







**DEDICATED TO EH-JAY FORBES,  
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[ thanks for all the help ]**

# CHAPTER 1: GOLD







# **CHAPTER 2: HARD TOP**









# **CHAPTER 3 :**

# **BIG DICKIE**



were the older kids, but we practically ran the school. On weekends we would cause havoc around the city, busting up windows, setting the old cars on fire, dumb shit, really. But it made us the 'bad kids', and so everyone either ran the other way when we were coming down the road, or fell in line behind us.

Hoob became a part of the gang because he impressed the hell out of us. He was one of those kids who was scary, who mothers wouldn't let their kids near. Not because he was strong or tough or any of that, but because you knew he'd do anything. He'd fight anyone, win or lose. He'd fight cops. There were no limits for him and you could see it in his crazy fucking eyes. Even when he'd get his ass kicked, he'd keep coming back, next time with a brick, the time after that with a knife, and so on until he won or died trying.

One time, Pies Fischer dared him to kill a cat that was prowling on some fence and he said *sure, no big deal* - and we all thought that meant he'd chuck a rock at it or something like that. But John just starts making kissy sounds and calling the cat to come to him, and it does. We're all laughing and he's carrying this black little cat, real nice and sweet, cooing to it, and Joey Gillespie goes *You gonna fuck that thing or what?* But then John is holding it hard by the throat, twisting its head like a screwcap, and it's not even funny anymore, the sounds coming out of it. It's screaming so loud it sounds human, and John Hoobler's struggling and it's biting him. We watched him do it, with this big goofy grin on his face, the cat's claws piercing *inside* his arms, but he doesn't even care. Finally there's a wet snap and the thing's head is backwards, and he's just laughing *Haaw Haaaw Hawww* and lets it drop. No one else was laughing. We were all scared. By some miracle Andy wasn't with us. I couldn't imagine what he would have done - that kid loves animals like most men love cooze. We probably wouldn't even be pals anymore if he had. Which, right about now, wouldn't be a bad thing.

But John wasn't always like that. Eventually he smartened up, we all did. But smartening up just meant he was wise to the game. He knew if he kept on, he'd end up in jail - he had to get smarter about what he would and wouldn't do, about who he'd let witness it. When we started out, we were nothing more than a gang of hoods with knives in our pants and snot hanging out our noses. John was useful for vandalism and arson, giving kids a thrashing, the dumb pranks we'd pull. When we got a little older towards the end of school and realized we could maybe start making some dough, but a guy with no control, a guy like John wasn't a good thing to have around. So after we started boosting cars, robbing little places like junkyards and corner stores, or doing some night-time burglary, John had to shape up or ship out. And at some point or other, he shaped up. Learned to talk to people, learned some civility and restraint. Learned about lying, about being sweet to girls, and how to make good with the cops. It was like a dog surviving rabies, almost never happens. And to be honest, he became a good guy, more or less. I used to think that maybe all the acting out when he was a kid was just a way to get people to notice him. And maybe once he had some guys who liked him for real, he started to grow up.

The rest was history. We grew up like that, new friends coming and going, but Andy, me, Hoob, and Pies Fischer were inseparable. We all got jobs and girls and all that, but stayed in the same neighbourhood, stayed in touch, moved from petty crime to gambling - set ourselves up a little racket, nothing big, but enough to pay for the steaks at the barbecue. John tried to make something of himself,

worked at a newspaper for a while, rented a house near the water with some fat little thing named Bonnie.

And then the war came, and our little show was broken up. Andy and I were drafted, Pies went into the Air Force, and John stayed behind. Because of the shortage of men, he was able to become - of all things, a police officer. And because of his attitude, his big mouth, and penchant for fat girls (Police Chief's wife), he was able to get canned in under a year. That isn't to say he was no good at it, he learned fast and was good with the books, but he was rough and abusive, even moreso than the regular coppers, and was big on the take. But he picked up enough experience and connections that when Andy and I somehow lived through the horror show across the sea, we figured he could be an asset to our little agency.

Like I said though, I keep my eyes open. As much as he's changed, I know that people have lots of different parts in em. I see it all the time in this line of work, people hide away what they used to be and it comes out - fast and hard. It didn't matter that he played the horn now, or had a little beatnik beard, that he actually had a bank account and could listen to instructions when we gave them. I'd been waiting for this to happen, I just wasn't quick enough to stop it.

There was a while there when I forgot all that shit and believed he was like Andy, I'm embarrassed to say. Worth a damn, good to have around, useful, all that stuff. You start to let your guard down when someone gets useful to you. Makes you think of them like a tool, something you wield, and you forget that a mad dog's a mad dog. There were times I'd even thought of him as a Good Man.

