

JESUS FREAKS (jē'zəs frēks), n. see ZOMBIE

"Just as there were many who were appalled at Him – His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and His form marred beyond human likeness.... He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."

Isaiah 52:14 - 53:1-3

March, 2015 – Good Friday...

“What the hell do you mean restricted area?” Detective Philip ‘Kane’ Makane (late thirties, ambiguous, sienna-completion) protested, shoving his way towards Special Agent Mendez, who stood 20 feet away barking orders into midair and tapping on his lobule to test the tiny, subdermal microphone’s quality. He did it out of habit every time he spoke or received a message. “This is our jurisdiction.”

Behind the yellow, laser-light barrier that cordoned off the smoldering wreckage site and flashed scrolling text that read (Federal Bureau of Investigations), Mendez knelt down to look under yet another sheet. They were all over the place, spread out like some giant patchwork quilt constructed in honor of something macabre. And most of them were still moving.

“Not any more, Detective,” Mendez said while simultaneously reacting to the mangled body under the sheet that turned slowly to face him.

Kane backed away from the duo of FBI agents in mirror-shades who blocked his path to Mendez, sized both of them up in one quick pass, and craned his neck, head tilting to the side to see over the shorter agent’s shoulder. That was where Mendez crouched and replaced the sheet over the squirming shape, steam rising from beneath it. He exhaled dramatically—he had been holding his breath to avoid the smell—rested his forearms on his knees, folded his hands, and surveyed his men who were spread out across the wreckage.

At the base of the hill, approximately 30 feet behind Kane, and separated by federal officers in black riot attire standing reticent, guns held up against their shoulders, a beefy throng of uniformed officers crowded around a single-file line of hastily parked squad cars and one, lone, unmarked Toyota that choked up the small paved road. Watching from afar, they grumbled in response to the feds' big-dick waving and occasionally yelled out in support of Kane.

“So what’ve we got, terrorists?” Kane inquired. “And what’s under the sheets, certainly not survivors?”

“Not quite,” Mendez replied from the background.

“Then *what?* What is so goddamn important that you feel the need to exclude us from the case?”

Cheers from the boys in blue.

“I’m afraid that information is classified, Detective.”

Wiping his palms against each other as he rose to a stand, Mendez was annoyed by Kane’s persistence. But he wasn’t the type to let it show. With a nod, he instructed the two agents to let Kane approach.

Kane half-turned toward his disgruntled colleagues and rolled his eyes mocking Mendez’s stock reply and subconsciously gaining strength from their surly indignation.

“You *federal boys* like hiding behind your ‘classified’ status.” Kane said, walking up to the barrier to meet Mendez, who did the same.

“Think what you want, Detective. I would think you’d be thankful that we’re taking over. You don’t want to deal with this mess. Trust me.”

“Don’t do us any favors. Most of these men here, including myself, have been on the force for a number of years. Surely we’ve seen worse in....”

Kane looked around at the field of twitching sheets, some large, some small. On the other side of the wreckage, men in Haz-Mat suits branded with the same federal lettering guided writhing bodybags—the transparent kind—on hovering stretchers into the back of a huge, armored semi as fast as they could.

Whatever it was that had happened here, it was bad, really bad. Maybe he hadn't, in fact, seen worse.

To his far right, five or six feds surrounded a naked grey husk of a man with a jutting ribcage and sections of exposed bone all over his body. One of the agents held onto a nylon rope that extended about two feet from his hand to where it looped around and dug into the grey man's throat. Leading with his mouth wide open, the grey man lunged at the agent directly in front of him, his teeth snapping shut inches short of his face when the rope pulled tight.

Kane's intuition told him that this guy was dead as a doornail, a fucking corpse.

But that's impossible, he thought.

The agent holding the rope called out to an Agent Curtis.

With his eyes, Kane directed Mendez over to the grey man, eyebrows raised, questioning: "What...the hell...is that?"

Diverted, on his way, by the weird lust for vengeance that twisted Agent Charles Curtis' face into a painful mask of anger and lunacy and festering misery as he stepped out of the intact section of the passenger area, sliding his hand beneath his jacket, Mendez whispered, "Oh shit!" and turned to face Kane. "Get your men outta here, now!"

"Hey!" Kane groaned as Mendez shoved him backwards and hurried over to Curtis who took large, angry steps over to the grey man, his hand wrapped in a white-knuckled embrace around the handle of his gun as he pulled his arm from inside his jacket. "Not until you tell me what is going on..."

