

Ghetto Talk

Part Two of a Nine Part Series

by **Eric Heise**

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Hu Jia stood at the corner of 73rd and Barkley. It's the same corner Valerie hooked. The sun was just setting beyond the worn out buildings in the west and she wouldn't be out this early in the evening. He had a bulge in his left jean pocket from the wad of cash, but he wasn't going to spend it on Valerie. He had spent money on her before, long ago when she only charged \$25 a lay. Those were the days where she cried right through the trick, but she hadn't cried with Hu. He had been one of the few, if only clients who had less experience than she did. She doesn't cry anymore and charges \$100.

Hu wasn't waiting for Valerie, though, he was waiting for Billy Conley, aka Billy the Crack Messenger aka Billy the Black kid with the flip mouth. Billy worked for Bossman Fernandez, a thug from the projects. Bossman headed up a major drug ring and hired people like Billy to do the dirty work. Delivering was dirty work; Hu was waiting for his deliveryman.

He didn't like to have to buy from the Bossman, he didn't even want associate with the Bossman, but his regular supplier Ramon Enriquez was out of commission having been in a car accident the day before. Ramon was still in the hospital and wasn't due to get out for a couple of days. Hu needed to make some money now.

Not your typical drug pin, Hu Jia had a mother with arthritis and asthma at home and a younger sister who still needed to eat. With the rent due and Hu out of work, making a quick street sale became substantial income. He only sold when he had to and lately he had to an awful lot. His mother was getting sick all the time and medication was expensive. There is no such thing as an HMO in the projects. Being the man of the house since his father disappeared ten years before, Hu had to take care of things.

Hu's t-shirt was soaked with sweat and had it been another color besides black, the perspiration would have shone. Sweat glistened his face and matted his black hair to a greased spike look. His mother's asthma was worse in the heat, but her arthritis was better. Go figure, some luck. He looked at his watch, knowing Conley was usually on time and it was still early. He jittered his leg like he needed to take a leak, but what he really wanted to do was get the stuff and get rid of it. With Ramon out for a while, that left a few more customers than usual. One of which was Carlos, a shit punk who'd buy from anyone just to get it, but not everyone would sell to him. The Bossman wouldn't sell to him because Carlos's brother Julio headed up a rival gang, but Hu would fill in that gap.

Hu pulled his left thumb out of his waistline to look at his watch, but noticed Billy coming down the block. The black man, not much bigger than Hu, smiled at him in scoring fashion. Hu stood still and straight, his face not flinching.

"*Whojah!*" Billy said trying to sound like Al Pacino in *Scent of a Woman*. Instead of saying *Hoowah*, he said *Whojah*, making a parody of Hu's Chinese name. Billy thought this was funny. "How's it go-*win* ma' man?" Billy put his hand out for a jive slap and handshake. Hu returned the urban greeting but said nothing and did not smile. He just nodded. "What it is, ma man, *Whojah?*"

“What it is,” Hu said.

“How you been, mang? I ain’t seen you in a fortune cookie’s age.” Billy laughed at this; Hu remained still. He wasn’t offended any more than he was interested in hanging around on Valerie’s Street Corner. “You mothahfucking chinks got some fucked up tongue, bro. And I don’t mean it as no insult. Take yo name, mang. *Whojah!* Ha! And Long Duck Ho. Classic. Some Young Guy. Ha! Very fucking wild. That Chinese shit is some fucked up tongue, ya know? Pure ghetto talk all around.” Billy continued to laugh. Hu showed no interest. “ All right, hombre, what do you say we take this indoors before we attract the company of the 5 – 0s?” Billy said, grinning and rocking his head side to side. “Besides, them 304s will be dangling their titties on this corner in no time, know what I mean? Shall we step into my office? ”

“Yes.”

Billy led Hu down 73rd and to an alleyway a block away. The alley was narrow, littered with trash and smelt like the dumpster he used to have to empty the trash in when he worked for Benitos Supermarket on Green Street. It smelt of the expired food and scraps of meat from the deli and meat departments. With the summer heat and humidity, the smell was worse and gathered flies and maggots. The alley had that dank and mildew feel, everything was wet all the time. Billy tossed up pieces of newspaper with his feet as he led Hu to his office.

