

10 Blocks Down pt 2

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The final part to the story Ten Blocks Down

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10 BLOCKS DOWN

PART II

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My heartbeat sped up and I rushed over to where she was, shoving the gun into my pocket. Tiffany moved away from me, apparently scared as I reached for her face.

“It’s okay baby,” I said, knowing that she must have been traumatized from whatever experience she had been through. I managed to get my hands on the tape around her head and pulled it free. Tiffany spit out a ball of duct tape that had been in her mouth.

What kind of fucking animals would do this, I thought, feeling myself getting angry.

“You need to let me the *fuck* out of here,” she screamed. “What the fuck *is* you doing?”

Yeah, whatever she had been through had been bad, that was without a doubt. My Tiffany never talked like that. She never cursed. It wasn’t in her nature.

“I’m not doing anything,” I told her, and flung my arms around her. I held her in an embrace, and told her that everything was okay, that I would get her out of this place. I said I wouldn’t let anyone hurt her.

But she only looked at me as I went to work removing the tape that bound her wrists, her face twisted in confusion. Then Tiffany’s face left me the next second, like a handful of dust in a high wind, and the next face I saw was that of Melanie Jackson, looking at me with her brow scrunched in confusion. I don’t know what it was but this look irritated me.

“So you got the tape off,” I said. The flashing lights were still illuminating the interior of the building. I *needed* these cops to hurry up and leave so I could pop this girl and go. And they wouldn’t.

“I ought to kill you right now.”

“What the fuck did I do!” she screamed, and I pulled my gun from my pocket, and put it to her lips. When I did her eyes watered up and a tear streamed from the corner of one of them. More quietly she repeated, “*What did I do.*”

I suppose at that moment I could’ve just put the tape back over her mouth and not have answered her question. But it seemed like there was going to be time to kill. I had a feeling that the cops were going to be out there for awhile—one of their own had been shot after all—and by what I could hear it sounded like a crowd had gathered as well.

Shit, I thought. *I hope no dumbasses try to come up in here.*

“Why’d you bring me here, granddad?”

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Amazing, I thought, and chuckled. I had a gun pressed to this girl's face and she was still calling me granddad, like there was the possibility I could take her out for ice cream after all of this.

“You had a man,” I said, taking the gun away from her face. I sat down and crossed my legs, figuring she couldn't go anywhere being bound as she was. “White dude by the name of Thomason?”

A few expressions flashed almost instantaneously over her young, brown face—recognition, confusion, then fear—and disappeared a moment later.

“What about him,” she asked, her voice shaky.

“He was popped in an alley a couple of weeks ago, not by you, I know. So you don't even need to try to explain where you were at the time and everything. I know you weren't there. But—I put up a finger as if stopping her from saying something, “I got reason to believe you set it up.”

“Really,” she said, purely irritated, now. “So some nigga tells you some bullshit and you just come along and kill whoever they tell you. That's why you here, to kill me—granddad.”

“Don't call me that,” I said. “Really, don't. It's not going to help you with this.” I pointed toward the window with the gun, toward the source lighting up the warehouse. “That's the only reason you ain't dead right now cutie. I'd be done and on my way home.”

“I'm twenty-two bitch,” she spat, her face a rictus of utter, flushed rage. “You're really going to just kill some twenty-two year old bitch because some crusty old nigga told you to!”

I remained calm. “You don't know who's been telling me what, okay pretty thing, so why don't you just keep your ghetto mouth shut.”

For the first time she seemed to notice the flashing lights outside, her eyes widening

“See,” I said, smiling, pointing the gun back at her. “If you want you can scream—really you can—and I *will* go to jail Melanie, if that's what you want. But I promise to put five in you real quick, before they come bursting in here. So with that, I leave the decision up to you.”

“*Bitch!*”

“Keep your voice down girl. Not about to have a girl almost a third my age act like she run shit around here.”

“You don't run shit nigga! I could tell you ain't even from here! You run nothing! Too fucking fat to even run your fat ass up the block if I sent my niggas after you!”

I leaned forward and she leaned back slightly. “I have a question for you,” I said, my eyebrows arched. “Where are your niggas now?”

“I told your dumbass,” she said. “Coming to the bar, before you—”

“Tell me,” I interjected, anger seeping into my voice. “You think each generation just gets stupider and stupider. It's a rhetorical question bitch. When I ask *where your boys are at*, the fact is they ain't here *now*. Because right now, *now* is all that matters.”