It was all because he was a good detective. Gemini wasn't always a rotted-out arsehole of an agency. Things have been rough for the past few months, just getting by on scraps, Private Eye stuff, no real detecting going on at all, but we had a good string for a while, and Hoob had a lot to do with it. Before John, the Case of Little Lulu Mazuchetti broke us onto the scene, when we solved a case that half the country couldn't solve - twelve year old singing dancing sweetheart disappeared - Andy eventually found where the suitcase she was in. Most of her anyway. We made the papers, got on the radio, the whole works. There was a photograph of Andy holding the suitcase over his head like a trophy he'd won. Then we did another big one almost right away, we always called it the French Caper - I got pushed out a window near the end of it, broke both my legs. Andy got pushed too, but he landed like a cat on his treads while I had a bone stickin' out my fucking slacks. I don't know how he even did it, but he sprung up and ran right back into the building and beat the frog fuck half to death with a candlestick. We eventually solved it, our own way, but I couldn't get around for a while after that too well, so that's when we hired John.

I had some real worries about him, but he wanted to prove himself and he did. The Case of the Secret Chinamen was almost single-handedly solved by John, and is the reason him and Andy get on so well. He was like me at first, sceptical of Hoobler, but gained a lot of respect for the man on that case and put it all behind him. Which is probably why he's so shocked by Hoobler taking all our cash and fucking us over. I never got all the details about what happened on that job, but they went through some hot water, hot enough that they won't talk about it. I was laid up in the office like a cunt secretary for almost the whole thing, taking calls and booking work. I passed most of the time looking through my telescope at nothing, trying to catch a glimpse of a fat leg or loose tit, but mostly just watching birds and stars. Fucking useless.

But John was instrumental in the next one too, when I was finally shuffling around on a cane. His connections to the queer fellas who wear dresses down on the harbour was the whole reason we knew where to dig during the Case of the Gentleman's Labyrinth. And on our next one, the second time we were all over the papers, another big-time murder solved, the Missing Millionaire, it was John who had my back in the fight of my life, against that giant Pollack weight-lifter who put Andy in a coma (Andy has been in three comas since we started the agency). So a lot of our success and survival had to do with John. I would even say I was proud of him, something I wasn't ever counting on saying.

That was then. Soon enough our luck was up, the economy was tanking, we were entering a dry spell. Bits and pieces of work. And John hoarded money, or short-changed the company and blew it on whores. He was drinking more (though we all were) but he blew jobs by getting caught investigating, getting arrested -- which led to us having to post bail (and further empty the coffers). And then I was remembering, *oh yeah, John Hoobler*, like I had forgotten who he was. And fuck me for not waking up sooner.

"Chris," Andy was calling. I snapped my head around. He was tying his shoelace, hopping on one foot, trying to keep up. He had figured where we were going, I was sure.

"Hurry on up," I said, my guts still boiling, a haze across my vision.

"Why are we going after the him? What's he got to do with our tires?"

"Nothin," I said.

"Chris," he shuffled up to me, all sweaty like I was, "we're supposed to stay away from Dick Douglas."

"That's what he says."

He grabbed my arm and tried to stop me but I was going hard and he's a skinny guy so it didn't work well. He sort of spun off me and to the side into a bush. I was coming towards city hall now, the marble steps and pissing baby statue. I stopped at the foot of them and straightened out my tie, patting down my lapels, giving a spit to the cement. I needed composure for this. I can't charge in there and puke egg all over the place. Andy had reluctantly joined me like he always did. I was the one with the plan, after all.

He sighed and started copy me, straightening himself out.

"Alright, what are we doing?"

"Your job's gonna be the put Big Dickie's bodyguard down. Immediately."

"Why?" Andy asked. His round face was blank.

"I'm putting the screws to Mayor Dickie. He's giving us what we want, or we're going public with the affidavits we got."

Dickie had been taking contracts with the city to build restaurant boats for tourism, except he was selling them once they were used for a couple seasons, doubling his profits with the town's money and keeping it for himself. We were hired to investigate, but I was sitting on the evidence because it was worth more to us than the money from our client. I hated to dump a job unfinished, but this was exactly why I did it. I was just going to have to blackmail him earlier than I thought I would.

"The affidavits are gone though," Andy said.

"Which means he can't steal them back from us," I said. It was weak logic, but I was desperate. We both were. Andy nodded. I was up the stairs, partner at my side.



