm control of my exploding emotions, I would probably have clawed, kicked, and punched that man no matter the excruciating torture I would have to face later.

Nevertheless, I could not help thinking about the streets of Detroit and the many people suffering from there terrible drug addictions, and how much money the boss makes from their living hell. I felt a sense of great sadness for the victims of this narcotics curse because of how helpless these men and women are, how powerless they are in the fight against addiction.

As I calmed down in the bathroom, I think I had an epiphany. I felt a surge of responsibility wash over me, cleansing my thoughts. I told my self that somehow I would break this gang down from the inside and try to destroy the drugs, to burn them away from the face of this earth. I vowed to not hurt a human, and only the cycle of drug violence. I knew that I would not rid the city of evil or anything even near that. What I wanted to do was create a dent in the crime, and hope that police or some average citizens would help and make the dent into a hole. Maybe some more people would join in and for once we could eradicate the city of mobs and gangs. I was getting giddy at the idea. I felt that finally, my life had meaning.

“Bam Bam Bam”, someone pounded on the bathroom door, “Hey Ferdinand are you okay? We saw you shaking when you went to the bathroom!” I replied in my most sincere voice, “Yeah sorry, I think I had an allergic reaction to something I ate, I think I'll skip dinner.

Give your boss my apologies.” I stayed in the bathroom and waited until I couldn’t hear anybody. I eventually made it back to my room and I dropped myself on the bed and started thinking of how to destroy the cocaine.

THE PLAN

“Hey Ferdinand! You dead or somethin’?” Startled, I look up at the colorful clock that is put up in the middle of the grey and black wall. It is 9:57. “What the, why didn’t you wake me up until now?” “You joking? You a grown man! I ain’t gonna wake up no grown man, got me?” Still pretty tired, I quip, “So then why did you come here, smart-one?” “Forced to man, boss wants you eating breakfast cause you didn’t ‘get enough to eat’ last night.” “Uh, tell him I’m coming.” The moment the man heard those words he stomped off, clearly angry. I tell myself to try harder to not make enemies so easily.

I didn’t sleep much last night thinking that I was in a den of thieves, drug dealers, and probably murderers, so I wasn’t that surprised I had slept in so much. I hurriedly put some clothes on that I found in one of my drawers and ran to the room where dinner was held last night. As I entered, I could see that there was already food on the table and it luckily was bacon and eggs, something I haven’t had it what seems like a life time, but I guess it should, because it really has been years since when I last had that meal.

The boss and I had a chat about what I was planning to do to the church, and my means of escape. I made sure that he would cover my escape to act like I was going to go through with the job. I proposed that there would be a car waiting for me on the other side of the building, which to he did not agree to immediately. He wanted there to be two guards and a driver for me as a guarantee that I would complete the firebombing. I didn’t want to quickly agree to what he said in case it raised suspicions of puppy dog behavior, which is common in spies. I made him think other wise with a bit of smooth talk that went something like this, ”Boss, after seeing how your gang works and bravely operates, I have simply fallen in love with the gang. I could not ask more of your gang so I wish to work alone. Then, if I get caught, I won’t bring any of your great men down with me.” The boss stares at me with happy eyes and his lips slowly curl into a smile, “You know, I real like you. I think that this be the begginin of a long partnership.” I smile. This time it’s real. My plans have a chance for success.

Taking advantage of our new friendship, I asked the boss if he would show me his drug supply so I could see how much he had. I knew he was the type that brags so I thought that if I

provided him a way to impress me, he would take it. Surprisingly, he did not agree right away and instead asked me for the reason that I had. I thought for a moment and replied that the reason was I could hook the boss up with some deals from gangs in Los Angeles. He asked me what some of them were willing to pay for so much drugs, and I told the fool that payments can go up to the millions if the drugs are good. He promptly agreed to show me his stock after hearing this.

We walk into the east end of the warehouse and stop at a heavily guarded door made of thick steel locked many times over. I remark to the boss, "Wow, that door must have a lot of keys right?" "Wrong, only one dang key tu this door, every last one o' dem locks open with dis here key." He lifts his shirt up were you could see a key hanging on to a leather string. "Isn't that risky?" I ask, to which he replies, "No man, how you gon open all these locks while people shootin at ya?" It was a stupid idea and I thought it was increasingly so when he later told me that the place is unguarded at night.

Then my heart almost stopped. A chubby guy yelled, "Hey boss! Ferdinand! Guys out in our lill' meetin area met a guy who says he's Ferdinand!" I feel a single bead of sweat role from my forehead. The chubby guy continues, "Don't worry though, we shot the fayka' and dumped his body into Lake St. Clair man." This one almost gave me the final push towards a heart attack. I felt genuinely sick after hearing the news, and I excused myself to go back to my room "to email the people in L.A about your products".