The other agents who stood close by dove away to safety as Curtis capped off 16 shots into the grey man. Each one tore into the grey man and sent dry chunks flying, small dust-clouds of pulverized flesh and bone bursting to relevance, then settling into the air at his bony feet. Though his body staggered and twisted in tribute to physics, the grey man's only real reaction—a dry, indifferent moan—pushed Curtis over the edge. He wanted that thing to *feel* the way he did when it—him, that sorry excuse for a human that the grey man used to be—killed his wife, Lucia. For him to simply expire, as a matter of fact, without fear, or anger, or gut wrenching anticipation... goddammit, that just wasn't good enough.

In his mind, he was ~~human again~~...alive again. In Agent Curtis' mind, he was crying like a baby and babbling shit about sparing his life while superimposed behind him, the faces of everyone whose life he had affected cast down all warped and oversized, laughed at his long, painful death. He looked the way he did that day in court, when he turned around and smiled at him. Those fucking teeth—they were enormous and stained yellow from 30 years of chain-smoking—had bitten off Lucia's left breast. And this was back when zombies were still thought of as devices of lower-level fiction.

It was all over by the time Mendez was able to grab hold of Curtis and wrestle the gun from his hands. During the struggle, he caught a glimpse of Kane and the uniformed officers who had jogged closer to the scene, some with their guns drawn.

"I said get your men outta here," Mendez grunted as he fought against Curtis' bulk. Curtis outweighed him by at least 20 pounds.

"No! Lemme go!" Curtis growled passionately. "That bastard took my Lucia from me!"

Kane raised a hand to his colleagues who stirred with pent-up aggression and long-standing emasculatory issues with the FBI, and nodded. When they calmed to an organized grumble, Kane turned back to Mendez.

"Look. Any minute now this place is going to be crawling with fire trucks and EMS units from all over the city, not to mention nosey reporters. So, unless want to deal with all that by yourself, I suggest you let us in on what exactly is going on here," Kane said.

Mendez began to retort, until he saw the grey man sit straight up, eyes burning with insatiable hunger, and turn to face the nearest living thing, an anonymous agent who crawled backward away from him and sprung quickly to his feet.

"Goddammit Charlie," the anonymous agent yelled, "are you out of your fucking mind?"

"Well, what'didjuspect?" Mendez replied.

“Lemme go, I said. You have to let me finish it...for Lucia,” Curtis begged.

He waited for the first sign of ease in Mendez’ grasp to break free and run over to the grey man who had already turned his attention to him and started crawling forward to meet him halfway, expectant jaws stretched wide and salivating blackened death.

“Charlie, wait!” Mendez yelled, but it was too late.

The grey man rose to his knees when Curtis came within a few feet from him and reached out grasping delicately at the air between them. Curtis stopped to cock his leg back and kicked the grey man in the chin with enough force that it tore his head from its base and sent it flying into the thicket 25 feet away.

A chorus of “holy shit!” filled the air behind Kane.

The grey man’s headless body collapsed to the ground, twitching and grasping at air.

Mendez volleyed between disappointment, anger, and shame, as he perused a mental list of pros and cons, attempting to decide whom to yell at first. To his left, the two anonymous agents had their hands full trying to hold back Detective Makane and his band of unruly uniformed officers. To his right, five agents stood, horrified over the grey man, who still reached in the direction of their voices, and tried, clumsily, to stand. The sixth one had jogged over to the bushes where the grey man’s head had landed and parted them with his hands.

“You guys are not gonna believe this,” He said, “but it looks like he...it’s still alive.”

Mendez closed his eyes and seethed.

“Well then bag it and put it on the truck with the others,” he bawled. “The rest of you take care of the body.”

Shaking his head at their questionable ethics, Mendez turned to his left and headed over to the boisterous crowd of officers. He focused specifically on Kane, who stood front and center arguing with the anonymous two agents.

“I’m going to have to ask you to control your men, Detective,” Mendez warned.

Kane stood defiant for a few excruciatingly awkward moments, eyes locked in a silent duel of egos. At the last minute he turned and spread his arms to corral the rising voices behind him.

“Guys! Please! Let’s hear what Agent Mendez has to say.”

“That’s Special Agent Mendez,” remarked one of the anonymous two.

