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Trupo's Hand by David Ewald

Monday, December 10, 2012



A corrupt cop places a handgun under his chin and commits suicide, with the blood spurting up onto the underside of a patio umbrella.

- screenit.com

Most unsettling—and greatest—sequence from *American Gangster* (2007, dir. Ridley Scott) occurs toward the end, just after Russell Crowe's good cop Richie Roberts sticks a thumb tack right through the photo-forehead of number one target Detective Trupo. Gotcha now, sucka.

Cut to the newspaper—or do the pants come first? Definitely the pants. Those swank dark brown polyester leisure pants. Trupo from the waist-down seated on his bed. The polyester mattress, facing east. A faint light in the room, late afternoon, muggy outside, August or September of 1976. Behind him, buoyed by the bouncy mattress and braced by his backside, a full cup of coffee, fresh.

Distress, uncertainty apparent in Trupo's torso. To get up or not to. He gets up abruptly. The cup behind him turns over, spilling its contents across the bed. A stain spreads, steam rises. Trupo leaves without noticing.

Then the paper. Trupo sets it down and picks up the gun, his service pistol, from the surface of the patio table. He sits and aims, barrel pointed in the right place, the way he understood.

When the shot goes off his wife doesn't hear. She is busy vacuuming in the darkness of the living room, her long dress swaying, her head bowed in reverence to the carpet, her husband's backyard end seen through the sliding glass doors in the distance.

He always saw himself as a character in a movie. Who would play him? Who would speak the words he was writing on the scrap of paper? I'm not one to go out guns blazing. I've done enough. Sorry honey. Best this way. Fight those bastards. Don't let them take the cars, the house, the vacuum I hear now. Will you hear? We've worked so hard for this, don't make them tell you any different. We did it together. What of the real man, the real name? What future actor, not yet born, would be his age, 39, when he took the role of him?

A bird on the patio umbrella above. He'd stopped thinking he'd die in the line of duty long ago. This was how, his back to the house, her. He was shaking. He'd forgotten his cup, the one with the fish on it, the one she'd bought him in the Cape. It was the bird he told her about that morning, remember? Do you remember the bird? I think it's the same bird.

He had a dream he was in Texas holding a big gun. But he'd never been to Texas so it could have been some other place,

maybe Mexico.

Like any child, he'd grown up believing he could be President someday. The moment before the bullet cut through his brain he saw himself as the President of the United States, years into the future, throwing the first pitch in some stadium in Texas then retreating to the safety of the White House to strategize the war. The war wasn't going well, and it had been a long one already, started many years ago, and his advisers were telling him it was unwinnable even as they were devising new ways to sell its legitimacy to the American people. President Trupo? He didn't think that was his name. His name was something else altogether, something burning with anger of a questionable legitimacy, an authority sold to the American people.

And who was he now? It was the fall of 1985 and he was wandering the streets of San Francisco. He'd always been fond of that movie. He'd just gotten out of a showing of the new James Bond, this one set in San Francisco and featuring the final battle on top of the Golden Gate Bridge. Poor Christopher Walken, he'd thought then. If only he, Trupo, could be an actor. If only he, Trupo, could escape from his life by playing someone else.

He was someone else, again. He'd been to Ireland recently and now that he was back his wife despised him. They weren't getting along, it wasn't working out. They slept in separate rooms. His son was nearly seven now. Born when Trupo murdered those two men, sorry, assassinated those two political figures in San Francisco's City Hall, Czolgosz, Guiteau, Booth, Oswald, and now the city didn't want him, the new mayor had made a public announcement pleading with him to stay away. But he had to try with his wife. He had to see if he could salvage himself.

One night when it had been particularly rough he dreamt he was a bad guy in a Western being shot to death by a fourteen-year-old girl, her revenge, his stupidity. It was the fall of 1985 in San Francisco and he shouldn't have been alive because he was supposed to be someone else, he felt it, like a burst blood vessel at the back of the brain.

The song playing on the car's radio was "So Far Away" by Dire Straits, and he felt that, so far away. He was thinking of Ireland now, and he put in the tape, waited for the new song. The hose was connected to the tail pipe. The hose was dangling through the back window, cracked just enough. All the windows were rolled up. The engine was on. The song was playing. It had to end somewhere, so why not here, in his own garage, in the dark? He saw all his lives now, the many roles he'd played, the people he'd killed, the ways he'd been killed as well, and was any of it true? What if the end to the origin story had never happened? Was he still alive, beyond the exhaust? Could he ever die? Was that a movie, too?

David Ewald's work has appeared in BULL: Men's Fiction, Eclectica, Denver Syntax, Spectrum, and elsewhere. His full-length play, Mormania, was part of Paragon Theatre's The Trench, and an experimental novelette, Markson's Pier, is forthcoming from Essays & Fictions. He serves as Nonfiction Editor for Eclectica Magazine and lives in California.

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