

Cody opened the phone, pulled the battery out, turned away, and fiddled with the device for a few seconds before reinserting the battery. He tossed it back to John, who, startled, fumbled it twice before clutching it against his chest. "Put it on your belt," Cody said.

John hooked it back onto his belt as Ibrahim took the soda bottle and screwed it into the other end of the retaining ring. The weight dragged the barrel down. By the time John recognized that the gun pointed at the ground rather than his own previous anatomy, the angular man had picked up the backpack, light and floppy without the Dr. Pepper. He slid his hand inside and braced the barrel of the gun, keeping his left hand away from the metal. With control of the weapon renewed, he pointed the contraption at John's head.

Cody said, "Aw, man, we don't have to do this."

C'mon, Cody. Let's turn on this guy together. Not the most desirable final thought, he knew. He should be thinking of family, or friends, or maybe the cleanliness of his underwear, or the blood that would probably spurt all over his suit, the suit they'd want to use at the funeral. Or did being shot in the head mean a closed casket?

Ibrahim responded to Cody, "Really, smart guy?" He took a breath and lowered the gun slightly. Then he turned and fired.

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