

When Doc entered the 1500 block of Fairmont Street, NW, there was little vehicular and pedestrian traffic, but he knew that the bitter cold would not keep the dealers and junkies from their appointed rounds.

He took note of the inordinate number of luxury cars parked in the block; an all-too-familiar sight in under-developed, neglected neighborhoods such as this one. Typically, the people making quick cash from illegal enterprises always purchased expensive cars and fine clothes, but remained in squalid dwellings. Clothes and cars defined them; where and how they lived did not seem to matter.

On the opposite side of the street, there were three teenage boys, one standing on the sidewalk near the curb, the other two huddled in different doorways of the same dilapidated building, which was covered in *Fairmont Street Crew* graffiti. To the inexperienced eye, they looked like they had nothing to do with one another. Doc knew that they were actually a team: one had the drugs, one had the money, and one had the gun. The boy with the gun was not only their protection, but was the look-out. Woe to anyone who tried to "jack" them or trespass on their turf. *Mummy's* turf.

On the other hand, if the rollers came through the block, they would flee in three different directions. That way, the police would never catch all of them - the rollers might get the drugs or the money or the gun, but not everything; not everyone.

As he walked casually down the street, Doc glanced up at the rooftops quickly, wondering *where* the surveillance team, outfitted with state-of-the-art night-vision equipment and listening devices, had set up the O.P. (Observation Post). He could not begin to guess their location. *Good*. If *he* couldn't tell where they were and he *knew* they were *there...somewhere*, the unsuspecting wouldn't spot them either.

A sudden gust of icy wind sandblasted his face with frozen left-over snowflakes, stinging his cheeks - freeze-drying them! Squinting, he put his body into the wind, pressing forward down the street into the gale.

Even beneath his down-filled parka and his thermal underwear, he could feel the cold, harsh wind tearing at his body like a pack of starving jackals.

*There she blows!* Doc mused with a chuckle as he saw a teenage *strawberry* (a crack whore) turn the corner off of 15th Street and enter the opposite end of the block.

Dressed only in a thin, dirty blue wind-breaker, a filthy white Spandex bodysuit and reeled-over blue high-heel shoes, the *strawberry* braved the bitter cold in search of someone to give a blowjob to or screw in exchange for crack or money to buy crack.

As she got closer, he could see that her hair was dirty and lint-laden. Devoid of hair care products, her head was as nappy as a sheep's ass. A crusty white substance was on her chapped lips and in the corners of her mouth. Dried semen, no doubt. *Ugh!* Even in this pathetic state, Doc recognized her.

That summer, she had really been something to look at. She had been very appealing when she was fresh. Now, she was stale. Used up. Rotten.

When the *strawberry* was about four yards away from him, Doc could smell her stench; the familiar rancid odor that accompanies filthy females such as these. Like sun baked fish heads doused in cheap perfume.

Shivering in the blustering cold, her teeth clicking like castanets, the *strawberry* asked, "W-wants s-s-some c-c-com-p-pan-ny?"

"Get out of here before I pop a cap in your ass!" *Brick* hissed. And he *meant* it.

The *strawberry* believed that he *would* shoot her, so, without another word, she pressed on.

Officer Jacob "Doc" Holloway was scheduled to meet James "Mummy" Jenkins in front of the apartment building where *Mummy* sold and stored narcotics, 1501 Fairmont Street, NW, at 10:15 p.m. He was not late.

As far as *Mummy* knew, Jacob Holloway was "Brick" Jones, a top-notch thief-turned-entrepreneur. A reliable snitch, an uptown stripper known as *Sizzle*, had turned *Brick* on to Robert Watson, one of *Mummy's* employees. Watson sold cocaine to strippers, near or on the premises of their places of employment. There was nothing Robert loved better than "stringing out those 'ho'es." That way, he could get what was owed him in trade. In turn, Watson turned *Brick* on to *Mummy*, a mid-level manager, so to speak, in an illicit narcotics organization which monthly distributed about thirty million dollars of crack cocaine, PCP, heroin, and marijuana. Subsequently, Doc had bought several grams of cocaine from *Mummy* before graduating to kilos.

