

Flash Point

Part Eight of a Nine Part Series

by Eric Heise

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“I haven’t spoken to him in weeks,” Mira said. She was finding the key to Martin’s place and walking up the steps. Jessie was behind her on the walkway. “I don’t know, Jess, I am worried, but I was so angry with him the last time I was here. We haven’t had a good word between us since before the accident.”

Jessie looked up from the walkway. “You think he’s here? Place looks empty.”

“He has to be here,” Mira replied. “I called his work and he hasn’t been there in weeks.” Mira opened the screen door and held it open with her butt. Jessie came up the step and held it open while Mira fiddled with the door lock. She unlocked the mustard yellow door and pushed it open. “I don’t think he would have gone to his parents – OH!” Mira stepped back from the door. “Oh my God! What is that smell?” Fear and panic swept Mira.

Jessie stood a moment and then the smell hit her. “Oh Jesus, Mira. What the Hell has he been doing in here?”

Mira shook her head put her jacket over her mouth. “I don’t know if I can go in. God, that smell!”

“I don’t know if I want to,” Jessie replied.

Mira walked in and saw the slumped body on the couch. It’s back faced her. “Martin? Martin?” She walked around the sofa in the living room and to the front of the body. There Martin lay dead, purple with dried blood oozing from his nose and some white stuff coming out of his mouth. “Oh my God, Martin!” Mira ran over to him and saw his dried up eyes looking upward. “Oh God, Jessie, call a doctor! Call a doctor!”

Jessie stood still, shocked. She heard the plea for a doctor again and Jessie finally acknowledged it. She went to the kitchen and grabbed the phone, dialing 911. Mira was screaming for Martin to wake up. “Yeah, yeah, um, doctor.”

“Get an ambulance!”

“Ambulance! We need an Ambulance, Quick. Um, where are we?”

“410 –.”

“410.”

“- First Avenue.”

“First Avenue.”

“Hurry!”

“And please hurry!” Jessie hung up the phone and watched Mira plea for Martin to wake up. She was shaking the body and it moved as one, not giggling or wiggling. Jessie stood there still watching Mira cry and scream until the paramedics arrived five minutes later. Two men in dark blue shirts burst into the home with cases in their hands. Mira was still rocking Martin back and forth to wake him up.

“Miss, let us in here please,” the one with the blonde hair said pulling the coffee table out. The two paramedics knelt by Martin, one checking his pulse.

“I don’t have a response,” the other one with the dark hair said. “How long has it been since anyone heard from him?”

Mira’s face scrunched in agony and tears. “I don’t know, I haven’t talked to him in a while. Tell me he’s ok.”

The blonde man shook his head. “I’m sorry. He’s been dead for several days.” The EMT was astonished. “When was the last time anyone saw him?”

Mira stood crying and shaking her head. “I don’t know. I just don’t know.”

Hu Jia flipped the pages of the illustrated atlas. Melanie resting her head on her right hand and poking at the book with her left, causing it slide out of Hu’s control. She laughed and kept doing it while he looked for section on Ramses. “Quit it,” Hu said. Melanie giggled more and hit the book again. “Quit it,” he pleaded. He flipped a few more pages and found what he was looking for. “Here it is, Ramses Temple in Egypt.” Melanie poked the book one more time, real hard and slid out of Hu’s hands, across the brown laminate table and onto the carpeted floor. She gasped at her own actions, sitting up and covering her mouth.

“Oh my God, Hu,” she said laughing, “I’m so sorry.” A couple people from nearby tables looked up but said nothing. Hu got out of his seat and retrieved the book, looking at the people.

“Sorry,” he said to them raising his hand. He sat back down and opened the book. Melanie grasped his right shoulder with her hands, her forehead resting on top. She laughed and was turning bright red. Hu flipped through the book trying to find where he was. “Stop it,” he whispered.

Melanie giggled, holding her hand over her mouth. “I’m trying.”

“Well try harder.”

She laughed harder. Hu flipped through the book, reading the heading on the pages. She poked at it again and let out a sharp yelp.

“You’re going to get us kicked out.”

“I don’t care. You’re too much fun.”

Hu looked at her with a smirk and shook his head. “Always a good time you blondes are looking for.”

She tussled his spiked hair and kissed his temple. “You’re a good time.”

Hu shook his head again. “Yeah, yeah, that is what they all say.”

The library lights were shutting off when Hu and Melanie walked through the courtyard of campus. Melanie was dancing around, trying to pick a boxing match with Hu.

“I no desire to fight,” Hu said in the broken English accent he wished he could get rid of.

“Come on, come on,” she taunted. “I’ll take ya in three rounds. No make it two and a half.”

“That would still be three rounds.”

“Whatever. Come on. Come on.” She danced in and out of the shadows from the streetlights, boxing at Hu with lefts and rights. After a few minutes she finally stopped, out of breath. She leaned on Hu’s shoulder for support. “Oh God, that is a workout.” They stood in front of the student union, still open Melanie caught her breath.

“Maybe you should try running, instead,” Hu said. “A boxer you not.”