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“ Fuck you,” she shouted, then snorted up phlegm and spit on me. It was warm, sticky, splashed right eye. I wiped it from my face, with the back of one hand, and leaned forward and wiped it into her hair. She struggled against me, but there was little she could do. I had bound her good. A stream of curses flooded from her mouth, some of the worst kind of language, and I slapped her once in the face.

“ Stop making noise,” I told her, grabbing a lock of her pretty hair and pulling it down toward me. It was natural, like my wife Tiffany’s had been. That was definitely a plus in Melanie’s favor.

She screamed.

I slapped her with an open palm again. “ You just keep your mouth shut, okay? You’re not helping yourself.”

“ And tell me something . How am I going to help myself if you planning to kill me anyway, huh? You punk faggot ass bitch nigga! Tell me how the fuck I’m supposed to help myself?”

I let the curses go. Smiling, I said, “ Talk to me Melanie. Tell me about yourself. We got a little bit of time before these cops are going to be out of here. Impress me with something.”

I wanted to keep her mind occupied, which was something I just recently realized I wanted to do, seeing how she was getting more cranked up by the second. This would be easier if I kept her mind off the fact that I was going to shoot her the second those lights went out.

I suddenly thought of my pills for my dementia, and realized I had forgotten to take my dosage before I came out here. My last dosage had been a couple of hours after I had first arrived at the hotel, preceding my bar visit, preceding my first meeting with Melanie. I needed to go out to my car to get them.

“ Think of something creative,” I told Melanie, having to use some considerable effort to get back to my feet. I was half breathless when I did. I stepped out of the warehouse, and saw a line of people—the part not cut off by the building I was in—staring in the direction of the police. I moved quickly, went into my car and straight into the duffel bag. The gun back in my pocket, once again, I searched the contents of the bag frantically, afraid that my mind would relapse at any second. Though I couldn’t be sure, there was an underlying fear that it had already happened. What had I done during that time, I wondered. What had I said? No problem, I was going to solve that problem real quick.

The problem was that the pills weren’t in my bag. The problem was, they weren’t anywhere in my goddamn vehicle. I cursed quietly, got out of the car, and snuck back into the warehouse.

Melanie, unsurprisingly, was working at her binds, this time chewing at the tape on her wrists. I pointed the gun at her as I entered, ordering her to stop. She’d torn an inch long gash into the tape, impressive work for the short time I was gone, but nothing more. If I had taken thirty seconds longer she might have made real progress.

All right, I told myself, sitting back down in front of her. Keep your mind together man.

“ Okay,” I said. “ Why don’t you go ahead and tell me your story with all of this? Tell me how you came to be here, and I’ll see what I can do for you.” Of course the only thing I planned to do for her was take her life. Nothing more, nothing less. But I let her speak, and did my best to look interested.

I could see Melanie doing her best to keep herself calm, though she was on the verge of panic. I only smiled patiently, sitting with my knees up, and my arms wrapped around them, the gun in one hand.

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â All that shit granddad, all of that is much more complicated than you think.â

â Complicated. That seems like a big word for you girl.â

â Fuck you!â

â Go on.â

â I had nothing to do with him getting killed. Yeah, we was fighting. But what couple doesnâ t fight? You know that kind of thing always happens.â

â All I know is youâ re my job. And someone died that was connected, and your boys were the ones that killed him. The reason you killed him I donâ t know. But Iâ ll tell you one thing, youâ re not going to do yourself any favors by not telling the truth. Come on girl, no bullshit.â I winked at her though I wasnâ t sure she could see it. â Tell me what happened.â

There was silence. The blue and red flashing lights from outside proceeded to bounce off the warehouse walls. I looked at my gun, checking the cylinder to make sure it was loaded.

â Like I said, granddad, itâ s complicated.â

â Doesnâ t mean, I wonâ t understand.â

â He was hitting me.â

â Whatâ s complicated about that?â

â Wait a second. That make no sense at all! If yâ all know it was some niggas that did this than why are you coming after me?â

â You ordered the hit. Word was it was a number of dudes who were at the site. Weâ re not trying to have a war.â

Melanie gave a quick angry sigh. â Iâ m fucking twenty-two! You just going to take me out like that?â

â Damn skippy, baby girl.â

â He was hitting me!â Melanie screamed, her arms tensed within her binds. I wouldâ ve tried to shut her up but I doubted with all the noise from outside anyone had heard her. â Every other night. Black eyes, bruised cheekbones. Canâ t hardly eat no food because my jaw was broken one time!â She started to cry again. â He made me limp before, busted my shin with a freaking golf club like it was joke! I was never going to plan to kill him! My boys hinted, and I accepted.â

â What do you mean your boys hinted?â

â They hinted that theyâ d be willing to deal with him for me. And I accepted. I felt trapped. He said if I filed any charges heâ d kill me.â

I scoffed. â Really? A white boy was doing this to you! In a hood full of niggas!â

â Yes, in a hood full of niggasâ nigga!â

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I chuckled, unable to help myself. "I mean, I don't get it. How does that shit even happen?"