“You know, technically they’re not *my* men.” Kane said looking past the anonymous agent without acknowledging his remark. “These men here answer to Sergeant Brooks.”

“Okay...well, since you seem to be in charge at the moment, I’ll address you,” Mendez said. “Now, what you’ve seen here today can never leave this site. This is a classified matter and, frankly, your men shouldn’t even be here.”

“Hmmm, that’s funny. I was under the impression that we were on the same side.”

“Absolutely, Detective.”

“So then why all the secrecy? Let me guess. Might this crash have somehow been deliberately caused? Maybe to hide, say, some kind of weapon, something that might explain why that gentleman over there seems to be quite alive despite the fact that he looks like a corpse?” Kane said, pointing at the grey man.

Mendez held his response on deck as he decided just how forthcoming he should be. He too was a cop once, so he sympathized with their anger.

“The crash was in no way deliberate, Detective, so get that thought right out of your head. What I am at liberty to tell you is that, yes, the man who was just shot...”

“Just shot...? That’s an understatement,” blurted a faceless voice within the crowd of blue uniforms.

“In short, yes, he was dead as were about 30 other ah...people who attacked us when we arrived. If these are what I think they are, then the movie

rules, destroying the brain and all that...you might as well throw that stuff right out the window. These things don't go down for nothing. We think they came from the Fernrock Cemetery about 3 miles east of here. We currently have a team investigating that site as well."

From the crowd, comments launched sporadically.

"Get the fuck outta here."

"Aw, c'mon."

"What do you take us for?"

"Shhh!" Kane scolded. "I know how it sounds, guys, but we all saw what just happened. Let's just hear him out."

"Thank you, Detective," Mendez nodded, letting loose a brief look of annoyance that he tossed underhanded at no one person in particular.

"The man you saw was Theodore DeLong...or what was left of him anyway."

"DeLong...DeLong... Now why does that sound familiar??? You mean the serial killer?" Kane asked.

"That's the one. Agent Curtis—he lost his wife, Lucia, to him three years ago. He was the one who brought DeLong down."

A long silent pause...

Kane reacted with forced disgust. Although he had nothing against Curtis, he didn't really give a fuck about what happened to the guy's wife three years ago.

"Well, you'll be sure to give Agent Curtis our condolences."

Heads turned as the din of screeching tires fell upon their ears, and soon everyone was focused on the paved road at the bottom of the hill. Flashing lights preceded the squad car that slid to a slanted stop next to the others. The front doors on both sides swung open before it came to a complete rest. From inside, Sergeant Daniel Brooks and Detective Allison Ryan, an attractive albeit manly-looking woman, jumped out and hurried up the hill.

Lifting his hand to signify “hold on,” Kane turned from Mendez and jogged down to meet them.

“You’re not going to believe wha...” he started to say to Brooks, whom he approached first, but Allison yanked him aside, cutting him off mid-sentence.

Brooks, who seemed to already know something, continued up the hill to his men.

Laying her arm around his shoulder, Allison pulled Kane close and started to whisper.

“We know about the corpses...er, zombies, or whatever you want to call them.” The hunter...he told us everything after we nearly creamed him when he ran out into the road.”

“Hunter? What hunter?”

Allison pinched a small notepad from the breast pocket of her coat.

“Gus Rollins is his name...been coming out here for years to hunt deer with his buddies. There are five of them altogether. He said that they were crossing through the cemetery a few miles back like they always do to get to their favorite spot when they saw a naked woman wandering around aimlessly, ‘like she was drunk,’ to quote Mr. Rollins. When one of the hunters, a...David Sechler, tried to help her, she bit him on the neck and killed him. That’s gratitude for you, huh. According to Mr. Rollins, it seemed like Mr. Sechler’s screaming woke the dead because that’s when, quote, ‘bodies started climbing out of graves left and right and all hell broke loose.’”

Allison eased the notepad back into her pocket and tapped it down. She turned toward the distant wail of sirens, gave them a moment’s attention, and then turned back to Kane.

“As crazy as it sounds, I believe him. If you would’ve seen the look on his face...”

“Don’t need to,” Kane replied. “We’ve seen it all first-hand right up the hill. To tell you the truth, I’m not sure what we saw up there.”

Kane bobbed and weaved his head, looking past Allison at Brooks’s car.

“So where is he, this hunter?”