At the end of the alley there was a wooden door in the middle of the brick work. The door barely hung from the hinges and it was down two small steps from the street. Billy hopped down the steps and gripped the door handle, lifting the door a little and then pulled it open.

“After you,” he said holding the door open. Hu walked through the doorway, having to duck in order to avoid the doorsill. Billy followed him and pulled the door shut behind him. The door still didn’t sit well and beams of light snuck through the cracks. Inside, the building was dark and dank. Hu heard a rat squeak and scurry along the foundation sill off to his left. “Follow me, ma’ man,” Billy said.

Hu followed him, forcing his eyes wide open to see in the dark. Billy walked around as if the lights were on, avoiding furniture and crap in his way. Hu missed Billy’s swerve and walked into what he thought was a chair. He nearly tripped.

“Watch your step, ma’ man,” Billy said looking back at Hu.

At the end of the room, or dungeon Hu thought, there was another doorway and Billy opened it, letting light from the other side to come in and Hu to walk through. “Just through there, ma’ man, just through there. And we’ll start the transaction,” he said. Hu walked through. Billy followed him and closed the door. “We’re going to come in here.” Billy pointed to the far wall and walked past him. The room was open and had nothing special in it. On the far wall where Billy led him was a crimson curtain. He pushed the curtain aside and walked through. Hu followed.

This new room was lavish and dimly lit with candles. A few people sat on sofas and chairs and music with a heavy bass played softly from somewhere, but Hu couldn’t see a stereo. He didn’t recognize anyone in the room. “What’s up, y’all?” Billy said to the group who waved or nodded, but did

very little else. He led Hu to the right of the room and through another doorway. A couple sat intimate on the sofa and didn't give Billy or Hu a second glance.

They went through a doorway that was as lavish as the living room, but had a huge desk in the middle and chairs around it. Billy walked around to the rear of the desk and pulled open a lower drawer. Hu stepped to the front of it, careful not to cross his arms or lean on the desk disrespectfully or insult the dark maroon and gold gaudiness of the décor. He recognized it as the Bossman's style. It was rogue and regal all in one, but Hu, who was born and raised in a mandarin Chinese lifestyle didn't care for any it. He just wanted his stuff and to get out.

Billy pulled two large packages out of the drawer and thumped them on the desk. "Lucky for you we just got ourselves some restocking. Kinda took me by surprise when I heard from you, *Whoo-jah*. You don't usually do business with the Bossman."

"My regular wasn't available," Hu said.

"Ah yes, *Senor Enriquez*," Billy said. "A very unfortunate accident he had. I hear the cops are asking around about his connection with Carlos Quimby." Billy placed one of the packages on a scale to the far left of the desk.

"What of him?" Hu asked.

Billy looked up. "You didn't hear? A car hit him yesterday; caused one helluva of a pile up. Just like they used to have on "CHiPs". Remember that show Hu?" Billy tinkered with the scale to get a reading. "Must have just bought a shit load of shit cause there was coke all over the place when the cops came. Word on the street says that he had just finished a deal with Ramon. Ramon got into an accident a few minutes later, about ten blocks away. I thought you would have heard where you live right in that neighborhood."

"No." Hu's mind raced. His primary supplier was in the hospital and being investigated by the cops for a sale with his buyer. He needed that money He needed it today. "What happened?"

Billy looked up and shrugged. "Nigger's dead. Car slammed right into his ass, bags of coke bust and went everywhere. Julio's on some rampage about it. Some shit is going to go down for that. I guarantee it." Billy removed the first package from the scale. "You wanted two keys, yeah?"

Hu's faced flushed. He felt like throwing up. He couldn't tell Conley he didn't want the stuff. That would put him in a very bad place with the Bossman, but he would have to find another buyer and that could be dangerous. He didn't know all of the buyers out on the street. Many were cops. Others were violent or spies for gangs who ruled neighborhood. He looked up and saw Billy waiting for him. Hu nodded slowly and sweat formed at the base of his temples. The room was too dark for Billy to notice Hu's nervousness, but that didn't set his mind at ease. Hu would have to be so careful with this stuff that the cops didn't catch him or infringe on someone's area.