# CHAPTER 4: INTERLUDE





penis made me grow enormous plastic tits, with rubber nipples ten times too long. I looked down at my naked belly, pregnant and swollen over my bush, realizing I wasn't myself, but my wife ten years ago, huffing and humping up and down on some great ogre's dick.

*I'm cheating on him*, I muttered, the room shifting around me, my guts churning with nausea as I rocked up and down, *I just gotta do it backwards*.

I don't remember what happened next, but I sort of stopped thinking. I felt like a sheet of paper getting crumpled up, all the walls and words and feelings gathering up on me and smothering me. All of them ganging up together to destroy me or fuck me or eat me alive.

# **CHAPTER :5**

# **SAINT HOOBLER**

# AND

then it was over. I was drenched

in sweat, out of breath, pants down, magazine on the wet floor, sore and tired. A bang on the door made me jump in the air, right off the toilet seat. Everything was clear and sharp, and I was having trouble remembering what was happening.

"What?" I shouted, expecting Andy on the other side.

"You okay in there, mister?" a boy's voice asked.

"You got it," I said. I checked my ass and I was clean, though there was a coil in the toilet below me. I was good to go, so I pulled my pants up and started washing up. I washed my tie since it had been on the floor and was wet, unrolled my sleeves and did up my buttons proper.

*What the fuck was that?* I said to myself, embarrassment and guilt crawling up my body. That was certainly more than I'd bargained for. We thought they would either bring us up or calm us down, not melt our fucking heads in. Christ, we only took one each. What the hell was this guy into?

I left the magazine on the floor since I didn't even remember bringing it in, and because it looked stained, already swelling on the piss-drenched floor. I tossed the pumpboy a coin as I passed by, telling him to clean up, because it's a *fucking mess in there*.

"Yes sir!" he piped, and ran in with a cloth over his shoulder. By the time I made it to the car it sounded like he had found the magazine. *Holy fuck*, his little voice echoed into the open air.

Out there on the dusty lot I realized where we were, how far from the city we had come. Everything had happened so fast, but it had been hours. The pills had slammed everything together like they happened all at once. I didn't dare to consider how long I'd been in the fucking toilet, or what Andy was like out here in the passenger seat.

Andrew Bobby was cleaned up too, his hair combed back, his tie straight and narrow, smoking a new cigarette. But you could tell that he'd just come through something bad, his eye bloodshot like an old hound, a drenched shirt and a real fucked-up expression on his face. We'd been through enough shit together to know when not to talk about something, and this wasn't a keeper. Who knew Big Dickie was a fucking dooper beatnik?

"You drive," was all I said.

He agreed with a quick nod, looking into the distance. We were up in the hills and the houses were few and far between, stacked on impressive mountaintops and plateaus, hidden by alpine treelines. The air was fresh and cool up here, so neither of us minded taking a rest, looking at the sky and those rich houses and the real pretty look of it all. I wondered, just for a moment, if it could ever be that I could get a place like this, a real piece of paradise. But those thoughts were gone pretty fast when I remembered that except for the skinny fella in the car, I wouldn't have anyone worth sharing paradise with anyway. I looked at my watch and saw just how many hours those stupid











# **CHAPTER :6: DOUBLE OR NOTHIN G**









expression permanently pressed into it, like she was constantly disappointed. It would only get worse when she'd cast her lamps my way. She had a grasp of things now - her hold on John wasn't as strong as she thought. He had obligations to us which ran deeper than her toothless blowjobs and French perfume. So now she was trying to get things going with Andy because she knew I was going to put her out to pasture the first chance I got. She was the type of woman who was used to getting what she wants - but her looks were gone and so was her money. All she could do now was sweeten up her pug face, try to make it look like she wasn't pushing past 65. I couldn't look at her while she did her bit, jutting out her skeleton hips provocatively, pouting like a little girl or doing little curtseys for thank-yous. At craps, I watched Andy wrestle with her as she tried to blow her rancid breath on his dice.

I played a little blackjack and a few hands of poker, the only games I liked, because they were about skill, not chance. I wasn't really paying attention though, just going through the motions. I didn't really want to be there, and I don't even remember if I won or lost. John just loved to blow money here, and I guess this was a little way to make things up to him for the vicious beating he took. Hadn't I thought about running off with the cash almost immediately when I got my hands on it? I'm sure the thought ran through his thick head, but he was man enough to fight back the urge.

