

Dark Lords of the Trailer Park

(Sample Story)

HOLE

Angel started out in the morning from Lake City, Florida in his blue, beat-up Skylark, going west on I-10 with Casey at his side and her husband's dead body in the trunk. He drove the whole day before stopping at a small, one-story motel in Louisiana called "The Captain's Table."

In the lobby, Angel registered them under a fake name and paid eighteen dollars for a room. A pale, bony man wearing an undershirt and suspenders sat behind the front desk and gave him the key. He warned him not to steal or break anything. No parties allowed.

After Angel unlocked the door and walked into their room, Casey followed and turned on the light. She dragged a hand through her hair and spoke for the first time in over four hours. She said, "There's two beds in here."

"Yeah. Doubles all they got left." He set their suitcases down and collapsed onto the bed nearest the door.

Casey took off her sunglasses and gripped her elbows. "It's cold."

"Let's get some sleep. We can unpack whatever we need later. All right?"

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She sat heavily on the corner of the bed next to him. She rested her forehead in her hand. "I seriously doubt I could sleep much right now."

Angel tried to think of something vague and appropriate to respond with, but nothing came. He got goosebumps. She was right; it was cold. For a moment they stayed hushed and motionless on the bed until Casey got up, went to the door, and closed it. She put the chain through the lock and leaned against the wall, frowning, making a show of it.

"You okay?" he asked her.

"Not very," she said.

Angel made another silence before he sat up and sighed. "Baby Doll, we've been talking about this whole thing for what? A month? What are you acting so shocked about?"

"Honey, my God, how can you speak like that?" she asked, her voice caught between laughing and crying.

"Like what?"

"Like I'm just being silly or something. I've never killed anyone before. Let alone someone I was married to."

"First off, I ain't never killed no one neither. And we didn't do nothing. I did. And I did it 'cause I wanted to. Christ, babe, he kept you black and blue since the day you married him."

She shook her head. "I wonder now if we did the smartest thing."

With a slow sureness, Angel lifted himself off the bed. He walked over and stood in front of her. "C'mon. I knew his type real good. From prison. Either I did what I did, or you'd be the one in the trunk of a car somewhere, especially if he ever found out about us, which he was bound to. I guarantee it. Besides, missing him, are you?"

"Of course not," she whispered.

"So be happy then. This is the 'happily-ever-after' part of the story."

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Casey said Angel's name beneath a short, shaky breath.

"Look, it's only me and you now," he told her. "If you've changed your mind about wanting that, you sure picked some sorry timing." He touched her temple. He let his hand wander from her face to her neck, then further down. He held one of her breasts and massaged it. She raised the hand away by the wrist.

"No," she said. "Don't even."

He put a finger to her lips and kissed her on the neck. When he took her face in his hands, she began to sob, her face squeezed red with anguish. She dropped her sunglasses and grabbed two fistfuls of her hair.

Angel said, "Hey. Hey. Hey. No. Shhhh, relax."

She moved into his arms. He whispered to her over and over that it was all right. They'd be in California before she or anyone else knew it. They'd both always wanted to visit the west coast anyway, hadn't they? He reminded her how they would start over there, blend in, just the two of them like nothing had ever happened. Everything would be okay. Every-thing. Not one damn thing to worry about. She'd see.

Once Angel had pulled the trigger of his .357, he could not stop shooting. Every blast seemed to require another. He needed to make sure there was absolutely no life left, no possibility whatsoever of the son of a bitch getting up. Once the gun was empty, he heard laughter above the ringing in his ears. It sounded somewhere far off.

Angel snapped awake. More laughter. A hundred-strong crowd was laughing. He raised his head from a crunched, wet pillow and zipped glances around him.

"Sorry, hon." Casey lay propped by an elbow, facing him, the covers tucked beneath her arms. "I told you I wouldn't sleep much."

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There was laughter again from over his shoulder. A green and grainy Jimmy Kimmel bulged his eyes while mimicking a hick accent. The audience roared. The blush of the TV blanketed the room in a skin of fluttering blue light.

“Needed to concentrate for a minute on something that ain’t in my head.” She looked back to the TV. “Every time I close my eyes, I keep seeing his face, y’know? And all the blood. All over everything.”

“Bad dreams?”

She cleared her throat and itched her nose. She shut her eyes. “Mostly. Why? Did you have one?”

“Me? Oh. Naw.”