Billy turned his attention back to the scale and the stuff. He thought Hu was acting weird, but all Chinese are weird, he considered and Hu was a quiet chink at that. "Two whole kilos of the good

shit,” Billy said. He lined the two packs up on the desk and slid them to the other side where Hu stood. “You like flied lice wit dat?”

Hu shook his head, hardly noticing the remark. He pulled the bulky wad of cash from his front pocket and unfolded the bills. A stack of hundreds set in his hands. Billy reached his hand over the desk. “Let me count that, Wong Duck Soup” he said. Hu handed him the cash and pulled his backpack off and on the table. Billy flipped through the bills, counting softly to some mysterious funky beat that only he could hear.

Billy nodded with a big, *that boy good* grin on his face. “*Whoo-jah!* We be mothafucking fine, we be in bizznuss, we be in da shit, fortune cookie,” Billy said and Hu took it as his cue to load the coke into his bag. “I’m gonna walk you out the back, if you don’t mind.” Hu looked up suddenly feeling really bad. “Not to worry, just a security precaution. After this sale, you are a Bossman Preferred Customer. Right this way.” Hu slung the backpack on his shoulder and followed Billy through another door in the living room. The intimate couple were still in the same spot, but the girl, Hu recognized her from Little Saigon, was now without clothes and her friend, Hu didn’t know him, was shirtless with his pants unbuttoned. Billy led Hu through a series of long passageways and then opened a door to the outside. Billy looked around cautious and saw no one around. “Here we are,” Billy said. “Anytime you need some stuff, you be sure to call back and ask for me.” He held out his hand to Hu for a ghetto shake. Hu shook, but had less soul in it than Billy did. Then Conley disappeared, back into the building and the dungeon. Hu stood alone in another alleyway again. It had clouded up and the sun was nowhere in sight. He ran his thin hand through his spiked hair and left for home.

II

Hu lay on his bed in just his cotton boxers. He stared at the ceiling with his hands behind his back. The television was still on in the other room and he could hear Jay Leno dishing out monologue telling him his mother had fallen asleep in her chair again. He’d have to get up and shut off the TV and guide his mother to bed soon. She didn’t have anything to get up for in the morning, but she was weak and she was sick and she needs her rest. He thought of where he could unload the coke and how he needed the money. The rent was due in a few days and this time Anderson wouldn’t wait for Hu to scrap up enough cash. There was no such thing as a good tenant with Anderson; he just hated everybody. But he owned the building and regardless of how little he did around there he still needed to be paid. Hu almost didn’t blame him. It was a dangerous neighborhood, one run by a Chinese gang who lived a few doors down.

Hu thought of Slim the Snake from the tracks, maybe he’d have a need for a couple of kilos, but then Hu remembered he was upstate on a B&E and in the infirmary at that. The B&E was in a building controlled by the Bossman, in fact his aunt lived there and when the Bossman found out some filthy little spic tried to high wire a sting in his aunt’s house, he ordered both of his legs to be broken. So much for Slim.

He sighed and watched a spider on his ceiling crawl and make a web. The streetlights glared into his room and the sounds of the city rang clear enough. He heard the hookers from the corner

whistle and yell for a date and a siren off into the distance. I'm never going to get out here, he thought. I'm never going to move on. He sighed again and didn't get much sleep.

The street outside his apartment remained busy throughout the day, but Hu liked to sit on the front steps of the building when he could. The front of the building got shade and he sat on the top step eating from an ice cream cup. Spooning out the vanilla and chocolate with the wood utensil it came with, he didn't think about the coke he needed to sell. It was Thursday and Mrs. Gambriolli from upstairs mentioned that Anderson the landlord was headed to his summerhouse on the lake that very morning. He'd be back in the city on Monday, most likely to collect rent and that was it, but he was golden for now. There was no question in his mind he could find a buyer over the weekend, but right now all that concerned him was the ice cream, cool and smooth and that warm breeze that dried the sweat on his bareback. His mother was feeling fine today, she'd slept well considering she spent half of the night in her chair and his sister was off playing.