But still I couldn't concentrate or relax. More questions were eating at me. I believed John's story. There's no way he would've been so careless if he was going to run away. He left a paper trail so obvious a boy scout could've found him, and we taught him a lot better than that. No, the problem was that if you believed John's story, it raised a hell of a lot of other questions. Andy was a sharp guy, but he'd been through too much to worry about these things, but I had garter snakes in my guts just thinking about it.

By now I was stone cold sober, but a mean hangover was coming on me. The little cigarette girl gave me a seltzer water and a medicated tablet for free, but I had to pay for my smokes. I could feel a bunch of prickles coming in on my face, and I knew I smelled terrible too, half from the dried blood all over me, and half from the sweat under my arms from that dope. If this was a nicer joint, we wouldn't have even been let in here, three fellas and their grandma, two of them with beaten faces, the third with a pound of blood on him. But this was *Lucky Streak's Casino*. Looking around the bar, I wasn't even the worst looking fella. Hell, John wasn't even the worst looking one, even with a set of lips like burst bratwurst. In the corner booth, there were a couple guys who looked dead. Junkies who looked like live-agains from some kid's horror funnies.

I fished a nickel out of my pocket again and tried Audrey. She picked up on the first ring, her voice angry.

"Hello?"

"Audrey," I said.

"Chrissy, have you been calling here and hanging up?"

"No, I haven't. Well, I called earlier, but I haven't been pranking you or nothing."

"Someone's been calling here, hanging up. Five times since supper." I realized she sounded shaken-up, not angry.

"You want me to come over?"

"No, Jerry's here."

"Is that Brown?" I heard him yell in the background.



I went and got John and started to lead him out of the building. Andy asked what the fuck was going on, and I told him we'd be back. He asked what the fuck to do with the old bird, but I didn't answer him. I could feel his eyes burning at me, but we kept on our way.

**CH A P T E R :7**  
**SNIP SNIP**















I tried to shake a little, to knock the clippers off of me, but they hardly budged. They were wedged under my sack. I kept imaging closing my legs by accident and chopping it all off with my thighs. They looked fucking sharp. I cried out to John, my guts sinking.

The one next to him was laughing harder now, muttering something about "murderball". The pistol was lowered from his head to his side, as his shoulders began to convulse in laughter.

"The murderball!" mine screamed, and began to shake with laughter too. The snippers jiggled under my balls and I groaned.

"I could - I..." the one next to Hoobler stuttered, but then became deadly serious, "I miss her so much."

Mine put down his gun and grabbed the shears with two hands.

"JOHN!" I screamed.

Hoobler snatched the pistol from his captor and swung around as he opened the shears around my nuts as wide as they could.

"JOHN!" I screamed, a jet of piss shooting out.

But then the man fell onto his back, screaming at the top of his lungs, the shears clattering to the floor.

"Oh fuck!" I screamed, backing away from them on my bare ass.

I looked over to John and he was standing upright next to the other brother, who was completely paralyzed, frozen on his feet.

"Why the fuck didn't you shoot him!?" I screamed.

"You broke my thumb."

"What?"

"I couldn't aim the gun because of my thumb. You twisted it, remember?"

I looked at the shears and tried to laugh but I couldn't breathe.

Andy and I had taken one each when we went on our trip, but John had thrown the equivalent of at least eight of them into their food. By some miracle they hadn't noticed it and chowed down on the whole thing.

Before long, the one on the floor was screaming so long that he couldn't breathe, was fighting for breath as his face turned blue. The other one, stiff as a mannequin, wept like a baby and whispered things to himself.

When we unlocked ourselves, John wanted to beat them as bad as they had us, or worse, but I wanted to think about it more. He was furious with me for even suggesting it. He paced around the room like a big ape, his nostrils flaring. I went for a walk in the little apartment, which I guess was some kind of safe house. It was mostly empty, a couple cans of food in the cupboard, a pot, some paper plates. One of their wallets and a set of keys was on the counter in the dingy little kitchen. Gerald Martin. The badge inside had a Pinkerton's license with a division I'd never heard of. I felt my stomach sink just thinking about it. I looked around a little longer, my head banging away, a wet grind in my ribs every time I moved. Past the kitchen was a little den. A front door with a window looking out onto the street. We were still in the city it seemed. As I turned to get back to Hoob, I saw that there was a document on the table near the door marked Gemini in red letters. There was a strange two-headed eagle crest stamped on it.

To think that the badge had bothered me. Inside the little folder was a whole fucking file on us, an entire surveillance report from six AM onwards. Photographs of me and Andy walking down the street, one of Andy in Dickie's car, his head thrown back wildly, another of John with his arm around the old cunt coming out of a brick building. They were from today! How did they develop them so fucking fast? But the pictures