“We had Loomis take him back to station. He refused to come anywhere near the scene, threw a fit until we stopped the car, in fact. And, wait ‘til you hear this: He says the feds shot his four buddies on the spot when they arrived at the scene. He was still hiding when it happened so they didn’t see him.”

“Sonofabitch,” Kane scoffed. “I knew those fuckers were up to something.”

Kane subconsciously inspected the dirt beneath him as he processed Allison’s information. At the top of the hill, Sergeant Brooks stood face to face with Special Agent Mendez, each flanked by their respective subordinates like old-fashioned street gangs facing off. For some reason, Kane imagined them growling at each other like dogs. Something about Mendez’s stoic arrogance made Kane determined to get to the bottom of this.

“You said Loomis was taking him back to the station?”

“Yep.”

“Well then, let’s go.” Kane said, directing Allison toward his car, a blue Toyota, with his palm against the small of her back. “I’ll drive.”

Easter Sunday

Despite the fact that his routine was the same so far—woke up to the voices on the TV (set for 12:00 pm), yelled out “snooze,” scratched his balls, and fell back to sleep—Philip Makane couldn’t help feeling that something was amiss. Technically, he didn’t have to work, so he automatically scratched that off, as it was known to drastically affect his mood, and continued on down the list of possible killjoys, eliminating them as he went along. Kane’s working theory had the military at fault for what happened at the crash site, some kind of testing gone wrong. It was happening all the time. Or maybe he was thinking of a movie he’d seen. Either way, it was the only reasonable explanation he could think of for what he’d witnessed.

The wake up, snooze, itchy-balls, sleep process usually repeated itself three to four times before Kane officially rose for the day, but this morning he was up on one and rubbing away the stiffness in the back of his neck. The pain

generally radiated from his neck down throughout his back, especially the lower back. Every time he woke up with it, he reminded himself how he never felt this way in his 20s, which then segued into his inability to stay up all night without paying the price anymore, if he could manage to stay up at all. Lately, it was becoming harder and harder.

Kane was never one to get ready for bed. He was good for nodding off fully dressed, just as long as he took his socks off. By morning he'd either be shirtless, or pantless, but never fully unclothed. He was down with the 'that's how we're born' mindset, but something about sleeping naked just felt too vulnerable. Sometimes he used shit like that to gauge people, sneaking it into mundane conversations.

Something just wasn't right. Where was the feeling of blunted serenity that came after the dreamscape morphed painfully into waking life, dragging distorted voices and laughter and echoed ringing with it through the ethereal muck? It only lasted a second or two before memory kicked in and brought with it the all the stress that sleep tricked him into forgetting. He never remembered feeling that way at all in his twenties, back when he was high on his own bullshit and cheating on Layla, his ex-wife, on a daily basis. She was an artist with a penchant for the macabre and bizarre, and she fixated on marrying the two with some form of ironic social commentary. That should have been his first clue. But her beauty had blinded him to such things. When he found out, after they had been married for a year and a half, that she had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and had been receiving treatment for it since she was in her late teens, he told himself that they would get past it together, that love could conquer all.

Back then he would've already squeezed in a day's worth of activity by...*what time was it?* 1:25 pm. Forty-five minutes of boxing drills and bag work, 45 minutes of cardio and free weights and a 10- to 15-minute quickie in the shower with Layla to bring him down was what a typical morning entailed.

Twenty-something Kane was an obsessive son of a bitch, consumed with fitness and physicality. And pussy. Maybe it was all to escape the dream of 77 little-boy-shadows that chased him awake, crying, throughout his childhood. The shrinks said the same thing, that it was a byproduct of his issues with abandonment and belonging. The number 77 was just a reference to his room at the Calhoun Foster Home, where he stayed the longest before he was adopted. They all assured him that he would outgrow the fear.

Kane was pushing 38, and the last time he had that dream was two nights ago. The only difference now was that he didn't wake up crying.

Moving from foster home to foster home had certainly left him with some issues that for a time manifested in his fists and his lightning-quick temper. That, mixed with Layla's "condition," was why he always left instead of engaging her in a heated argument like she preferred to do. That was one of her biggest complaints, that he was a runner. What she didn't know was that he usually ran right into the arms of another woman. *Ahhh, the good old days.*

It was boxing that finally straightened him out and enlightened him to controlled aggression. Mr. Raines, his gym teacher, recommended it one day as he walked by Kane and another boy, Omant Rowan, sitting at opposite ends of the bench outside the Principal's office. Omant was nursing a black eye and busted lip while Kane tried not to look too proud. If it wasn't for Raines, Kane might've ended up a couch potato like his adopted brother, Curtis. Sheila-Bell Makane would never have taken the time to listen past the word "boxing" to even hear how it might be good therapy for a rambunctious child. Thank God the classes were already paid for when she adopted him. He was about 8 years old at the time.