"*Whocheré?*" asked a familiar voice. Hu looked up and around from both ends of the street and then saw Maria coming towards him. He wrinkled his mouth and sighed through his nose. "Hiya baby, what's Chinese cooking, there *Whoojah!*" She smiled, flaring her pouty red lips at him, stepping one foot on the bottom step.

"Hallo, Maria."

"Whatcha got there, Hu, some cream of da ice?" Maria asked. She was always spinning the words around to sound cultured, but it always came out just more ghetto, Hu thought.

"Yeah."

"Hmm mmm mmm. It looks good. You lookin' good. What do you say you take me out on a fancy date, like them uptowners do on a Friday night?" She smiled and leaned her tank top forward.

Hu sighed. "It dis ohny Dhursday," Hu said trying to get his accent right, but knowing it was still Chinese.

Maria wavered back and forth, flirting. "Come on, you hunk of a fortune cookie, you got the bucks. I know you got it," she said. "You *Numbah One Man.*" Number One was Vietnamese and Hu knew it but he didn't have the patience to give a lesson on ethnic jargon.

"I have to work tonight," Hu said getting up and walking down the steps and past Maria. She turned to follow, expecting him to stop at the bottom step to greet her.

"Where are you going?"

"To throw this away," he said turning his head back and raising the empty cup. He tossed it in a barrel and walked down the block. Maria followed in toe.

“So, where are you going now, *Hugindapants?*”

He shook his head. “Why don’t you go home.”

She spurted in front of him and wiggled her chest and ass in front of him. “Because I got some back and I’m gonna lay on my back for you.” She smiled and puckered up.

“Where is your brother? Wouldn’t he be upset at you?”

“Fuck my brother, he doesn’t run my life,” Maria said half insulted and half amused. Her brother Troy was a member of a Hispanic gang on the other side of town. “I coochie coochie just for you big *Whojah*. Come on, whatdaya say to a little Latin Lovin’?”

Hu finally stopped. She still had her arms up in the air and her nipples were hard, he could see them through the tank top. She wore no bra. The shirt came up to show her thick belly just above the tight denim shorts. “I say go home and leave me be.” He turned and walked back to his house. Maria stood in the block staring at him.

“So why don’t you want to fuck me?” Maria yelled. “What are you, faggot?”

Hu turned. “You just want to get knocked up and collect double from welfare for having a double minority. Go home.” Hu walked away disgusted that she’d try and use him for welfare, that he didn’t take advantage to get laid, that he was in this dump of a city with people like Maria who were raised on welfare and couldn’t wait to get a file of their own. He wanted to throw up but it was just too hot. He walked back inside his house and Maria left to head back downtown.

Thinking of Roger was genius. Why didn’t I think of him in the first place, he thought. Maybe it was the stress of having the stuff and his mom being sick and the rent due. Carrying the stuff on him for an immediate sale was out of the question. Hu didn’t think the cops knew about him but those cops are slick, especially when it comes to nailing a chink for drug possession with the intent to distribute. Those fucking cops loved to nail the non-whites and stick a felony charge or two straight up their asses. Cops were funny when they wanted to be and not when you needed them to exist. So far Hu had only one run in with the law and that was one too many. He’d been on a sale that went sour because of his supplier, some dirt bag darkie named Shawn. What Hu didn’t know was that Shawn was a junkie dealer in a heap load of pig shit. He’d had a fire fight with a detective a few months before their deal and had even sold to some cop’s niece who’d had an overdose on heroin. The cops were all over Shawn like white on Chinese rice. Hu didn’t know that until after the cops were chasing him down an alleyway at three o’clock in the morning. The whole block was infested with vice cops wearing cheap blue windbreakers with the white POLICE stenciled on the backs. One pig even had some gunslinger style gun holster; only it was made of a heavy nylon instead of the baked leather of the old west. Hu caught a glimpse of him just before he did the 440 in a world record pace. What an asshole, Hu had thought long after the crackdown and he had changed his pants.