Angel watched as Casey opened her eyes and reached to the nightstand. She removed half of a joint from her purse and lit it. Blue worms of smoke twisted from her mouth.

“Bad dreams,” she said slowly.

Texas. It was the next night, and they were in the desert. Angel dug the hole while she sat in the car. It took him over three hours to get nearly five feet down, shape out a decent rectangle. Deciding this was enough, he climbed from the hole and staggered to the car. There, he saw Casey sitting in the passenger’s seat, gazing at her husband’s grave, illuminated only by the ghostly sparse beam of Angel’s flashlight on the ground.

He leaned into the window. “Almost done,” he said.

She nodded without taking her eyes away.

Angel walked to the back of the car where he unlocked the trunk and raised the lid. The smell that hit his face was the unmistakable stench of rot. It was thick. He picked out and set aside the garbage he had used to cover the body — milk crates, milk cartons, newspapers, towels. At the bottom was Casey’s husband, wrapped in a bedsheet. Five brown,

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continent-shaped stains surrounded by smaller darker ones were visible from the torso area. Black ants hurried in panicked zigzags across the sheet's surface.

Angel bent in and embraced the body. He lifted it out and dragged it towards the hole, the limbs seeming to slide in protest from Angel's hands to the ground whenever his grip would weaken, or an ant would bite him. When he reached the hole, the body fell in with a push. He stood over the grave, wiped at his forehead with the back of his hand. He replaced the dirt, using her husband's own shovel, the one Angel had discovered in the shed in back of their house.

Halfway done, he decided to take one more rest. The muscles in his shoulders felt tighter than whipcord. He returned to the car and got in on the driver's side. They sat without speaking until he reached, found the back of her neck beneath her hair, and rubbed it.

"You're handling this pretty good," he said.

Casey let her breath out as if she'd been holding it for a long time.

Angel stopped rubbing her neck. He dropped his hand and looked at it. "When I was a little kid, I watched my mom kill my dad, shoot him three times right in the chest. I do sort of know what this is like for you."

She looked at him. "You told me your folks lived in Jacksonville."

"Folks ain't living nowhere."

"And you saw the whole thing happen? Angel?"

He nodded.

"Holy living shit, and you never told me?"

He held her eyes a moment. "My mother, her mind, y'know, it was pretty cooked with drugs. She used to beat me in the head with this huge toaster we had. Then she'd cry her eyes out and hug me and say how sorry she was and promise me she'd never ever do it again. But, next day, I'll be damned if she didn't brain me with that toaster again, harder than ever. It was fucked up." Angel extracted a cigarette from the pack in his shirt

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pocket and lit it, igniting the inside of the car in a wash of orange. His eyes wandered through his window and up at the night sky.

"I'm so sorry, baby," Casey said. "I never knew."

"People are people. I don't give a shit."

"Thing about tragedies though, they help us connect. They're at least good for that much, right?"

Angel's gaze came back from the sky. "Anything else we should bring out into the open while we're at it?"

She paused, coughed. "We're down to less than three hundred bucks."

"That'll change. It'll have to."

"You're not planning something bad, are you?"

"I've got to get this shoveling over with. We'll have more heart-to-heart later. Promise."

Angel went to get out of the car, but she halted him with her hand. She looked him long in the face as though searching for something lost. He unbuttoned the front of her shirt.

He watched her and laughed. "You're so insane," he said.

"Hurry," she said. She put her arms around him and tried to kiss him, but he held her off.

"Have to warn you. I'm smelling pretty ripe."

Casey's words were slow and even. She touched his face. "He raped me once with a wine bottle. Him and a friend. I ever tell you?"

He kissed her again, warmer this time. He opened her mouth with his tongue and put his arms around her. Angel felt her gradually relax, then tremble, then finally return his kiss. With one hand he took off her shirt while she unbuttoned his.

She kissed his chest.

"I am glad he's dead," she whispered. "I really am happy."

While Casey waited outside in the car with the motor running, Angel made like he was locked in an intense, contemplative crisis over which candy bar to purchase. He continued until the convenience store was empty of customers. He approached the cash register and set a 3 Musketeer on the counter and waited for the store clerk—a dopey, red-headed teenager—to make eye contact. Once he did, he asked Angel if that would be everything for him tonight. Angel pulled the .357 from inside his jacket and held it at arm's length, pointed in the clerk's face.

"I want it all, asshole," he said. "If it's green and in the register, bag it."