Let's see, what year was it, '03 or '04? Yeah, 2004.

It was a good year. This was before the Jesus Freaks had any real power over the government, before things like abortion and homosexuality and interracial marriage—depending on the state—and using the Lord's name in vain were illegal. Kane was 23 then, and just coming into his stride as a beat cop. His head was crammed with recent sparring matches and past busts, gone right and wrong, replayed from different angles, then dissected into grids, diagrams, and floating equations that broke each movement down with the intent of learning from his mistakes. Just before a big bust, he'd find a wall where no one could see him and pepper it with combinations to psych himself up and calcify his knuckles. He was a fucking machine, but he wore it with subtlety. All the gung-ho shit stayed inside his head. Most people thought of him as a natural athlete. He was not.

Dark, moody, mysterious, and ambiguous-looking were the words most often used to describe Kane. Had he been easier to peg racially, his rather mundane facial features would have been just that. He was better-than-average-looking with great bed-head, but there were plenty of guys sporting that look. He would've been just another face in the crowd.

In recent years, Kane had become a “media darling” thanks to his ambiguous shade—not too black (dangerous/intimidating), not too white (homogenized/safe)—his tenacity, and his proficiency with his fists and feet. It was a moniker that he refused to take seriously even if he did draw from it to lift himself out of the humdrums.

Kane’s shade had its own unique stain to it. Because he never knew his real parents, his best guess put himself somewhere between blue-black and lily-white. That way, he covered all the bases. It was so silly to even speculate anymore.... Well, that’s what he used to think. Now, he almost had to, depending on where in the country he was and who he was with. People seemed more than willing to ask these days. Lately he’d been telling them he was Italian. Yeah, it was only perpetuating a bigger problem, but he had too many troubles of his own and too many puzzles to mull over in his head to play crusader. Besides, it could have been true.

Sheila-Bell Makane disapproved of his curiosity and did what she could to cock-block his attempts to find out more details. When he’d inquire about his racial identity, she’d respond with some stock saying like “love has no color,” which, coming from her, an uneducated white woman, meant nothing.

Sheila-Bell was stingy with her love, but when she gave it, she demanded full reciprocation. This applied to her men as well. It was probably why they all eventually left her.

That feeling...

It stayed with Kane through his entire routine: piss, shower, shave, coffee. Along the way, there were a few things that seemed strange to him.

The traffic...where was it? Where were the blaring horns, the sirens, the engines roaring, the angry pedestrians speaking their minds, the speakers struggling to accommodate as car stereos shouted profanities and conveyed pent-up frustration beneath too much bass, riding on an ominous rhythm that crept up and spoke of anger, aggression, and unresolved conflict. Where was the music of dawn that echoed like dubious animal calls throughout the forest canopy and haunted the environment from two or three layers within the dense asphalt flora and fauna? It always reminded him of just how much he loved living in the city.

Even on Easter Sunday, he expected to hear some activity in the streets. Instead, there was the occasional car driving erratically by as if some tumult was going on inside.

The talking billboards and holographic ads for the day's paper that floated above the newspaper bins could be heard loud and clear from his third-floor apartment. Any other time he could hardly hear them over the hustle and bustle.

And where were the birds that chirped away outside his bedroom window every morning? Some mornings it seemed like they were fucking with him, they were so loud.

Maurice, the homeless flautist, was sleeping outside the all-night coffee shop across the street like he always did, but gone were the endless feet stepping over him as faceless trendy-folk exited with their overpriced lattes, locked in obligatory discussions about the horrors of big business, or oil, or animal rights, or religion, as if there was a list of topics in which to plug their angst. On the weekdays, they were replaced by the corporate slaves, who they both envied and ridiculed. Instead of the fancy shit, they preferred a simple cup-a-Joe, usually 20 ounces, to help suppress feelings of failure and regret that haunted low-level and managerial types alike. It birthed all kinds of unnecessary stress that, in the end, sped them along toward an early grave.