There was one cop, Martinelli his partner had called him that night, who nearly caught Hu. When the sirens and lights distracted the two from the current drug deal, Hu didn't waste any time to figure out whether they were here for them or some hoes down the corner. He did a 180 and sprinted out the back door of the abandoned building. The back of the build was covered, lights everywhere. Hu had slammed the door open on a cop whose nose met it and broke on impact. Blood went all over the cop's face and shirt. Probably hurt pretty bad, too. "Martinelli, get that fucking prick!" The bleeding cop had called out. Hu didn't know who this Martinelli was, but had a good idea when some jarhead pig chased his heels closer than a pissed off pit bull. Hu ran harder to stay ahead, hurdling trash barrels and a few winos. He could hear the cop's heavy breathing right behind him. Of all the partners that bleeding cop had to have, Hu thought, he had to have one who wasn't on a coffee and doughnut diet.

Hu thought he heard the cop breath, "Com'ere you little prick" just before reaching the chain link fence and jumping to the top, straddling it and dropping to the other side. Hu landed in a crouched position, seeing a barrel to his left. The chain link fence rattled and the cop was a second and a half from jumping right on top of Hu. Hu grabbed the barrel by its open edges and swung it upward to his right and at the chasing cop. It slammed barrel-wise into the cop's face, pushing him back to the alley side of the fence. Hu sprinted for the open end and out to the street where he disappeared in an apartment building nearby until light where it would be safer to travel.

The bust had scared the shit out of Hu and sent Shawn up to the maximum-security prison upstate for five to ten. Shawn hadn't ratted Hu out and that was good. The cops had nothing on Hu to begin with. Shawn was a know drug addict and dealer with a long rap sheet. Shawn was the one the cops wanted and he led them to a bigger fish than Hu, the Bossman's archrival on the street. King Billie Connors would have gotten himself a stay in prison when all was said and done, but while waiting trial and free on bail, he fled the country to South America.

Remembering Roger gave Hu a new sense of urgency. Maybe if Maria came around now, he'd be in the mood to deal with her advances. Roger usually hung out at a club on the other side of town called the Flash Pit. The Flash Pit was a drug and social locale of most of the city's mild mannered pushers and users. Roger's cousin was a bouncer and the nights that Big Tony worked (Tony was better than 320 pounds and even at six foot three, that was overweight), Roger was usually there, able to get the fringe favors of free drinks and the better booths. Most people had little use for Roger. He was your slick Italian with pride a mile long and integrity about as long as Hu's spiked hair.

Hu left his house early. His mother had just flicked to a rerun of *Fraiser*. She had been feeling well most of the day. "Make sure moddah gets to bed before Jay Leno," he told his sister before he left. She spoke very little Chinese, so he was forced to say it in English with a thin oriental accent. "I gotta go out for a while, and won't be back until vedy late."

"Where are you going?" Li asked. "Can I come?"

"No, you have to stay here and keep eye on Muddah."

"She's fine, why can't I come?"

“Do not argue with me,” Hu said. “Just do as you are told.” Hu left her room and told his mother he was leaving before closing the apartment door closed.

The street was damp from the air and the sky was lit up on the edges of the west. Hu walked the opposite direction, the purpled sky ahead of him. The club would take him an hour to walk to. He needed the walk to clear his head and think. Besides, the last think Hu needed was to have anyone in this world, including a cabbie know that he existed.

The Flash Pit had a small neon sign where the windows would have been if there hadn't been covered over by boards and painted black. A low bass rumble came from the inside, getting louder every time the front door opened. Hu walked up the steps and was greeted by a bouncer who held the door open.

“How's it going tonight?” The bouncer who was not Tony, Roger's cousin greeted him. “Just need to see some ID real quick.” Hu nodded and pulled out his wallet, showing the bouncer his driver's license. The bouncer took it, looked at it for a moment and handed it back to Hu. “Thank you, right through there.” Hu nodded and walked through, greeted by another bouncer, again not Tony and a pay booth with a guy who looked like the son of Satan.

“How much?”

“It's five, plus another ten if you want to get into the back room,” the cashier said. Hu pulled out a twenty from his left pocket and slid it through the cashier's window. The Son of Satan put the twenty aside.