It had taken Holloway several months to win *Mummy's* confidence. *Mummy* Jenkins had even confided in him how he had gotten the nickname "Mummy" when he was bandaged from head to toe after being badly burned a couple of years earlier in a PCP fire. Now, he looked like the Phantom of the Opera. It was his fault the PCP lab blew up, *Mummy* admitted. He shouldn't have lit a cigarette with all those fumes in the room, but he was so high, he wasn't thinking clearly. Oh well, shit happens.

*Mummy* also disclosed that, prior to his cremation, he had rigged a booby trap for cops in case his PCP lab was raided; and how he had longed for the day some unsuspecting roller would spring the trap and flash-fry his own ass. He giggled.

What he did was store containers of highly flammable liquid PCP, which requires refrigeration to maintain its potency, uncovered inside the fridge...so the PCP fumes could permeate the refrigerator. He then unplugged the refrigerator and screwed in a refrigerator bulb...well *part* of a bulb: *just* the part that screws into the socket and the filaments, bare filaments. The glass bulb itself was gone.

*Mummy* then closed the refrigerator door and plugged the unit into the wall socket.

Whenever he or his workers wanted to retrieve PCP from the refrigerator, they had to first unplug the unit...otherwise, the bare filaments would ignite the flammable PCP fumes which filled the fridge and **KA-BOOM!**

Too bad he never got the chance to blow-up a roller. But, the humor of the irony of his fate did not escape him.

Years earlier, when he was handsome - and he had old photographs to prove it - he had been a pimp. He had destroyed his good looks because he got greedy. He had just wanted to increase his income when he started manufacturing and distributing PCP. "Where I fucked up," *Mummy* confessed, "is when I started smokin' that shit."

Over the last couple of months, he had endeavored to impress *Brick* with endless pimp and drug lord stories about "*keepin' them 'ho'es in line*" and "*offin' muthafuckas*" that had crossed him or encroached on his turf. All the while, Doc couldn't help thinking how much *Mummy* resembled Vincent Price in *House of Wax!* At times, he could barely keep from laughing out loud at the notion.

Of course, Officer Holloway already had prior intimate knowledge of *Mummy's* career highlights, but *Brick* was properly amused...and fascinated.

*Mummy* trusted *Brick* so much, he introduced him to his twelve children, seven boys and five girls ranging in age from 5 to 10 years old. He had also introduced him to their twelve mothers, all of whom *Mummy* referred to as "bitches" - to their faces. Still, he was a great provider and a wonderful father. His children and their mothers wanted for nothing. He sent his kids to private schools; provided each mother with a fine home, an expensive car, designer clothes; and a generous monthly stipend. He even spent considerable "quality" time with each child *each and every week*. And never missed one birthday.

Commendable behavior...for a greedy, selfish, lascivious, vindictive, self-serving murderer.

*Brick* and *Mummy* regularly attended basketball games at the Cap Center; football games at RFK stadium; horse races at Rosecroft; baseball games at Memorial Stadium; boxing matches in Vegas and Atlantic City...always accompanied by the finest young honeys, of course.

They also went target shooting twice a week at the Maryland Small Arms Range. The first time they went, *Mummy* smiled at the end of the session and said, "Well, at least I know you're not a cop."

"Why is that?" *Brick* asked.

"Cops can't shoot," *Mummy* retorted.

*Mummy* and *Brick* even played pool and cards...and chess, though *Brick* was annoyed by *Mummy's* cutthroat, kamikaze chess-playing tactics. *Mummy* concentrated on trying to get as many of his opponents pieces as possible, sacrificing his own pieces with zeal, before attempting to formulate a strategy to checkmate the opposing king. Ex-cons always seemed to play this peculiar brand of chess, which Doc Holloway dubbed, "jailhouse chess." Despite the fact that he had never defeated his partner Jack, Doc preferred playing chess with him. Jack was the best player he had encountered.

Annoying as *Mummy's* style of chess playing was, *Brick* appreciated the opportunity to learn how the man thought.

No doubt about it: *Mummy* and *Brick* were "tight." With his backing, Officer Holloway was about to join the organization...with the blessing of the head honcho, of course. *Brick* Jones had arrived. He was going to meet *The Man*.

