

The Replacement

You can find me on the Deep Web. I'm there, if you need me. I get paid in Bitcoin. Half the agreed amount before the job, the other half when it's completed. I'm a hit man. And yes, I love my job. It's good money and I got kids to feed. Funny thing is, I learned the trade from the old man.

The old man was old fashioned. Only used a 38. Worked a steady day job at the gas station. Went out at night by himself and Mom never said a word. If I asked where he was, Mom said, "Oh honey, he works nights at the 7-11 sometimes, we have bills to pay." She'd ruffle our hair. "You kids are lucky, your father loves you so much."

All that extra work paid off. Mom quit her job at the dry cleaners. Poppy bought us a tidy house in a better neighborhood, with a yard. We got a dog, a pool, started taking a family vacation every summer. My twin sisters Joanie and Janie got braces for their buck teeth. We got a new station wagon. Poppy bought us shiny new bikes, a big TV and a week-end cabin upstate.

The old man sat me down for a man-to-man when I was eighteen. Thought he was going to spout some nonsense like "Always use a rubber" like my friends' dads. Fools, all of them. But Pop sat me down, in that way old guys have, you know. When they sit in a chair backwards, and hold onto the chair seat. Looked at me with those dark eyes. Told me what he did for a living. Five or six hits a year. For twenty years. Dark unblinking eyes. I shivered. He looked like a movie mobster, someone you wouldn't want to piss off. I was scared of him for a few seconds. I blinked, and he looked just like Pop again. A regular guy. Says hi to his neighbors, mows the lawn, reads the Sunday paper. Barbecues on the weekends. Sleeps in and misses church.

"Why'd you do it, Poppy? Kill all those people?"

"Son. It was business. Just business. I was always a Professional. Never killed women, children. Never killed anyone but bad men who deserved it. Very bad men. Never got arrested. Never got my name in the papers. And I made good money for your mom and you kids. That's what a man does. He takes care of his family. Not like these bums that don't pay child support, let their women and kids live on food stamps. No food stamps in this house."

"Why're you telling me this, Pop? I could've gone my whole life without knowing."

"Because, son. My nerves are shot. It's time for me to retire. And they need someone. Someone they can trust. Nowadays, they use computers and all that nonsense. I figure---since I took you to the range since you were a boy, you know how to handle a gun. And you got all these here computer skills, you've been playing violent video games your whole life. You've killed more people than I have, when you think about it. You'd be perfect for the job. Besides, you said you wanna marry your girlfriend Tina and you don't wanna go to college. You don't

wanna join the military. Before you know it, you'll have a bunch of kids running around. What do you wanna do, work at McDonalds or Taco Bell?"

So I took Poppy's advice and I followed in his footsteps. It's not a bad life. I work when I want to, have a lot of free time. Pop says I should be able to keep going for twenty years, then pass the gig on to my son Dino. I make a lot of money. And I take good care of my family. Pop told me he's proud of me. You can't ask for more than that.

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