“You want all ones?” Satanson asked and Hu nodded. He counting out the bills with his black fingernail polished fingers and slid the five ones under the window with a blue ticket. “Give that to him. He'll stamp you hand” Hu took the ones and slid them in his right pocket with his other small bills. He handed the blue ticket the bouncer in the doorway who took it and ripped it in half. He took Hu's wrist and stamped the front of his hand. “Enjoy,” he said. Hu went inside the club.

The bass was louder, accompanied by the rest of the song that's too high pitched to be heard outside. A stage in the middle of the room was lit with bright overhead lights and strobe lights. The bar on the other side of the room, to his right was dimly lit with reds and blues and greens. The rest of the club was dark save the neon ropes lights on the walls and ceilings. It's hard enough to see through all this smoke anyway, Hu thought. A girl in a tight silk tank top and tight black short shorts approached him and asked if he wanted a drink. Hu nodded and asked for White Russian. The girl, white and attractive, tapped his upper arm and said, “Sure, be right up.” Hu hardly heard what she said exactly over the music, but he got the point. He waited at a half wall, watching the club move. Two blondes were doing most of the moving on the stage. Hu bobbed his head a little, not much, just enough to not be stiff. He looked around for Roger, didn't see him anywhere, but was relieved to see Tony stand by the curtain behind the bar where the back room was. It was only 8:30 according to his watch; the club was barely full and knew that he'd have to hide in a dark corner from being overly seen. In another thirty or forty minutes, the place would be packed. The waitress came up to him with a drink on her tray. She took Hu by surprise.

“How much?” He asked but she never heard him.

“Six fifty,” she said and Hu handed her a ten from his left pocket. She handed him three ones and two quarters and he left the quarters on her tray. She smiled and nodded and he nodded in return. Several girls walked around to the patrons to say hello and sit on their laps and collect a buck for their patronage. Hu moved to the far wall, a level above the floor section where the stage was. Several other guys stood on the wall, watching the activity, yet removed from the constant flow of the club. Hu sipped his drink through the small red stirrer and bobbed his head.

III

Hu moved around the club and visited the back room where there was a bar stage with mirrors behind it. Tony recognized him at the curtain and nodded to Hu. “*Whojah!* How you doing, there, Charlie?”

“I good, you see Roger?”

“He ain’t here yet, but I expect he will be soon.” Hu nodded to him and went through the curtain and to the backroom. Every few songs, two girls would come out to the stage scantily dressed and leave totally naked. In the big room of the general club, they’d left clothes on and danced around a big stage with fire poles in the middle. Fifty, maybe sixty guys could crowd themselves around that stage, but in here, two girls would give their undivided attention to twelve at a time. If you waved more green, you got more attention. Hu watched from the back, now on his second white Russian, though the ice was pretty much melted in this one as well.

He’d almost given up Roger showing up until he heard a holler from the curtain.

“Ohhhhhhh, yeah!” He heard. “That’s what I am talking about, completely *naykad weemon!*” It was Roger, and not only was he here; he was in a good mood. But, let’s face it Hu thought, who couldn’t be in a good mood in this place? “Work it girl, work it!” He said leaning over the bar. He had four other guys with him, four big guys and they moved to a small table off in the corner. Roger sat down, bobbing his head to the beat. He looked around and saw Hu stand at the back wall. Roger stood up and pointed.

“*Whojah!*” Roger said. A few of the patrons took their attention off the girls for a moment, but it quickly returned. Hu looked over to him and smiled thinly, raising his glass to Roger. “*Whojah, whojah, whojah!* You come over here, boy.”

Hu moved from his wall spot to the booth Roger’s gang occupied. One of the big guys moved out of his seat and allowed Hu to sit, patting him on the back as he did. Hu nodded and smiled to the guy who he thought was Jimmy the Tail but he couldn’t remember. The drink and smoke was giving Hu a lightheaded feeling. Roger reached out to shake Hu’s hand. Hu set his glass down and did so.

“Motherfucker, look at this fucking shit,” Roger said. “Fucking just talking about the Mighty *Whojah* today and look at this fucking shit. Motherfucker is right here in my club and sitting with me at my motherfucking table. Whatdaya think about that motherfucking shit, huh? Huh?” Roger slapped Hu on the shoulder. “Fuckin’ aye, motherfucking great fucking karma is what the fuck I say. How ‘bout you, Charlie, you diggin’ on that shit?”