For as long as he could remember, Kane craved action. The idea of sitting behind a desk from nine to five drove him mad. Watching the cycle in various stages from his car when he'd park in the crowded business district to eat his lunch exasperated him as he attempted to fathom how people could be so accepting, so complacent in a life so short. He laughed at the wide-flat asses and overhanging bellies wrapped in oversized lady-suit jackets with raging shoulder-pads or draped in some sort of shawl or long sweater to conceal the truth: that they were fat, and life, with all its possibilities, was passing them by.

Fifteen years of action had aged Kane more than he liked to admit. So really, what was the difference? Even if he didn't have to sit on his ass all day, he was still just as much a victim, risking his life day in and day out for people who always managed to find fault with something he and his colleagues did. It was enough to drive a person like Kane to want to brutalize the thankless community. But that would hurt his image.

Besides the prospect of action, the appeal of authority attracted him to the force. Being a true alpha-male, he had a problem taking orders, but giving

them was good therapy. He knew it was probably the wrong reason for joining, but he was a levelheaded guy with no prejudices, except maybe for fat people who used their weight as a crutch or an excuse. That was more than most of the guys he'd gone through the academy with could say.

The cadets he roomed with were an ignorant bunch, constantly bitching about this and that group and blaming them for their shortcomings. Some of them were pretty good guys on a one-on-one level. It was when they got together as a group that they slipped into the roles of follower, laughing at jokes that they probably didn't think were funny just to fit in. Kane watched them squirm when the ringleader, a guy named Randy Sloan, felt comfortable enough to sling a few underhanded jokes about his dark complexion. He most likely thought Kane was white, so they were without the malice that he injected into his racial commentary, but Kane still felt it necessary to make Sloan understand that he was not one to be fucked with. After that, the jokes stopped.

Doesn't it figure? The one day he set aside to veg-out, and just about every friggin' channel was running a special report. Initially, it tricked him into getting all cozy for the big lie. He tried to guess what they might say, what kind of bullshit the feds might come up with to explain what he saw Friday. But the anchorman kept talking about a strange storm front that was approaching rapidly, and a rash of overnight violence: people attacking each other unprovoked, several reports of people being bitten by strangers. They also kept flashing an image of Reverend Jesse James Dallas, the televangelist. Apparently he had some major announcement planned for later this afternoon. It had something to do with the homeless man who supposedly walked on water to save a drowning boy earlier this morning. Kane wasn't really listening when they brought it up on the news. Stories like that always set off his bullshit alarm, especially when they were mentioned in the same breath as Reverend Dallas, who irked the hell out of him.

Kane felt bad enough sitting on his ass for more than 15 minutes at a time, and now there was nothing by which to escape from reality on an exceptionally quiet Sunday afternoon while he waited for some news about the crash. He sat through the special reports until they began to repeat themselves, then, out of curiosity, he flipped over to the channels up in the 500s, where Reverend Dallas reigned. His empire spanned five stations altogether. Strange that he'd run a repeat on Easter Sunday of all days.

Had he known it would be like this—nothing to watch but the kind of news he lived every day—Kane probably would have slept at the station last night. Fuck Dr. Danvers and his mandatory day off. He warned Kane that he was a likely candidate for an early heart attack if he didn't slow down and “experience life in the present.” It was a nice gesture and all, but there was still so much work to be done. He didn't leave the station until 2:00 am this morning, and didn't get home until sometime after 3:00. He only lived about 20 minutes away, but he took the scenic route just to collect his thoughts. He had spent a good part of his evening trying to reach Special Agent Mendez, whom the FBI receptionist claimed didn't work for them; interviewing Gus Rollins; making calls to his many informants to see if they had any info on the crash, or if what the feds were up to had trickled down to them; and trying to figure out the identity of his “secret admirer.” That's what his partner, Allison Ryan, called the man with the Danish accent who, for the past six months, had been leaving cryptic messages on his voicemail. They went something like this:

“This message is for Philip Makane...Detective Philip Makane from the 13th Precinct. I don't know how exactly to explain this without coming off like some kind of nut-job, but I had a dream about you...a terrible dream... You see, I'm psychic...”

That was usually when Kane pressed erase and moved on. Crank calls and death threats were commonplace to him; still, he liked to check them out whenever he could, even if only to find out the number and give the caller a taste of his own medicine.

Kane crossed his legs and held the steaming cup of coffee to his lips, waiting for it to cool as he channel-surfed with his mind. It always turned out to be much more of a pain in the ass than the commercial suggested.

