

Excerpt from

RESIST

By Tracy Lawson

After a while, Tommy grew more confident behind the wheel and actually enjoyed the drive to the lake. Most of the autumn color had faded to brown, but it was a crisp, sunny day, perfect for a drive in the country. This late in the season, the area was sure to be deserted, and he wished he were taking Careen to his family's old vacation spot under different circumstances. The private road was muddy and rutted, and Tommy slowed the car to a crawl. He parked above the lake, out of sight of the house, and led Careen through the woods toward the shore.

They paused in the cover of the trees and watched as a woman, wrapped against the chill in a fringed wool blanket, walked slowly along the beach. When she drew nearer, Tommy whispered, "That's my mom!" Before Careen could stop him, he dashed out of the woods.

Lara Bailey turned toward the sound of his footsteps, but when she saw him she backed away, pulling the blanket close.

Tommy kept advancing. "Mom? Mom—it's me!"

"I don't know you. And I don't have a son. Stay away from me!" She turned and hurried up the path to the house. "Art! Art..."

He ran after her and closed the distance between them easily. He took her by the arm just as Art Severson came out on the porch.

Tommy motioned him back into the house and guided his mom inside. Careen followed and closed the door behind her.

Art was pale, his clothing disheveled, perspiration beading on his forehead. “Get the hell out of here or you’ll mess things up.”

“I don’t take orders from you. Where’s my dad?” He lowered his voice. “Why doesn’t she know who I am?”

Art smiled and inclined his head toward Tommy’s mother. “We’ve been pretending like nothing’s wrong,” he said. “She doesn’t remember what happened.”

Up close, Tommy could see the glazed, faraway look in his mother’s eyes. She obviously hadn’t detoxed yet. *I hate that stuff.*

“Lara? Art? What’s going on?” Tom Bailey came slowly in from the kitchen. He was much too thin and looked older and grayer than Tommy remembered. Their eyes met, and at first he thought his dad didn’t recognize him either, but then he drew a long, sobbing breath and whispered, “Tommy?” He sagged against the wall and began to laugh weakly. “Tommy! Art, that’s Tommy. He’s alive!”

Tommy nodded, getting more annoyed by the minute. “He knows. I stayed at his place for two weeks after I got out of the hospital.”

Lara looked from one to the other. “Tom? Who *is* this?”

Tom Bailey tried to compose himself. “I’ll introduce you in a minute, honey. First, Art and I need to talk with this young man.”

Tommy threw a quick look at Careen, and she gently took Lara’s arm. As soon as the door closed behind them, Tommy advanced on Art. “Is the QM coming?” Art looked away. “How long before they get here?”

“Tommy, what do you mean you stayed with Art? Art, why didn’t you tell me? How could you let me think he was dead?” His father was clearly trying to keep up.

“You have no idea what I’ve been up against.” Art turned on Tommy, defiant and unapologetic, and Tommy felt a surge of rage. He pulled the gun and leveled it at Art’s head.

His father tried to get between them. “Tommy, what’s gotten into you? Art got us away from Stratford and brought us here where we’d be safe.”

“Is that what he told you? Dad, get your stuff. And hurry. Please.” When his father was out of earshot, he took a step closer to Art, eyes narrowed. “How could you let him think you’d rescued them when you’re just babysitting until the quadrant marshals get here?”

“You have no right to judge me for anything I’ve done. You have no idea what was at stake.”

“I’ll judge all I want. You just better hope I don’t get mad enough to shoot you.”

“Oh yeah, tough guy? I’ll tell you what happened, then you tell me whose fault this is. Your dad decides to singlehandedly take down the OCSD and Lowell Stratford. Me, I mind my own business. Then one day some of Stratford’s goons come to me and say, ‘Put a muzzle on your boy Tom Bailey.’ But there’s no stopping your dad once he gets started. Soon the goons are back on my ass, and this time it’s, ‘Gosh, you have a pretty wife. It’d be too bad if anything happened to her.’ But I can’t stop the great Tom Bailey—he’s decided to expose Stratford’s plan to fake a terrorist attack. Now don’t get me wrong—I’m no fan of the guy myself. But why does your dad have to stick his neck out, especially when it’s also my neck and Beth’s on the line, too? But before he can

blow the whistle, the creeps in the dark suits show up a third time and say, ‘Congratulations, you’re getting promoted at work. Invite the Baileys over for dinner to celebrate.’ I ask what’s going on. They say, ‘Stratford’s decided there needs to be an accident.’

“No, I say. There has to be another way. I’ll do whatever you ask. So we make a deal. They agree to let your parents live if I agree to give them all your dad’s files about Stratford.

“So Beth plans a big, fancy meal for the four of us, but your folks show up with you as a last-minute addition to the dinner party. You’re a kid, and you’re innocent, so while Beth’s setting an extra place, I make a call and beg them to cancel the plan. But they won’t. They say if I try to warn your dad, there’ll be a home invasion robbery-turned-murder instead of just a little car accident.

“I’m sweating bullets, but by the end of the evening all I can say to your dad is ‘Hey, drive safe on the way home.’ Before long there’s a call from the hospital. You survived, but you’re badly hurt. You won’t ever be the same again.” He paused and fixed Tommy with a look that in the past would’ve made him squirm, but Tommy felt nothing but anger. Finally Art went on. “They won’t tell me where Tom and Lara are. And it’s *still* not over because I can’t find the goddamn files. I turned your place upside down while you were in the hospital, and again while you were living at my house. I tried one last time, about two weeks ago, when you were outside in the yard. I got Tom’s laptop, but there was nothing about Stratford on the hard drive.

“Last week, they tell me Tom’s alive, but he’s not cooperating. To motivate me—or maybe to punish me—they switched Beth’s CSD dose and now she’s checked out most

of the time. They're watching everything I do and say. And that's the last thing I remember. I woke up here this morning. I'm out of the antidote, okay? And now I'm..." he turned and vomited onto the floor.

Tommy wrinkled his nose against the smell and was caught off guard when Art came up swinging. He ducked, but must've squeezed the trigger, because the gun went off with an ear-splitting bang, shattering a window pane. He was so freaked out by the way the gun had bucked in his hand that he threw it away and caught Art with a hard right to the jaw. The older man sank to his knees in the puddle of vomit. Tommy carefully retrieved the gun.

His dad stood in the hallway, staring at him, open-mouthed. Tommy wondered how much he'd overheard. "Dad?" He patted his father's bony shoulder. "Come on. We're outta here." He opened the door and saw Careen running up the path, a terrified look on her face. She skidded to a stop.

"I thought I heard...is everyone...still alive?"

"Yeah, no worries."

Art stumbled out the door after them, and pulled his phone out of his pocket. Tommy shook his head. "No phone privileges for you, mister. And no driving, either. Hand 'em over."

Art rolled his eyes as he tossed the phone and his keys to Tommy. Tommy tilted his head toward his parents and lowered his voice.

"Take them to the car, Careen. I'll be there in a minute."

Her eyes flicked between his face and the gun in his hand. "Don't you think you've made your point?"

“Just go. Everything’s fine.” When they were out of sight, Tommy walked Art over to the clump of trees near the beach. “You know, you do have a very pretty wife, and she deserves much better than a jerk like you. As for me, I’m not all that innocent anymore.” He stared at Art coolly. *Let him wonder about that for a minute.* “Remember the combat training they made me take? I’ve found it comes in handy. The skills are applicable in almost any situation.” He pointed the gun at Art’s head.