“Yeah,” Hu said. He didn’t quite understand everything Roger was getting at, didn’t care really. “I come here, I come here and look for you,” Hu said.

“Whoa,” Roger said holding his hand in front of him. “You ain’t gay or nothing are ya?” Roger laughed.

Hu shook his head. “No no, nothing like dat. I have something you maybe interested in.”

Roger looked at Hu for a moment, then raise an eyebrow and smiled out of the corner of his mouth. “Oh yeah, like what?”

Hu looked around. The patrons in the backroom stared at the two blondes on the bar stage. The music went *thump thump thump*, drowning out any conversation. He leaned towards Roger and said, “Stuff you like.”

Roger sat back and nodded his head, grinning. “We talkin’ something of high quality?”

Hu looked at him. “Bossman.”

Roger stopped nodding and stared in mid-thought. He nearly stopped breathing. “How much?”

“Dis high grade Colombian red. This vedy good stuff.”

“I know what the Bossman distribs. How much?”

“Five tousand dolla.”

Roger nodded and then smiled. “Yes.” Relief swept over Hu and he sat back in his chair, relaxed. “But not here.” Hu shook his head and Roger understood that Hu didn’t have it one him. “But you do have it?”

“Oh yes, I do have it. We make transaction whenever you want.”

Roger thought a minute and then said, “Tomorrow night, if that’s good for you Mister Whooh-*jah*.”

“Dat’s good fo’ me, absolutely.”

“Ok, Sal here will pick you up at the corner of 9th and Derby Avenue at eleven o’clock in the PM tomorrow night. You ain’t there, you ain’t anywhere, ya hear me?” Roger pointed at Hu’s chest.

“From there, Sal will bring you to the meeting point. We clear on it all?” Hu nodded. “All right then, sounds great.”

Hu got up from his chair. “Hey, why don’tcha stick around, get yourself a broad.”

Hu shook his head. “Many more business to do.” Roger shrugged and shook Hu’s hand.

“Tomorrah.”

Hu nodded and left. Three blocks down from the Flash Pit, he threw up in an alleyway, but felt fine after that.

IV

Hu was early for his meeting with Sal, and right on time, Sal pulled up to the curb in a black Cadillac. He rolled down the electronic window and told Hu to get in. The two drove to the other side of town, the pier, where Roger had a warehouse he used to store fenced goods. Sal pulled the car behind the back where Roger had parked his, near the office. Sal led Hu inside.

Hu stood for a moment as he walked inside, readjusting his eyes to the darkness in the warehouse from the well lit parking lot outside. “It’s just through here,” Sal said. Hu could make out Sal’s massive figure from the glow through the windows and followed the dark shadow, hoping he wouldn’t slam a knee into a desk. Tightening his backpack strap, he followed Sal into the general area, albeit empty except for a few coat racks half full of furs and leathers. There was a light on the other end and voices came from the room. Inside were Roger and three of his cronies. Roger stopped in mid-sentence and looked up when Sal scuffled into the room. He slid off the corner of the desk where he sat and smiled, holding his arms out open.

“*Whojah* ma’ man! How you doin’ there, killa?”

“I good, vedy good.”

Roger nodded, smiled and robbed his mouth like he was wiping his face. “That’s good, that’s very good. Now no one followed you two, right?” He looked at Sal and had a tendency to fall asleep at the job.

“No one followed us boss. And Hu was right on time.”

“Yeah, I ain’t worried about Hu. Hu’s the man. And if it’s all the same, I got some cash here for you just after I taste test the product.”

Hu nodded, walked over to the desk and placed his back pack on it. He unzipped the main compartment and pulled out the two packages. Roger looked at them for a moment, guesstimated the sizes to be about right and then signaled to Johnny. Johnny pulled out a scale and weighed the two packages. He nodded to Roger with a frown. “Taste it,” Roger said and Johnny sliced open each package with a Swiss Army knife blade, tasting a sample from each and nodded again.