*Mummy* Jenkins believed *Brick* to be the owner of *Brix Construction Company*, which was a front to launder the sales profits from the several hundred kilos of cocaine he had purchased from him over the last year. *Brick* told him that he sold kilos to high-society types who had hired him to renovate their top-of-the-line properties in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. It just so happened that several of these rich folks just *loved* to party. *Brick* felt them out and when he was sure he could safely do business with them, he became their supplier. But, the beauty of *Brick's* operation was that he and his crew also "cased" each home, identifying valuables and making notes on security systems...and how to circumvent them. When the time was right, they returned and burglarized their customers. Suckers!

The money was good, but *Brick* was ambitious. The real money was in drug distribution for street sales...and *Brick* Jones was ready to expand his enterprise.

Mr. Jenkins had no way of knowing that the money *Brick* used to purchase the drugs was provided by the Feds...or more precisely, by other drug dealers, and that the cocaine he bought was now *Mummy* tagged as evidence and in storage in a DEA property room.

The cash *Brick* used was seized during raids. When the U.S. currency was no longer needed as evidence, the Feds put it back in circulation through undercover operations such as this one. Of course, the serial numbers were recorded so that the Feds could track where the money was being spent. So far, the money had shown up in New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Miami, and L.A., as well as the District of Columbia.

When *Brick* approached the front of *Mummy's* apartment building, *Mummy* was talking to one of the ugliest men he had ever seen, second only to *Mummy*! Not only did the fellow look like an aardvark, but he had fresh stitches on the left side of his face, from the area of the temple down to his chin. But the stitches looked like someone had used tennis shoe laces as sutures. The stitches looked like they belonged on Frankenstein's monster. *Frankenstitches!*

Holloway envisioned a blood-stained back-room-butcher with the dubious title of "Doctor," rubber gloves drenched with blood, using a knitting needle to sew up the man's face.

They made quite a pair. The two would have been perfect for starring roles in an old *Universal International* horror movie, *Frankenstein Meets The Phantom of the Opera*. *Mummy* sent the Monster on his way when he saw *Brick* approaching. As usual, *Mummy* was happy to see him.

"Hey, man," *Mummy* beamed, "What's zup!"

"What's hap'nin', Mummy," *Brick* replied. They shook hands.

"You always on time, Brick. I like that.

"Hey, Brick, what do you say to a woman with two black eyes?"

*Brick* considered the question briefly, then answered, "I don't know."

"Nothin'," *Mummy* replied. "The bitch didn't listen the first two times!"

*Mummy* broke into laughter and *Brick* followed suit.

"That's a good one, man," *Brick* lied.

"You ready to change your future?" *Mummy* asked. Without waiting for a response, he said, "Come on, let's go."

*Brick* followed into the building and was greeted by the usual, overpowering stench of urine ever-present in the hallways and stairwells. Today, he noted the additional rankness of vomit.

A large cockroach crawled leisurely along one wall. A rat scurried past them and disappeared into the shadows, the sound of its claws clicking against the concrete floor as it continued its flight in darkness.

"Come, on," *Mummy* directed, "Let's take the back stairs."

*Back stairs?* Holloway thought. *Why?* Holloway was apprehensive, but kept his suspicions to himself...even when they left the fourth floor landing, where *Mummy* maintained an apartment from which he sold drugs, and continued upward.

As *Brick* followed *Mummy* up the stairs of the 8-storey apartment building, the words of his partner Jack Tilden, who was parked safely up the street and around the corner, echoed in his mind: "*Make sure you don't eat or drink anything before you go to make a buy. That way, if they find out you're working undercover and you get shot in the belly, your guts won't fall out.*" Jack had given him that advice two years ago today just before he made his first buy and "Doc" always remembered that whenever he put his ass on the line like this. How could he forget?

When *Brick* and *Mummy* stepped onto the roof, it was freezing. It had snowed regularly over the past couple of days and the roof was covered with snow and patches of ice. Four men were already there. Three of the men, one Latino, two African American, were well-dressed; the fourth, also a black man, was being held by both arms by the dapper black "twins," who looked like prizefighters in Armani suits and overcoats. The fourth, a rather thin man, who had wet his pants, was not well attired. In fact, the boldest fashion statement of his otherwise mediocre ensemble was the duct tape covering his mouth and securing his hands behind him. His face was bloody and badly swollen and he was whimpering like a child. Then *Brick* recognized the whimpering man as a mid-level drug dealer by the name of Lorenzo "Huckabuck" Franks. The first time they met, *Huckabuck* had stuck a gun in his face! It was an honest mistake. *Huckabuck* was high on cocaine at the time and had mistaken him for someone else.