"He wasn't some square, *granddaaaaaaad!* Something about the way she stretched the word 'granddad' bothered me, but I didn't say so. I let her continue speaking. Tried to keep my mind from slipping off. He was fucking Russian."

I nodded, winked again. "Yeah, and hint, hint, he's connected. I put my gun down mockingly on the floor in front of her, loving the ability to present such a tease. Tell me something, I went on. Didn't a siren go off in your head or something? Tell you this wasn't right?"

"He didn't have an accent."

"He doesn't need to have an accent for you to know that something's wrong. That's the problem with you young people these days. You just don't see things."

"See things? Do you see what you doing? Huh? Do you? Do you see that what you're doing is wrong? Does your old ass see that you're not going to get away with this?"

"I bet I do."

"I bet you don't *BITCH!*" she growled, spit flying from her mouth, a single vein prominent in the center of her temple. A brief flash of red light allowed me to notice this.

I snickered, spinning my gun before me. "You so mad baby girl. Tell me why you so mad."

I knew that I was upsetting her, but I figured I had the right to at least a little bit of fun, before the cops hit the road and this pretty thing made her way on up to heaven. I watched Melanie calm herself down, then glanced toward the window. There was nothing I could see from this angle, but I couldn't help myself. I really needed those lights to fade.

"You're old," Melanie said. "How do you think God's going to look at what you're doing?"

"We are the God's of our own lives," I answered.

"That's blasphemy!"

"Why? Just because you say so?"

A pause. Then Melanie gave an angry chuckle. For the longest time then she just leered at me, her eyes strangely haunting. My wife could give the same kind of look when she was mad.

"So..." Melanie said. "Who's Tiffany?"

The question hit me like a brick. How the hell did she know anything about Tiffany? I hoped that I didn't show any sign of surprise on my face when she'd first asked, but I thought that it may have been too late. The question had come completely from left field.

"What," I said to her, feeling myself getting angry.

"Tiffany's a girl you're with, huh? You made me talk. Why don't you tell me about Tiffany?"

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“ See you young,” I said, pointing my gun again. “ You don’t know what the *fuck* you’re saying.” I paused. “ How the fuck do you know about Tiffany?”

“ Fuck you granddad!”

I got up as quick as my old body would let me—which wasn’t very quick at all—and leapt on her, taking her to the floor. I pressed the gun to her head.

“ Swear to God girl, I give a fuck about your age. You tell me how you know about Tiffany, or I’ll cut this shit short, I swear I will!”

“ You called me by her name crazy! You freaking mental psyche ward asshole! You called me by her name!”

I moved slowly off Melanie, straightened her up back against the wall, and returned to my spot. She looked at me fuming, red and blue lights lighting up the tears that fell from her eyes.

“ Sorry,” I said.

Melanie said nothing. The only sound between us for the moment was the sound of her sobs, what I equated to the sound of utter hopelessness. And there we sat, for the next five minutes.

“ I’ll go ahead and tell you about my wife,” I said. “ Since we still here, and those cops are going to take their time out there. Is it just me or does everything work slower in Houston?”

Melanie said nothing. Though I no longer wore my sunglasses, I had to mostly depend on the sound of her breaths to know that she was crying at all. The tears, though visible, were hard for me to make out.

“ Tiffany was my wife of forty years ago. We got married back in ’72 and things were probably as good as they could be in a relationship. We didn’t make much money or anything like that, but we had each other, and that meant a lot. I had one kid with her. You see, we were only together for a few years, and every girl I’ve been with since, just hasn’t been the same. They had nothing on my Tiffany, no they didn’t. My life was meant to have that time with her, I believe.” I sighed. “ Word is she was carjacked coming home from work, which is weird because she didn’t even have the kind of car that would make you think she was a good person to carjack. She really didn’t.” I stopped talking for a moment, thinking about how the position I was in today stemmed from the end of my days with Tiffany.

“ She was shot once in the head,” I said, pointing to my temple with the barrel of the gun, then returning it to the floor in front of my crossed legs. “ Died instantly. Probably only took her for twenty dollars.”

I was now finished giving the short version of my history with Tiffany, and silence resumed once again, like a painfully hot day in Houston after a storm.

“ Did they ever find who killed her,” Melanie asked.

“ Yeah, they got him. It was just some nigga.”