Melanie smiled, looking up from his shoulder. “I have to pee. Come on. You can guard the door.”

They headed to the student union, Melanie guiding him with her hand on his back. “Oh great, get to listen to you flush a toilet.” She shoved him.

“Shut up,” she said and laughed.

Hu sat in a lounge area while Melanie was away. A newspaper lay on a table and he picked it up, thumbed through. A headline caught his attention.

Man found dead of apparent drug overdose.

Hu scanned the article. It had the details of how a Martin Emerson was found by his estranged girlfriend in his home. Heroin was found cut and lined on the coffee table. Martin had been out of work following a near fatal car accident in which a drug pusher was killed, and had been recovering at home. He had been dead for days, the coroner judged.

Martin Emerson. Hu thought about the name and about the cause of death.

Heroin overdosed. He tried to snort it and it went bad.

Hu's brain flickered with thoughts. Memories of recent conversations flowed through his head: The deals with Ramon, with Johnny, with Roger, with some guy who said that the stuff was more than it was last time.

This is premium stuff, he had told the buyer.

The buyer acted strange, but Hu didn't care. He was getting his money and getting rid of that stuff. Now that Hu thought about it, the contact said he was new.

New to what? New to the market? New to Hu? New to the drug?

Oh no, not him, Hu thought. I sold him that heroin. I sold him the street poison that killed this Martin Emerson. Hu looked through the article again. There was no picture, but he wanted a description. He wanted a description that said that Martin Emerson had anything but dirty blonde hair and a white face. Hu wanted the victim to be black or brown or have a scar or be seven feet tall or anything but some white guy who had no business in this drug life that was sickening Hu.

A funeral service would be held on Thursday of next week. Hu ripped through the paper to the Obituary section. He needed a picture. He didn't think he'd find one, but he had to look – oh no, he thought. It was there in black and white. The obituary for Martin Emerson detailed his life and family and had a candid picture from a cookout, probably. And there he was, Hu's customer now dead.

Hu tossed the paper down and stared, unable to breath. Melanie came down the corridor, singing and tussled Hu's hair before noticing something was wrong. "Hu? What's the matter? Are you ok?" She sat down next to him.

Hu looked at her gravely and said, "No."

"I know this guy is up to something," John Martinelli said to his partner Frank Marshall. They sat in the unmarked cruiser outside the high brick walls that hid the Bossman's crime palace from the world. "There's a buzz going around, I just know it's Fernandez and he's behind it."

Marshall drank his coffee, getting drops on his mustache. He sighed through this nose and Martinelli didn't notice.

"All I need is an in, that's all I need," Martinelli said. He watched the gate of compound, but the only visitors were a couple of gray squirrels playing on a nearby tree.

“This is exactly what Bailey and Morasutto were doing before they got sidetracked,” Marshall said. He turned his head to his partner.

“Whatdoya think we’re going end up those fucking losers? Give me a break will ya? Jesus Christ, Frank, you act as if this is my first time out on a stakeout. Whatdoya think I can’t do my job now? I’m no good at my fuckin’ job?”

Marshall waved a hand. “Forget it.”

“No I ain’t gonna forget it, Frank,” Martinelli said. “What is this, huh? You against me too?”

Marshall sighed and Martinelli heard him this time. “Maybe you haven’t noticed it, but we’re not exactly shining stars in the department, John. You heard the captain, we blow anything else and that’s it.” Marshall shook his head. “I don’t know about you, John, but I have no training to do anything else. Shit, I’m almost forty and I feel sixty and I look worse. I need this gig, just for a couple more years so I can retire, and believe me the department will be glad to get rid of me. You got this *Phantom Dealer* shit hovering around you, and man, I’m telling you, I got some uneasy feelings about all of this shit.”

“What, you don’t believe now, either?”

“It isn’t a case about belief, John. It’s about proof. That’s our job, to bring in proof so the DA can present proof and lock up the shit,” Marshall said. “And lately John, we ain’t brought in shit without it stinking so bad.”

“You know Frank, I ain’t got enough problems without you -.” A car pulled out of the gate and sped the opposite direction. Martinelli watched it a moment. “That’s what I been waiting for.” He started the car and proceeded to follow it. “You’ll see, I’ll show you all.”

On the other side of town, the black car that pulled from the Fernandez compound entered the parking lot of an abandoned movie theater. On the other side, Ramon waited outside his Chrysler K station wagon with a satchel by his feet. The black sedan pulled up along side Ramon and the engine cut. Ramon looked at the sunset in the smoked out windows and nervously waited for the Bossman to come out. He twitched and bit at his upper lip with his hands in his pockets. A breeze blew his matted hair. The driver, a man Ramon had seen a few times got out of the car and opened the back door for the Bossman without acknowledging Ramon.

The Bossman emerged from the rear seat, big and dark and dressed in crimson. A thick gold chain hung around his neck and a small cap rested on top his baldhead. He had a mahogany cane in his hand and he adjusted his shirt. Around the other side of the car, another man got out, one of the Bossman’s lieutenants Ramon recognized as Jeremy.