*Huckabuck* was supposed to be in prison. *Shit!*

Before Holloway and Tilden were recruited for the *Janus Project*, they had targeted *Huckabuck*. Using ordinary UC techniques, they had purchased a kilo of cocaine from *Huckabuck* and busted him right on the spot. It was a good bust. The key field-tested positive for cocaine.

Tilden's and Holloway's ultimate goal was to convince *Huckabuck* to cut a deal and roll-over on the man who was supplying him. But when evidence technicians tested the white powder the day after it was stored in the Drug Enforcement Administration's DC laboratory, it was determined that the substance was not cocaine at all, but a popular baby laxative. Impossible! There was only one answer: The police officer who had transported it from the station's property room to the DEA lab had substituted the coke for the baby laxative. Since baby laxative is not a controlled substance, the charges against *Huckabuck* were dropped.

When word got around how Tilden and Holloway had blown it, they became a laughing stock. With only one exception, their superior officers were embarrassed by their abject failure. Holloway and Tilden were placed on P&P (Prostitution and Perversion) duty, busting Shims (She/Hims: transvestite prostitutes).

The one official who still believed in them was Lt. Baker. He knew that the cocaine had to have been switched for the baby laxative en route to the DEA laboratory by the man who transported it there, a police officer by the name of Bradford Dillon. Dillon must be on the take.

Baker needed people he could trust to work with him on a new task force. He filled Jack and Jake in regarding the *Janus Project* and the rest was history.

Had *Huckabuck* blown his cover? Was Officer Jacob Holloway history?

Abruptly, *Mummy* grabbed *Brick* from behind and held his arms securely behind him. *Oh, shit! They've made me.* Holloway thought. *Make sure you don't eat or drink anything... That way, if they find out you're working undercover and they shoot you in the belly, your guts won't fall out.*

"What the fuck...! What's up, Mummy?" *Brick* sounded indignant rather than scared, despite the fact that the sudden burst of adrenalin brought on by fear had his heart pounding.

"Just shut up, man," *Mummy* replied. "Just shut the fuck up and pay attention."

*My guts falling out is the least of my worries,* Holloway thought. *Guys like these blow your brains out!*

The most dapper of the dapper three, the Latino, who was obviously *The Man*, walked slowly toward Holloway, smoking a long, thin cigar. When he reached *Brick* he eyeballed him for a time, puffing his cigar. "I understand you want to work for me, yes?"

Keeping his cool was difficult, to say the least, but *Brick* managed to reply, "Yeah."

*The Man* unzipped Holloway's parka and frisked him, but failed to locate a wire. Instead, he found *Brick's* Colt 9mm automatic tucked into his right coat pocket. He admired it. "Very nice," *The Man* complimented him. Abruptly, he racked the slide and stuck the pistol in Holloway's face.

*Oh, shit! This is it.* Holloway figured he was dead, just as he had the first time someone stuck a gun in his face. It had been *Huckabuck* as a matter of fact. Why bother to beg or whimper? He might as well go out like a man, with his eyes open, looking *The Man* straight in the eye.

After a few moments, which seemed like hours to Holloway, *The Man* asked, "Are you a cop?"

*If I say 'no,'* Holloway thought, *It's entrapment. If I say 'yes,' he'll kill me.*

"Hell, no," Holloway replied.

After a brief moment, *The Man* lowered the gun and said, "Excellent," before turning away. "Release him, Mummy." *Mummy* complied. *The Man* turned back and added, "If you have lied to me and you *are* a cop, my friend, *that* is entrapment. Not that it would matter, you understand. I just like to ask that question to see if any undercover cop would actually be stupid enough to confess it."

*The Man* paused for effect; looked at the stars for a moment, taking in the night.

"My friends here are well-dressed, yes?" *The Man* asked *Brick*. Without waiting for a response, he continued. "If they look out for me, I look out for them. That's the bottom line. "Come over here for a second, let me show you something."