Kane preferred the stereo for his entertainment. Oldies like Zeppelin and Gang Starr rocked his ass, but he didn't want to miss the report.

Fucking brainwave chips, he thought, focusing his half-eyed glare just enough to switch the TV to manual and retrieve the old-fashion remote control from the coffee-table drawer. The big electronics manufacturers included brainwave chips in all their models as of 2010. They were supposed to make it easier to channel-surf, but all they really did was hand out migraines.

Sirens...out of the blue it seemed, all of a sudden sounding near and far. They had sneaked up on him, a distinctive variety, different from the cry of squad cars.

Kane started over to the window, fingered the mini-blinds apart, and immediately leaned away from the bone-rattling hum of the sleek, basketball-sized security cam-bot that whizzed by too close for comfort, broke hard left, and disappeared down the side street.

Then the phone rang.

As he turned, four more cam-bots darted into view outside his window and followed the first one's beckon call down the side street. Whatever it was, it was big.

Kane stared suspiciously before walking over and lifting the phone from the cradle. Of course it had something to do with the sirens and the attacks on the news.

Kane to the fucking rescue again.

Max Hedberg's Journal

Entry #1

I just watched my 3-year-old son turn into a zombie. There, I said it. I couldn't bring myself to...let's just say that I locked him in the storage room across the hall. His name ~~was~~... is Eric.

It all came to a head when I returned home from work to find my wife, Maria, naked, straddling the UPS guy (whom my son aptly named the Big Fat Man). My first inclination, after I puked all over the front steps, was to bash both their heads in. I've never considered myself a violent man; however, given the situation, I was willing to explore my "dark side," so to speak. I paced outside the front door for the next 15 minutes, struggling to keep myself from lashing out. As I tried to calm myself, I began to notice a few things that just didn't sit right with me.

1. The Big Fat Man, who was fully clothed, I might add, didn't even flinch when I walked in the door. Neither did Maria for that matter. And I wasn't trying to be quiet.

2. Maria was covered in suds and I could clearly hear the shower running in the background. Even though she had a body to die for (thanks to Pilates), Maria had never been the type to walk around the house nude. In fact, after 8 years of marriage, we still make love in the dark. Pitiful, I know.

3. What I could see of her arms and thighs were rubbed raw and blistered. I later found out that she had tried, in vain, to scrub away the infection with scalding water and her favorite loofah during a moment of semi-clarity.

4. If anyone was going to stray in our marriage, I was sure it would've been me. Call me naive, but Maria just didn't have it in her. No pun intended. She'd developed a "thing"—call it a crush—on good-looking black men over the years (Wayne Brady was her current fave), but I just chalked that up to harmless fantasizing. It was always my belief that healthy fantasies are one of the things that make a marriage last. Whatever the case, she certainly wouldn't be attracted to a 250-pound UPS delivery guy with blubber-face (also known as meat-face).

When I went back inside (I was prepared for the worst), Maria, whom I must have caught in the middle of a clear moment, sprung to her feet and spun around. It took every ounce of my being to keep from passing out at the sight of the Big Fat Man's throat dangling from her flared teeth, and the blood. It ran from her chin down to her pubic hair. Between violent lurches, she looked me in the eyes and said "Oh God, honey. Wh...what did I just do?"

Entry #2

Seeing the Big Fat Man up close and personal the way I did when I had to dispose of his body, I couldn't help thinking that he was so unappealing looking that maybe Maria did him a favor by putting him out of his misery.

I saw from his schedule that we were the last stop on his daily route, marked in for 5:00 pm on the dot, so you have to consider the day's worth of sweat and BO that festered in his cracks and crevices. Now, add that to the load of shit in his pants, and you've got a funk to contend with. The smell was so bad that I

had to do it in brief spurts, taking a prolonged break between each to suck in some fresh air. In the end, I couldn't bear to dismember him like I originally planned, so I wrapped him in the throw rug from the study and put him in the upstairs closet where we keep the off-season clothing.

I should tell you that he eventually woke up, too.

If you're wondering about Maria, I put her in the freezer. Besides the lights, it's the only thing in this damn panic shelter that works anymore.

I'm starting to worry about what I'm going to do about food. My stomach is already turning. It doesn't look good for me.

I'm sorry, I can't do this right now....

Talk to you later.