

Introspection

From The Melvin Time Chronicles

by

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Chapter 1

Melvin did not know who was banging on the door at 4 a.m., but he knew they better have a damn good excuse, otherwise the mortician would have more business today. He forced himself out from under the six layers covering his body: hands first, then arm, then his torso. The cool air stung his flesh like he was actually in the morgue instead of wishing he could put whoever was behind that blasted door in there.

BAM BAM BAM! “Hey Mel, ... I need you man.”

The voice sounded familiar, but Melvin could not place it. Anyways, at 4 a.m., they better be dying, no matter who it was. Grabbing a tattered black housecoat, Melvin headed toward the door.

He grabbed the wooden door with a furious jerk and planted his foot on the linoleum floor. Who was this presumptuous fart anyway? He cracked the door open and an enormously fat slob came busting through, letting just as much damn icy Louisiana wind into the room as friggin possible.

“I need your help, man. I don’t know where to turn or even who to trust,” the 450-pounder shouted through the room while gasping for air before collapsing butt first, on the couch.

Melvin threw the door just as hard as he could, trying to slam it shut with a resounding thud, but it only coasted softly, leaving behind him a slightly opened door through which the January wind still blew. His lips squeezed together in rage and he could feel the warm, actively-disturbed, blood rush through every part of his now red-hot face.

Melvin closed the door with a shove of his right hand, pressed his body up against the door with fervor, and then looked at the blob sitting in 'his' chair. There this asshole sat with his cheap green jacket that had several stains, presumably from the hundred pounds of food this guy either tried to eat or just stuffed in his pockets for later. Candy bar wrappers stuck out of his pockets. He was bald with a mildly graying beard that food crumbs were in, and from the runny caramel that was oozing, it looked like the stuff was stuck for good. His pants looked like his legs were poured in and then compressed, and, the coup de gras were his wet, muddy tennis shoes from which shreds of cloth were torn.

“Hey Buddy, you better explain yourself friggin’ quick or I’ll throw your shameful ass back out on the damn street!”

The guy swallowed hard, tried to take a breath, and said, “Okay, Okay.” Another big breath. “Just give me a second.”

Melvin began tapping his foot. He wanted to get back to bed and try to warm up before he had to get to his office. Tap. Tap. Tap. The guy strained to breath. Tap. Tap. Tap.

“Okay,” Huff. Huff. “Forgive me,” Huff. Huff. “I ran all the way from the corner.” Huff.

Melvin wanted to retain his anger, but could not help but smirk. His house, swiss cheese with a door, was only three houses from the corner.

“We were buddies back in high school.” Huff.

Melvin laughed and then sneered. “Yeah, right.”

“It’s true. I am Tom Soren.” Huff.

Melvin sneered. He had seen too much, witnessed too much, had been gullible too many times to readily believe anything. “I’m not buying it, Pal. Tom Soren was my best friend, but I have not seen or talked to him since high school.”

“I know, Friend, and I’m sorry. I’m also sorry that I haven’t been there for you like you were for me.”

Something about that statement shook Melvin. It was true that he was Tom’s protector in high school... the voice matched and the face... “Tom! What in the world are you doing at MY doorstep at 4 a.m., and why now, after all these years?”

Tom managed a mild breathy laugh and then said, “I am in big trouble Mel,” huff, “I figure you are my last hope.”

Melvin’s excitement at seeing his high school bud turned to concern about just what kind of trouble Tom had brought into his life. Not that his life was great, or even good, but none of it involved major trouble. For Tom to come to him took some courage. The two had lost contact when they had graduated. Tom was the valedictorian. He had delivered his speech, was supposed to meet him at a restaurant, then disappeared. Melvin never knew where. Some say he got into a limo, but Melvin never really knew that for certain.

Huff. “I just hope they didn’t follow me here.”

Oh great! ...was Melvin’s only thought... “What can I help you with Tom? Explain to me what’s goin’ on? You hope “who” didn’t follow you?”

Chapter 2

The guy that said "Friends are Forever" probably never dreamed that 20 years later a load of garbage wearing pants would break in the door needing desperate help at 4 a.m. It was definitely the last thing that Melvin expected, but there his "blast from the past" sat.

As the slob started speaking, Melvin could not help but wince about his poor sofa. It wasn't expensive mind you, but 450 pounds? It was not made for that. The odor emanating from Tom's direction was sweaty, sweet, nasty, and gut churning which made Melvin want to crawl away and hide.

"I'm in deep trouble, Buddy."

"Yeah, you said that. So how about some details? The last I saw you, ... hell, I guess I was 18-years-old," Melvin said as he raised a hand.

"Yeah, I know," the guy replied while gasping for air. He wheezed "You wrote mom and dad numerous times." Tom's hazel eyes dropped. Breathing hard, he continued, "You wrote me a lot of times after high school." Eyes lifting up, "Man, they grabbed me right after graduation."

Melvin shook his head slightly, "Who?" He paused briefly. "Who??" He patted his foot a moment, then exclaimed, "WHO?!?!?"

Tom hung his head for a moment. "I thought I could answer that for a loooooong time, but today, I just don't know, man," he said as he propped his head with both hands.

"You are completely confusing me, Tom," Melvin said as raised his hand with splayed fingers. "Now," his hands found their way back to his side, "twenty-something years later, you show back up into my life." His hands raised again, bouncing as he talked. "What happened to you? Where did you go? Why are you here?"

"I don't know, Guy." Tom said slowly shaking his head. "I guess I thought you could help. I am a man without any friends, except you, my high school buddy."