Desperately trying to mask his apprehension, *Brick* followed *The Man* to the edge of the roof. "Look. See that brand new Mercedes parked across the street? And that Porsche over there?" *Brick* nodded. "I bought those today for my friends here, because they look out for me."

*The Man*, rubbing the small, but noticeable scar on his left cheek, walked over to *Huckabuck* and stared into his eyes. "But this piece of shit, he does not look out for me. He steals from me."

*The Man* stepped back and nodded at the *Dapper Twins*. At that point, they raised the bound and gagged *Huckabuck*, who kicked and cried frantically, carried him to the edge of the roof, and carefully stood him on the icy ledge, making sure he was balanced before letting him go. *Huckabuck*, desperately keeping his balance, was more terrified than ever.

"It's cold, but it is not that cold," *The Man* told *Brick Jones*. "Take off your gloves."

*Brick* hesitated for a second, then complied. *The Man* took them from him.

"So, you want to work for me, my friend?" *The Man* asked *Brick*. Without waiting for a response, he drew his own chrome-plated .45 automatic. "If you want to work for me, you've got to show me that you are worthy of the position. Take care of this light work for me and you've got the job."

"Your gun is nice, but you have to admit mine is much nicer. By blowing his brains out with my gun, you will honor me."

*The Man* handed his gun to *Brick* butt-first. At that instant, *Brick* heard the sound of a handgun being cocked just behind his head. *Mummy* preferred a .44 Bulldog revolver over "all that automatic crap." "They jam on you," *Mummy* was fond of saying. "A revolver ain't nothin' but the truth!"

The choice was simple: Blow *Huckabuck* off the roof or get his brains blown out by *Mummy*. This was *not* your typical police work...not by a long shot.

*Brick* racked the slide of the glistening, chrome-plated Smith & Wesson automatic, chambering a round in the beautiful firearm. He admired the weapon before turning his gaze to *The Man*, who puffed his cigar; then to the *Dapper Twins*, who stood majestically like Clydesdales, looking on; then to *Huckabuck*, steam billowing from his nostrils, his breathing labored by fear.

A funny thought occurred to *Brick* that *Huckabuck* was actually the victim of a modern version of walking the plank. Left on his own, how long could he stand on the icy ledge before he lost his footing...and fell to earth? What was not funny was that *Brick* had realized just how much can be communicated merely by the look in one's eyes. *Brick* could actually *hear Huckabuck* pleading for his miserable life; could *hear* it in his eyes. The piteous look in those eyes would never leave him, he knew. *Never*.

*Brick* aimed the .45 at *Huckabuck*, with every intention of shooting him. This *was* kill or be killed after all. But just then, *Huckabuck* lost his footing and, with a muffled scream, fell from the roof. *Brick* lowered the .45.

The dapper trio laughed as they watched him plummet to the pavement. *Brick* did not bother to look. He didn't have to; could envision *Huckabuck's* head bursting on the pavement like a ripe melon.

*Mummy* put away his .44 Bulldog just as *The Man* turned back to *Brick*.

*The Man* beamed. "Humpty Dumpty had a *great* fall, eh? That wasn't exactly what I had in mind, but, just as good, no?" He retrieved his .45 from *Brick*, put it in a plastic zip-lock bag and put it in a pocket of his black cashmere overcoat. He handed *Brick* his 9mm and black leather gloves.

"What's with the plastic bag?" *Brick* inquired.

"Just a little insurance," *The Man* replied. "I will explain later." *The Man* clapped his gloved hands together and then continued. "Well, it seems I suddenly have a job opening. You've got the job. You now have that fucker's route. But, please, my friend, don't ever forget: If you look out for me, you can have what's parked on the street, like my good friends here. Betray me, and you will be *on* the street." He held out his hand to Holloway. "My name is Santos Tudor. 'Brick' isn't it? Welcome to the big time."

*Brick* nodded, shook Tudor's hand and said, "I hope your faithful employees get a better retirement plan."

After a brief pause, Tudor smiled. *Brick* smiled back. Tudor then laughed raucously and patted *Brick* on the shoulder. *Mummy* and the *Dapper Twins* laughed as well. *Brick* only pretended to laugh. He would reserve his mirth until they were all under arrest...or dead.