“Well ain’t that something, Mister *Whojah* continues his honest ways, and looks like we have a deal.” He gestured to the stack of cash like a game show host. “My friend, it has been a pleasure.” Hu nodded and loaded the cash quickly into his back pack, zipped the compartment and slung the pack over his shoulder. “Sal will take you back to the city, but on the other side of town. Sal?” Roger put his hand out to shake Hu’s and Hu returned. “Always a pleasure. And if you’re ever looking for a job, hey, I could use a good personal cook, ya know? I love dem egg rolls.” Roger laughed, followed by his cronies. Hu giggled, but didn’t find it funny. He just wanted to get out of there and quick. Something was not right. Something felt wrong. He and Sal were at the doorway when the lights and sirens went.

“Awe shit!” Roger said, pulling out a .45 from his shoulder holster. “Fucking cops! Who the fuck led them here?”

“Wasn’t us, boss,” Sal said. “I’m clean.”

“Yeah, well I’m not. I got two keys of fucking coke in my warehouse, not to mention – oh shit!” A voice came over a boom microphone.

“Roger Laguinni, we have your warehouse surrounded. Come out with your hands up.”

“Fuck!”

“What is it boss, how’d they know we were here doing a coke deal.”

“They’re not here for a coke deal you idiot,” Roger said rummaging through his desk. “They’re here for that art work I got in last week. Fuck, someone in the neighborhood must have squealed.”

“What art work?” Sal asked.

“That stolen art work from the fucking museum job we did, you asshole,” Johnny said. “Don’t you watch the fucking news?”

“Sorry Hu, but you’re going to have to –.” Roger looked around but Hu was gone. “We’d the fuck –.” He was cut off but the blow horn again and threatened with tear gas. They all hit the floor.

Hu crept along the floor of the warehouse. He could hear the cops outside and see their lights flashing. There has to be a way out of here, he thought. He made his way to the opposite side of the building from where he came in with Sal. There was a door he was sure led to the outside, but what would be on the other side, he didn’t know. The last time he ran into this situation he broke a cop’s nose and got away with it. There seemed like more cops outside this time and the odds were against him. Still, a chance was a chance and he and taken a chance with the deal tonight already. Any more wouldn’t matter in the long run, if there were to be a long run.

He moved to the door and stayed low. The bullhorn announced they were coming in after them in thirty seconds. Hu looked around for a dark corner to hid, should the cops raid the building and search it from end to end. If he couldn’t escape, maybe he could hide it out. His heart raced and beads of sweat poured down his face. He held on to his backpack strap tightly and looked for a hiding

place, even a desk to crawl under, but there nothing substantial unless he could shrink to the size of a mouse.

The bullhorn announced it was coming in and there was a thud at the other end of the room. He saw light bleed in from the office and voiced screamed to come out with your hands up. He reached up and gripped the door handle to the door next to him. He thought he might be able to escape; all he needed was a diversion. As if someone read his mind, the cops let out the tear gas and smoke filled the room.

Go! His mind screamed. Hu moved the door handle but the door wouldn't budge. He shoved himself at it from a kneeling position and it wouldn't go. Oh no, this isn't gong to open, he thought. He pounded it with his shoulder *thud thud thud* and the door wouldn't move. He stood up half erected to pushed at the door again, flinging it wide open to his surprise, and he nearly fell right out of the building.

Gathering his senses quickly, he closed the door behind him and braced his back against it, looking around out of breath. No one was out here. In front of him was another building but both ends were wide open and free. To the right, he saw harbor markers and knew that was water. He went left, keeping close to the wall and glancing back towards the doors every couple of steps. He reached the edge and peered around the corner slowly, seeing only reds and blues flash along the buildings and dumpsters. He looked down his right and there was darkness. He looked back at the door once more and nothing. He drew in a deep breath and stood up straight on the wall when the door burst open and a plains clothes cop sprung out. He had a gun in his hand. Hu looked right into his eyes and they locked for a moment. Hu didn't know the cop from Adam and didn't wait around to get to know him. There was "Wait, hold it," and that was all Hu heard. He ran in to the darkness and fled the pier area staying in the shadows.

On the other side of the road Hu found a dark alleyway. He crawled underneath some trash by a dumpster and hid until morning.

- end -