As I drove over to the mall I turned on the police scanner app I had recently added to my phone. I heard the entire area was locked down and that suspects were still at large. Someone, perhaps two people, had opened fire on a group of people taking advantage of the Black Friday hours that some stores were doing now on Thanksgiving Day. Several people had been shot but there were no confirmed deaths, yet.

As I approached the mall I saw the Douglas County Sheriff’s cars blocking all of the entrances and I knew there was no way they would let me in. I had two options. One was to park the car right outside their perimeter and wait until they opened it up. The other was to go back home and call my editor to let him know there was no access to the story, which I was sure he would not want to hear. So I decided to find a place to park behind a gas station that was across the street from the entrance to the mall.

I pulled into a lot behind the station next to a wooded area and turned off the engine but continued to listen to the scanner. After about a half hour it seemed like no progress was being made. I couldn’t see much from where I was but I did suddenly hear the sound of my back door opening and realized that a crazed looking white guy who was sweating profusely and carrying some sort of automatic weapon was now in my backseat.

“Don’t say a fucking word. And turn off that scanner. Then, back out of here real easy and head down Lincoln just the way you came.”

His face was flushed, the little I could see of it in the rear view mirror. “So you are one of the shooters?”

“I am the only shooter, asshole. Now start the car and drive.”

Doing as I was told, I pulled out and headed back down Lincoln towards where it turned into University. As soon as we were on our way he asked, “So, where do you live, asshole?”

Lots of thoughts raced through my mind before I answered him. “Not far from here, actually. But there are a lot of people at my house and I’m sure the cops will be searching the area. What do you say I drive you downtown? Or to the airport? Whatever you like. You know, I’m a reporter for the Times. I can tell your story in tomorrow’s paper if you like. Or not, if you don’t like. What do you say?” I was sounding frantic. “Airport or downtown?”

“Your place will be just fine. I haven’t had my dinner yet.” He had a funny look in his eyes as I realized he was slouching down in the backseat to avoid being seen. The next turn was the entrance to my neighborhood but I drove right past it.

“So, listen. What do you say I give you the keys to my car and I get out up here at the next light? My wife is recovering from cancer and I really don’t want to upset her anymore with this kind of surprise. Know what I mean?”

“And then you go home and call the cops on me. Sure. I’m going for that.”

“No, I won’t. I’ll just say the car was stolen and my insurance company will cover the whole thing. You go your own way. They won’t be looking for you in this car.”

The gunman was silent for a moment, actually considering my suggestion. Then he spoke. “Sounds like a good plan. But how do I know I can trust you?”

“You don’t. But you can trust me.” We were approaching the red light. “I’m going to turn right here and pull over to the side of the road. I’ll get out and you can climb up front. Then I’m gone and you’re on your own.”

I began making the turn when he said, “No, just drive to your place. You get out there and I know where you live in case you cross me, then maybe I’ll take off.”

That didn’t sound like a great move to me so I decided I would try to trick him by pretending some stranger’s house was my house. Then it occurred to me that if that didn’t fool him he would probably just shoot me and take the car anyway. “Mind if I turn on the scanner for an update? What happened back there, you rob a bank or something?”

“Turn it on, go ahead. I didn’t rob any bank. I just got pissed off and started shooting. Don’t know why. Just started shooting. And it felt good.”

“You want me to put that in the story I write about you?”

“Up to you. Now let’s get to your place. And quit all this fucking around.” I turned on the scanner and we heard that two people were in critical condition from the shooting at the mall but no one was dead, at least not yet. The police sounded like they thought the shooter was still within their perimeter.

“Sounds like you got away. They don’t know you’re out here at all. And you didn’t kill anyone either.”

“Your house, Mister. Now.” Looking in the rear view mirror I guessed him to be in his late teens, maybe early twenties.

“Alright, you win. But please, tell me you’ve got all the shooting done for the day.”

“As long as someone doesn’t piss me off, I reckon I’m done.”

“Okay, good. Now, what’s your name so I can introduce you to my family?”

“My name is Billy Shore.” He was smiling and I could see he was missing a tooth in the front.

“Okay Billy, what happens after we get to my house?”

“We go inside and meet the family, just like you said.”

“And the gun stays in the car, right?

“Wrong. Gun comes with me.”

“Okay, but you’re not going to shoot anyone, right?”

“That’s right. Unless, like I said, they piss me off.” He sat up straight and looked out the window. “I thought you said you lived close. We’ve been riding around for ten minutes.”

I turned on to my street and said softly, “We’re here now Billy.” I was trying desperately to think of something that would get him to just leave without coming inside as I pulled into my driveway. “Billy, how much cash would it take for you to just leave right now and not go inside?”

“How much you got?

“I think I can hit up the ATM down the street for $500 and I have about $300 in my wallet. What do you say?”

“I say I’d rather come in and meet the family and see how much more money they can all kick in, how about that?”