Once in my room, I sat on my bed and stared blankly at the wall. I had broken my own promise of no one getting hurt, not even a gang member. I thought to myself how it would be best if I completed my mission tonight, and not drag this ordeal out to prevent any more deaths. I gathered the supplies I had, which included kerosene and matches. That was enough to burn the drugs but I still had to get passed the problem of the locks on the door. Though unguarded, it would be hard to get passed the locks for numerous reasons. I thought long and hard and came up with a bright idea. I suddenly realized that the lock would not be a problem. I simply stole one of the many lock-cutters that gang members kept around for small crimes.

FINISHING THE JOB

After dinner, I stayed awake and waited for the perfect moment to sneak into the room with the shipment crates of the drugs proved easy in some ways and hard in others. The important part, staying awake, was easy because of plentiful but horrendous thoughts of the real Ferdinand getting murdered. It was hard to think these thoughts and come up with a justification

for the loss of a life. I eventually justified the death by convincing myself that it was an almost necessary sacrifice to the greater cause of bringing the drug rings down, one gang at a time. I thought to my self what the real Ferdinand could have done and I thought better and better of the whole situation.

At 1:26 am, I quietly opened my door, which was hard to do because of the creeks it sometimes gave. I put all my stuff into a felt bag and started tiptoeing down the long warehouse. I felt like I was being looked at and I could swear my heart was pounding loud enough to be heard through out the whole compound. After what seemed like ages, I reached the door to the room full of drugs. I silently pulled out the lock-cutter of my bag and suddenly a loud “Clang!” sounded. I had made a mistake. I had accidently hit one of the locks with the end of my cutter, and it produced a loud, metallic sound.

I cringed at the noise but luckily no one was woken because of it. I proceeded to cut the locks one by one which was fairly easy. I smiled a real smile thinking of how enraged the gang boss would be. The cutting only took a couple minutes so I was relieved greatly. I slowly opened the thick enforced steel door and gladly it did not make any creeks. I popped the cap off a kerosene bottle and began dousing the crates with all I had. I prayed that no one would hear the trickle of liquid seemingly amplified by the buildings shape. The dousing was done and the moment of truth came. I struck a match and for a second, I was amazed by the single light in the darkness. I flicked the match on to the nearest crate, which created a sudden burst of heat and light. I quickly kicked the crate and it toppled to the ground, and that lite a kerosene puddle with branching lines of fuel to the other crates. It was a beautiful chain reaction that I enjoyed only for a split second.

I sprinted back to my own room, and in an astounding surprise; I did not have to explain an alibi to anyone. I locked the door behind me and felt pure emotions of happiness, achievement, and pride wash over me. Finally. The job was done. The mission was over. My proud thoughts were suddenly disrupted by the noise of gunfire. My mind snapped back to what was happening right now and I made a decision that changed my plans completely. I decided to run to the nearest police station, escaping the warehouse during the commotion. I slowly poked my head out and I could see gang members firing guns blindly at other gang members, thinking they were rivals from a rival another gang. A bullet whizzed by my head into the wall next to me were it had been moments ago. I didn't want to linger around here anymore to prevent the

possibility of being shot and killed, so I ran across the building to the exit with much faith, carrying my backpack. As I sprinted the last stretch of distance and exited the compound, I felt a sense of relief and freedom. I kept running for a couple blocks until I was clear of the gangsters, when I then started my way to the police station. When I found it, I slept on a bench nearby for about four hours until the sun rose. At the end of this, I had become something I didn't believe in. I had become, a hero.

EPILOGUE

“So here I am officer,” I say with a smile. “What do you think? Do I get the job?” With a dumbfounded expression on his face, he replies, “Look buddy. My guys have been tracking that gang for months. There is no way you did that in less than a week. That story is way to unbelievable. I mean, what, you explain yourself to want to be a hero? Plus, you have no evidence what so ev-“ It was at this precise moment were a police man barged into the room.

“Hey chief! You know that gang called Donovan's that we were tracking? Last night, a bunch of reports came in about gunfire heard around there and when we checked on it this morning, half the place was burned down! We arrested a couple of lackeys still there but the boss seems to have gotten away.” The officer goes out in the hallway to tell others of the news and when I look back at the chief his mouth was hanging almost comically wide. When he regained control of his body, he uttered words that will forever change my life, “Jesus kid, there's a hero in you. You're hired”