Without waiting for further instructions, the clerk pressed a button and the drawer to the register opened with a ding! and the rolling of register tape. The price screen flashed NO SALE. Angel saw the clerk's hands were shaking.

The clerk placed the cash on the counter.

"Partner, if you wouldn't mind any, I'd appreciate it if you'd put the whole thing in a bag and hurry the fuck up."

"Oh. Right," the clerk said.

The clerk grabbed a brown bag from behind the counter and unfolded it, the shaking of his hands almost causing him to drop it. He placed handfuls of cash into the bag. He added the change.

When he'd finished with the money, Angel snatched him forward by his hair. He pressed the barrel of the .357 against his face, forcing the flesh of his cheek over his left eye. The clerk made a sound like a donkey. He sobbed.

"Do exactly as I say, and you'll be fine as wine," Angel told him. "Now get on that floor there, face down, and put your hands behind your head."

Angel let go and the clerk did as he'd been told.

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“Now stay there till I’m gone. Don’t do nothing. Don’t even think about nothing. Understand me? Are you thinking?”

The clerk shook his head and sniffled.

“Good boy. I’m considering not killing you.”

Angel hesitated before taking the bag off the counter and heading to leave—but as he opened the glass exit door there was a tremendous blast behind him. Something with the force of a baseball bat slammed his arm and sent the paper bag sailing from his hand. The bag whirled through the glass door as it shattered. He heard Casey scream from the car.

Angel spun without falling. Standing at the far end of the counter was some Santa Claus-looking fucker with a white beard, big stomach, everything but the red suit. He clutched a .38. Santa Claus yelled, calling Angel names, telling him to get out of his god-damn store.

With a hand on his arm, Angel stood there, too stunned to react. A second bullet ripped a small piece of his hip off. With a shout, Angel fired his gun without aiming and hit Santa Claus in the exact center of his face. There was a brief, blurry spray of blood and bone and Santa Claus dropped. Angel gripped both of his wounds, limping backward. He turned and hobbled as fast as he could to the car and got in.

Casey threw the car into reverse, and the tires made a loud chirp as the vehicle lurched backward. She shifted to drive, stomped the gas pedal.

“It’s okay, baby. You’re going to be fine,” Casey said, her voice thin with terror. “Sit still, baby. It’s okay. It’s okay. It’s okay. I’ll bandage you up. This is no big deal. Nothing more’s going to happen to you. You’re fine. Everything’s fine.”

As they got further away from the store, the pain grew worse, and Angel heard a faint dripping noise. He felt as though the car were sitting still and the rest of the world was moving. The road stretched ahead of them, endless. After a couple of miles, he had a hard time keeping his eyes open. His head felt too big for his body, his limbs impossibly

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heavy. He realized the dripping noise was fat splats of blood spilling from the tip of his elbow to the seat.

"It's all right, baby," Casey continued. "It's okay. Sit still. Almost back to the motel. I'll take care of you. My turn to take care of someone for a change. Please, baby, hold on. Just hold on now." Casey sounded to him as though she were outside the car.

He focused his eyes and thoughts on the road, nothing else, but it didn't help. The last thing he remembered before urinating himself and passing out was the dim headlights of the car pushing against the night fog, which Angel somehow mistook for clouds. He reckoned they must have been flying.

Twenty-two hours later, in another motel room, somewhere in California, Angel had a dream he was somewhere familiar, but he couldn't put his finger on where. He was looking out a window at the sky, at clouds resembling large, white walnuts, accelerating over at a speed only possible in dreams. Next thing he knew, he squatted in a rowboat surrounded by a black ocean. He woke up.

"I called them," Casey said. She was shaking Angel. "There was no choice. I'm sorry, baby. Forgive me."

He blinked. He rubbed his eyes with his good hand and turned his head. Outside, he heard the wind blowing. It was raining hard. Stoned from the dope he had smoked and from muscle relaxers Casey had given him, he lay half-awake, watching stretched, skeletal shadows sway across the ceiling.

Angel felt comfortable, consoled by the harsh hiss of the water pelting the parking lot. It was a nice feeling at least to know that outside it was cold and wet while inside it was dry and he slept next to the warmth of another person, the only human being he'd ever much cared for besides his mother.

"California," he heard his mouth say.

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Moments later, he awakened to find Casey gone. Before the police kicked in the door, aimed their guns, and screamed who it was they were, Angel drifted off into another deep, drugged sleep, giving himself over to that quiet, silken numbness which embraces those lost in the rain.