

"Zombeis's" Lair

Clear, temperate, spring morning. We're on a driveway that must be a quarter mile long; winding... looks like a golf-course. Cousin Skeeter's lugging this computer chassis he wants me to fix; I already told him it ain't worth it. Maybe it's an excuse for those balanced, super-sharp screwdrivers on his tool-belt...

We had pulled a gig for Zombeis Security that was a pit-job. Hot, disgusting... Don't know how we got invited to a private party at the CEO's estate in the Carolinas. I was sort of daydreaming about Billy Mat's former girlfriend; a blonde with Celtic or Slavic features who wore a plaid wool skirt with wide checks to this barbecue once. Mr. Dude, CEO, drives by in what kind of car Skee-boy? -- *Lamborgorti?*-- A million dollar ride. He don't pick us up but says he'll get the 6 pack and get us... by the time we see him again we're practically at the house. How would you describe it? --*Too much house for one person.*-- Glass and rock and timbers...

There's nobody there. Us and him. House servants gone. Just gardeners and outside laborers who don't speak English. -- *I asked him about that; said the girls he invited were coming later. He had some business to discuss.*-- So he sits us at the pool with a full bar; beer in the fridge. Every rum, vodka, whiskey you could think of... --*And ice.*-- He chats us up. --*Asks questions.*-- He takes a cell-phone call and I go exploring. I pass the closest bathroom and go looking for a further one; but can't get too lost because I see there's surveillance cameras all over. He's got one room with the head of every imaginable large, dead animal... What's it, an hour later he starts talking about guns and politics. We like the guns part so he invites us downstairs to his indoor shooting range for calibers up to .338 Lapua. --*And armory*-- Unbelievable, it was like Christmas in July. -- *Man, so many toys.*-- We forgot about the girls! After we fired thousands of dollars worth of rounds through dozens of pistols, rifles, automatic weapons he produces the drinks again from a swivel-out bar under a cleaning counter. --*More politics*-- He took a remote out of his pocket and turned off the security cameras. The unreality took hold. I imagined him changing into a monster. Step by step he walked us into the unthinkable. I began remembering this bungalow; boxy, not too small in an expansive neighborhood of bungalows. Radio on your back waiting for your world to explode. --*He wanted to kill the President; though that wasn't our job. Some Congresswoman.*-- He wasn't kidding. The dollars and the cents, and the lazy benign things he thought were evil. When we stood there grinning: Soldiers turned contractors but not assassins or traitors he got a bad look and cocked the Glock he was fiddling with. 'Hooley nailed him through the wrist with one of them screwdrivers. --Then we hauled his howling ass over to the interrogation room and

strung him upside down by leg braces. He says "Whatcha gonna do now boys?" -- [pause] I knew what... --*For God and country, Gilmore?*-- I took my two favorites, a 1911 Colt Auto for my right hand and a Model 15 Smith & Wesson .38 special for my left. Skeeter goes with an M1 carbine. --*Always liked the retro*-- We hammered his ass fifteen ways to Sunday. They'll be no grand pay-day and no assassinations neither.

There was a box of gloves for cleaning; we put on 2 pair each and wiped down prints then using Skeeter's big-boy carbon-steel screwdriver jammed-in-the-latch of the security-room and kicked her open. His security cameras fed into a server rack that was hot-swap-able Raid 5. We yanked all the drives, took 'em to a tool room and after wedging 'em into a vice welded mild steel over 'em with a MIG. But on closing inspection saw there was partial T1 feed to a back-up location. --*Sheet!*-- We picked up the chassis we came with, and borrowed his 6-pack for egress passing all the pretty company, blonde and brunette hair flashing above the convertibles inbound. -- *Sorry about that*-- Left the truck by the road where we got in my rental and sped off for destination two:

Four story apartment building. Dimly lit corridors, low ceilings though relatively wide. Back-up was in an apartment on the fourth floor. Probably the outside security guy's retreat. We made our entrance, found it unoccupied and pulled out all the data for later destruction. Wasn't much: just two 500 GB drives. Taking the stairs to the lowest floor: Limestone steps become irregular; pre-basement required a leap down of three feet. Round the next bend the walk-way was in a decline. Then a basement wall with a short, very narrow aluminum door. Up small toe-steps; open the mini-door on its hinges. Squeezed out sideways holding on to very little as there was a drop of three feet to the alley. Job over. Exhausted. --*Heebie-Jeebies*-- PTSD. But the country is safer. --*For the moment.*—

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