

Back to My Old Self Again

There I was sitting on a street-side café chair at a round table with four other men, two of whom were excitedly reciting their woes with government agents.

Was I a Richard Harding Davis character off on an adventure of danger and intrigue?

If what they said was true, it could not be otherwise.

The radio reported a gunman taken by police at a high school after being disarmed by students, they turned him over despite his pleas for help as he wildly muttered things like, “I want to see the governor. I want to talk to the president. They’re building concentration camps in Minnesota. Government experiments with the water we drink,” and such like things that seemed oddly familiar.

I wondered.

Later that evening I pondered these thoughts as I lingered by the window of the penthouse office my clients hired for me to use while I helped them. A desk was brought in that matched the expensive furniture. I had a giant walk-in closet to hang the few suits and ties I still owned. I was comfortable, extremely well fed in the five-star restaurant on ground floor. They supplied me with nearly everything a man could want.

Yet I wondered.

When the heavy mahogany door between my makeshift office and that of my clients’ residence opened after an introductory knock by the man who brought me here and my barely audible “Come in!”, the space between the jambs was filled with the enormous frame of LeBeau, grinning like the proverbial cat. The big man didn’t miss much. He seemed to have unlimited cash on his person at all times.

He liked to think he was clever. Some men are like that, you know.

I wondered.

He was on flame about the injuries his friends were suffering at the hands of women and men who identified themselves as federal agents before proceeding to violate Florida law with reckless abandon, disregarding the rights of individuals pursuant to Florida and federal law. Or so he said. And he expected me to solve the problem.

He was paying me to solve the problem.

All I wanted was continued good health and a house on the river fully paid for where I could write, fish, and forget about these people and their problems. But LeBeau was a man who didn’t like paying money to get nothing. The money was there and plenty of it. The view from that penthouse window was amazing. Palm

trees. Wide winding boulevards in the distance. A swimming pool and exercise room on the first floor. A concierge. French food if I wanted it. Indeed, pretty much anything I wanted just by asking.

Yet, all I really wanted was a house on the river, a swimming pool of my own, and maybe a single-engine airplane I could fly north with when Florida's heat and hurricane summers came around.

The job put continued health in question, of course. But who's counting?

Masked men swooping down in black helicopters with Mac-10 .45 caliber assault weapons to arrest unarmed men and women seemed to me a bit overly aggressive behavior for employees of my government, however. So, since I was being paid more money than I'd ever seen before, it seemed a good idea at the time for someone with my unique skills take a closer look, interview witnesses, research the laws cited to me by these amateur lawyers and, if necessary, file an action in the local circuit court where one could hope for justice at the hands of a judiciary that might agree with me about the Mac-10's and ski-masked wielders thereof.

LeBeau's friends were mostly men, middle-aged, frustrated by life's many disappointments no doubt, anxious to champion a cause, totally askew of the real issues that threatened them and their loved ones. They were off on a tear one might say with no practical sense of what they were doing.

But the money was good.

Tyrone Manning was the only fellow I met in those first few weeks who had any semblance of a properly functioning brain, i.e., functioning in reality mode, free from the mesmerizing effects of political paranoia. All the others seemed to be posturing to impress each other. Spouting legal citations like they were Justice Cardozo come back from the grave. Tossing the topic of conversation from mouth to mouth like it was some kind of children's game, keeping the damned thing alive, telling the same stories of injury and insult again and again ... stories of which I heard 80% in the first five-hour meeting I had with these peculiar people. Only Manning saw the danger in their ethnocentric enthusiasm that was missing the call to action. That was screaming at them. "Come on," he would say. "Every second you hold back the enemy becomes more entrenched. If you are going to act, *now* is the time to begin!" They paid little attention. Too busy trying to out-talk each other.

Down at the IHOP a few evening earlier I met men who'd come down from Ohio to address the local conclave of concerned neighbors and friends. Those who claimed to have been threatened at gunpoint by masked men wielding military assault weapons instead of standard police issue hand guns, identifying themselves as federal agents. Didn't seem right to me. Wouldn't have seemed right to the men who kept the world safe for us boys and girls in my hometown up north. But this was Florida, the land of Mickey Mouse and other fantasies.

Why hadn't I heard of this before?

It's true I avoid the papers and television news like the diseases of mankind they are, but masked men with military arms demanding unarmed Floridians to get out of their car and submit to the force of an alleged legal officer? Not on my watch. Those men were, in my view, clearly in violation of the law on their own side of the fence, law too many of my friends died to protect!

Brandishing the capability to cut a man in two from fifty feet away at the mere thought of doing so.

Angry fingers on triggers.

Angry voices.

Angry faces hidden behind terrifying black ski-masks?

Didn't seem like a world I wanted to know about.

But the money was good.

I asked LeBeau, "What are we waiting for?"

I had a plan.

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