Melvin rubbed his stubble chin. This guy must not have any social life at all for him to not have any friends, but on the other hand, neither did he. Melvin looked over at the clock: 5 a.m. He grimaced. "Maybe I can help. Just maybe."

Tom's eye's hung low. Softly he said, "I hope you can, Friend. I know it's been a long time and I know you don't know me from a stranger on the street anymore and I know you have no reason to help me or trust me after all these years, but," he paused and stressed, "man...I need help." Tom looked up. "You, me, everybody we know,

and the entire rest of the world, maybe our entire universe, and the universes beyond ours, may depend on what we do.”

Melvin tried to swallow the big lump that had built up in his throat as Tom was speaking, but it did not seem to want to go down and then, with a sudden Ka-Chunk, the tension broke and the voluminous mass and whatever else went down his throat all at once. His concerns were vast, not only because of the implications of what Tom had said, but the sheer fact that he had a friend that cared about him.

His life had been hard and, right now, at this moment in time, Tom was probably his closest friend. That's "if" he were actually here, and "if" he was the same person he knew those many years ago, He had had only had one friend in his whole miserable life and Tom had been it. The friend that Melvin knew from long ago was not prone to exaggeration. He was a dead-serious kind of guy.

Melvin took a hard look at the proverbial, blubberish slob in front of him. Was this actually the Tom he knew those many years ago? Could this guy's incredible claim be true? It seemed an awful lot to take in.

“Come on, whoever you are,” Melvin said ushering Tom, or whoever this was, out of the chair and then toward the front door. Melvin tilted his head down. The odor from this guy was horrific being so close, but at this point, he didn't care. Melvin just wanted this slob out so that he could get on with his life.

Tom pushed against Melvin's arms, saying, “I am Tom Soren, truly I am.”

“Okay, you're Tom Soren.” Melvin said as he grabbed whoever this was by his food-encrusted jacket and pulled closer towards the front door. The whale turned his head to look at him and Melvin stared at this guy's wide-open eyeballs. “Well, Tom, this is just a little too far fetched for me to believe. Bye.”

Chapter 3

“But it’s ME! It’s Tom! It really is!” Tom pushed back against Melvin’s forcefulness. “At graduation, we sat beside each other because you had a 3.75 GPA and I had a 3.77. Remember?” Melvin stopped. Tom continued, “You told me that graduation was the best thing that had happened in your life thus far.” Melvin cocked his head. “I told you that you were my best buddy all through school and that I owed you a lot.”

Melvin's arms went limp and fell to his side as he backed up. His legs sprawled out like hot noodles and his feet tripped over one another and his limp body fell to the cold white tiled floor. He trembled. His insides were quaking enhanced by the cold on his derriere. “You ARE Tom! But ... but ... but ... How?!?” His voice was shaky and uncertain and the sound of it surprised even him.

As he reached his hands to the floor trying to get up, Tom said, “Believe it or not, bud, I have kept tabs on you through these many years.” He paused. “The organization I have been working for confiscated the letters that you sent to mom and dad's house. They let me read them, my Friend,” another pause, “and I have kept up with your activities.” Tom took Melvin's hand into his and pulled him up. Tom guided Melvin back to a seated position on the sofa and then re-took his seat in the chair.

“College was a bust,” Tom continued. “You majored in computers, but that degree did not help you get a decent job.” Tom leaned back.

Melvin, startled at how much this guy knew about him, just leaned back against the cold vinyl of the sofa.

“When you couldn’t get a job, your bride, Teresa, divorced you,” Tom said. “Then you married Margie. Three years later you divorced her. Women...” Tom made a fist and shook it in the air. “Then you went to trade school and became a Private Investigator. A job that’s apparently been keeping you afloat.” Tom looked from one side to the other. “And apparently it has kept you barely afloat. This place is a mess: dirty dishes, dust everywhere, and my gosh, the neighborhood is a dump.”

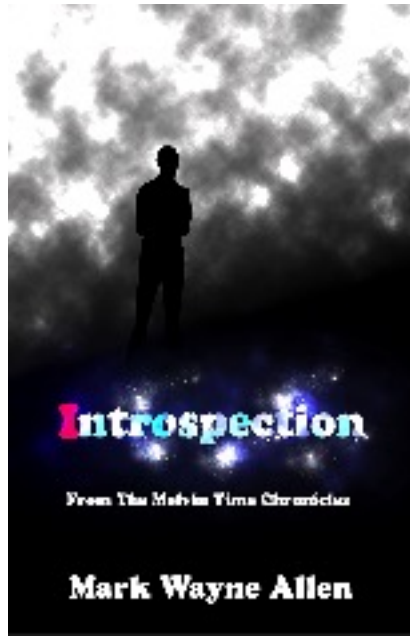
Melvin could feel the rush of his blood into his face. Who was Tom to criticize anybody: he was a walking dump himself. “Wait just a cotton picking minute Bud,” he hurriedly stood up, “this is my house. I don’t take that kind of nonsense ...”

Tom leaned forward and raised a flush hand, “Easy there, Buddy. I was just trying to get your attention. Geez, you are as hot headed as you were in school.”

Melvin felt a bead of sweat roll onto his brow, wiped it away, then lowered his

hand and said, "Well, I'm usually not easy to rattle, but this is," he looked over at the digital clock on the dust covered bookshelf along the wall, "5:30 in the morning." Tom chuckled. "I usually am "NOT" awake until an hour from now. Now, Tom, would you please dispense with all this doom and gloom stuff and please tell me what the hell you are doing here?"

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