Martinelli pulled up to the entrance of the theater parking lot, out of sight. He cut the engine and peered through some trees at the activity on the other side. Frank Marshall watched through binoculars. “Whatdoya see?”

Marshall watched a moment and said, “Well, well, well. Bossman Fernandez has decided to come out and play. And it looks like that shop owner Bailey and Morasutto were questioning is there with them. And – oh look at that. A canvas bag probably full of profit.”

Martinelli picked up the CB radio. “I’m calling for back up.”

Marshall continued to look through the binoculars. “Yeah, I think that is a very good idea.”

The Bossman extended his hand to Ramon. “It is nice to see you again, Mister Enriquez.” Ramon shook his hand, frowning. He rubbed the satchel lightly with this right foot. “I apologize for meeting so far out of the way. Normally I would do this differently, but you understand the situation.”

Ramon frowned and nodded with a small grunt. “Been kind of quiet, though.”

“I took care of the police inquiries for the time being, but in light of this recent mishap with an indirect customer, the atmosphere has become quite humid, yes?”

Ramon bit his lip harder, which was hidden under his thick mustache. “It seems to be a small problem.”

“I think the problem seems to be with whom Mister Hu Jia has taken on as cliental,” Bossman said. “I would be more convenient for all involved if he were to remain more careful as he has in the past, but lately Mister Jia has become sloppy.” The Bossman’s voice bellowed and rocked the K car. Ramon had never heard the Bossman speak beyond a subtle and eloquent whisper before. He became afraid.

“I just supply, you know that,” Ramon said. He was surprised his voice was as strong as it was, because his leg was shaking. “Hu Jia has always been reliable. Where it goes after he leaves in none of my business.”

The Bossman frowned. “Maybe we should start *making* it our business.”

“Come on, come on,” Martinelli said. He was tapping his hand on the steering wheel. “Where the fuck are they?”

“I don’t know,” Marshall replied, still looking through the binoculars. “But they had better hurry up, or we’ll the need the coroner instead. This looks like it’s going to get ugly.”

“Keeping tabs on where the merchandise ends up has never been a concern of mine or yours of that matter,” Ramon said. “And big deal if some user is dead. There will always be a customer.”

“I prefer things to stay even keeled.”

“Then get out of the drug business,” Ramon snapped. “Because this business is anything but even.”

The Bossman lifted his head. “Maybe you feel that the deals have been uneven.”

Ramon’s mouth twisted. “Maybe I do.” He looked at the Bossman with a glare.

“Well, maybe I don’t appreciate your attitude, Mister Enriquez.” Jeremy stood forward and slid his hand in his coat.

“Oh Christ, they’re going to shoot it out now,” Marshall said. Martinelli fired up the car and tossed the single red light and siren on. He tore the car’s tires up on the sand and screamed for the other end of the parking lot. Marshall got on the radio and started calling in for backup.

The chatter on the police radio bantered back and forth and Jack Bailey opened a new fifth of Jack Daniels. He slumped into his recliner, wearing a dirty tank top and shorts. A cigarette burned in an ashtray to his right. He took a swig of the whiskey and left it resting in his crotch. He stared at the wall in front of him, listening to the police activity in the abandoned theater parking lot. A nickel-plated automatic sat on the TV tray to his left.

Ramon saw Jeremy reach his hand inside his jacket. He turned quickly and reached inside the K car for the .357 on the front seat. Jeremy pulled out a 9mm and aimed it at Ramon. Ramon swung around and fired a shot, hitting Jeremy in the neck. Jeremy got off four fast shots just before getting hit. Ramon took two in the left shoulder. He fell backwards into the K car, the gun pointing to the ground. The Bossman screamed for someone to get Ramon as he dove into his car. Ramon fired a shot at the black sedan. The car started to spin off; bullets hitting the door window the Bossman had just closed.

The Martinelli driven unmarked cruiser slammed into the front of the black sedan and the two of them stopped. The driver reached through the open door window with a small automatic firearm and sprayed the cruiser with bullets. Martinelli got out of his side and shot the driver. Marshall crawled out of his side unharmed until Ramon shot at him twice, hitting him once in the leg and the

other bullet hitting the dirt along side. He fired at Martinelli, only hitting his door. Martinelli poked his firearm out and shot Ramon in the leg. He fell to the ground, the pistol leaping underneath the car. Martinelli reached inside the car for the radio handset.

Bailey took another swig of whiskey, the pistol now on his lap. The activity yapped like a small dog, some from officers on the scene, others from dispatch, more from incoming backup.

“Motherfucker, that was my fucking bust,” Bailey mumbled to the bottle up close. He knew the suspects involved. He knew the bust and what it meant. He put the bottle door and then put the gun to his head.

A letter with stationary from the Chief’s office lay open on the table. It notified Bailey that he had been suspended indefinitely. A post-it note included on the letter was hand written and said, “Don’t bother fighting this one, Jack.”

A shot rang out from his house and the old lady across the street stopped watering her flowers and looked up.

Martinelli held his gun to Ramon’s head. “Don’t even think about,” he said.

Ramon thought about it. He thought about it long and hard.

-the end-