

(Note: Psychopath Frank Moore has found his scapegoat, his look-alike, John Kirk, a close-enough double. Frank Moore is now hold-up in a hotel room, in the process of dyeing his hair to match John Kirk's. Frank has already switched their identities and fingerprints in government databases.)

Frank came out of the bathroom naked, except for the socks that protected him against what lived in the hotel's carpeting. Frank was ever cautious about the Heavenly Father's army of sneaky little bastards.

Moving across the room he caught his reflection in the window. He stopped and looked at himself. His transparent image stood with the outdoor mist swirling behind it. The smoky likeness of Satan in Hell, Frank thought with a grin.

He gazed at his movie-star face, flawed now by the square bandage on his cheek. If the graze under it left a scar, he would wear it as a medal. Awarded to him by Mon Lew, for having pulled off—not yet, Frank warned himself; it wasn't over yet.

He drew close to the window and peered through his reflection, downward toward 1st and Gaffey. Five stories below, buried deep in fog. Then looking northward he saw the hazy lights of the 110 Freeway, where its entrance rose up out of the drabness.

Frank refocused and eyed his reflected hair, dark and shiny with fresh dye. He lifted a hand to brush it back but had to stop himself. His hair was wet and slicked down, there was nothing to brush back. Frank understood now that the brushing had become a habit. A tic, he feared, a sign of weakness. He promised himself to watch it, never to do it again.

"Christ sake," he complained then. 30 more minutes for the dye to take and he was hungry. Best hotel in San Pedro, the cabby had told him. Never mentioning their room service shuts down at midnight.

If Frank had only known. Could have picked up something at the all-night market. The cabby waiting while he was in there buying the dye kit, bandages, gauze—phone call he had made while shopping, calling the police on his Tom Pincus phone:

"Was on mah late-night walk with Cheney, mah Rottweiler," he recited to his reflection like a crusty old soldier. "Go past this parked Lincoln and hike up the horse trail—got mah flashlight, y'know, and run across a dead fella layin' by a fresh-dug grave. Grab yerself a pen, son. Give ya the directions, aw'right?"

Frank applauded his performance, confident the cops had found the body by now. Frank Lester Moore dead in the hills. Old Eddie soon to hear of his errand boy's miserable fate.

Frank smiled, picturing his tearful wife identifying the body as his. Ty had to, if she ever wanted to get her hands on the money, as if she ever would.

Ty's next step, Frank thought: try to find him through his red-headed playmate. Too dumb to know he had set her up for it, those few times he had let Ty spy on him and Emily. On her way to catch him with Emily at this very moment, he imagined. Unaware of Ling, or whomever of Eddie's men were following her.

"Wonderful night," Frank said to his reflection in the window, and his stomach disagreed with a growl.

Stocking feet sweeping over the carpet he went to the minibar. On top of it sat a wicker basket of snack bags. Nuts, chips, and pretzels.

Frank hesitated, concerned about eating out of plastic bags. That's all right, he decided. It had been a long time since he had broken the rules.

He tore open the pretzel bag and glanced at the clock radio. 25 more minutes, he noted, then shampoo and rinse. Two times, the dye-kit instructions had said; and that would be the end of it. He would have his dark-brown hair.

Frank munched away on the pretzels and his eyes landed on the bible that lay on the nightstand. He stared at the shiny crucifix on its cover. For the first time ever he wondered if there were Christians who believed that God the Father was a Christian. If sometime after His son's resurrection He Himself had become a Christian.

Frank tossed it off as a ridiculous question, but then concluded that one never knows what the religious faithful might come up with.

His eyes flicked to the Samsonite, closed and upright on its wheels. His silenced Russian pistol in it, on top of the money. Ten million... well, not quite, he shrugged. There had been the cab fares, and the cash advance for the hotel room.

Frank knew all about graveyard shifts at hotels. The staff hoping to supplement their skimpy paychecks with a cash check-in. The room occupied for a few hours, then empty before the morning shift change.

Frank remembered the clerk's eyes brightening when he saw the payment Frank had given him. A hefty cash bribe that had muted the usual request for ID.

Frank carried John Allen Kirk's, not to be shown unless pressed for it. San Pedro was a small town. Never know who knows who, Frank had told himself on his way here to the hotel.

He swallowed the last of the pretzels. Moving on to the chips he opened the minibar and took out a bottle of ginger ale. Glass bottle, he nodded with approval. Noticing then that the miniature liquor bottles were made of plastic. Didn't matter to Frank. He never touched the stuff.

That's all he needed, to dull his senses and destroy his will... stumbling through the Heavenly Father's garden of humanity, too drunk to harvest the blood of His children.

All of His children, Frank reminded himself.

He washed the chips down with ginger ale and turned to his naked reflection in the window. Through its transparency he stared into the misty night, and a vision appeared:

Little boys and girls planted in God's garden. Seedlings that had to be cut down before they became infested with the lies of goodness and grace.

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