More silence.

“ I’m sorry about that,” she said. “ Lost a boyfriend I had back in high school. He was shot by a stray bullet. Wasn’t even involved in a gang or nothing. I was depressed for the longest time. My whole

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family was worried about me. My mom and my dad.â

â Are your mom and dad in your life?â

â Yeah.â

â How do you end up here with your mom and your dad in your life? I donâ t get it. Are they still together?â

She nodded.

â You are fucking kidding me.â I stared incredulously at her, and after a moment or two surprised a smile out of her.

â Stop doing that,â she said. â Youâ re crazy.â

â Yeah, well your cityâ s a mess. Not crazy about that. Let you know that right now girl.â

â My city ainâ t that bad. Whatâ s so bad about it?â

I waved her off. â Donâ t want to get into that. People out here just seem to have no sense is all.â

â Thatâ s not everyone.â

The next couple of moments passed quietly, both of us sitting in our spots, thinking our own thoughts. At one point Melanie, still bound, looked around curiously, as if trying to figure out where she was. I picked my gun back up, and examined the cylinder, making sure that I had put bullets in. At the moment I was having trouble remembering. Five minutes later, after I had put the gun back down in front of me, I picked it back up and did it again.

â So am I on your good side,â Melanie said, after twenty or so minutes had passed.

I looked silently at her, and had to spend a moment trying to remember just who the heck she was. But the memory didnâ t fade completely, and when I recalled who she was I told her yes and smiled. She observed me for a moment, trying to figure out if I was telling her the truth.

â Good. You let me go and I promise I wonâ t try to get nobody on you or nothing.â She laughed then, to show that the statement was made in jest.

â Iâ m happy to hear that,â I said, grinning, my mind on my wife and how hearing about her death had devastated me, had seemed to rip my soul from my body.

â Maybe Iâ ll go back to that bar, find myself someone cute.â She chuckled. â You know?â

I noticed the lights outside finally starting to fade away, as I laughed at what had Melanie said, as if it was the cutest thing in the world.

When the lights had been gone for three full minutes, I returned the cell phone Iâ d been using to time the three minutes back into my pocket and stood slowly up, grabbing the pistol.

â Let me help you out of that tape girl.â

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She looked up at me as I approached her, her eyes lighting up, and extended her bound wrists toward me. For her, this might work out.

â Thanks grandâ â

I shot her twice in the head, the first sending a thick spray of blood out the back of her skull and briefly lifting her hair like the hem up a curtain in the wind, the second, aimed at a face that had been looking lifelessly up at me, tilted her head violently to the right. And there she remained, sitting against the wall, her head to the side like she was asleep.

I took a step back, that unsettling feeling of forgetfulness creeping around the back of my mind like an interloper at an upper class gathering. I needed my pills. There was no way around it. I had to get the hell out of here and get my motherfucking pills out the room, or this was going to eat me up.

But as I headed out the door, my mind started to blank, the sites that I had so recently become familiar with becoming less and less recognizable with each blink of my eyes. Each flicker of my mind. Then, once again, it all left me, and when it came back I was in a room that was new to me. At first I knew something was wrong, and I struggled to remember what I had just done. But even that level of awareness faded.

I looked around, a pistol that I didnâ t recognize in my right hand. But the touch was familiar, I was vaguely aware of that. The smell of the space, a dank smell intermixed with dust and the faded smoke of crack pipes struck my nose as if new.

â Okay,â I muttered to myself, looking up at the dark ceiling and the rest of the dim confines. I could barely see a damn thing. It was frustrating me.

The question that seemed the most obvious to me was how the hell I ended up here. How in the world? I should be at home with my wife. I should be home withâ

Then I noticed a body, sitting up against the wall. It scared me at first, and I thought my heart was going to stop. I strolled up to it, the gun that was unfamiliar to me pointed ahead. God my eyes sucked. Why the heck were my eyes messed up like this? It was blurry. Unclear.

Someone had been shot. It was obvious, I could smell the gun smoke. I felt my heartbeat speeding up. Actually, it wasnâ t just speeding up, it was hurting as well. It shortened my breath enough to force me to take a knee, a foot away from the body in front of me. It was in that position, being able to see the body from a particular angle, helped by a small slice of moonlight, which allowed me to see who it was, to see that it was Tiffany. It was my wife.

I tried to remember when Iâ d last seen her. For whatever reason it wouldnâ t come to me. A gasp escaped my throat. It was a gasp that sounded nothing like mine, one that sounded much older and rougher. But I didnâ t wonder why, instead I rushed at my wife in a panic, dropping the gun on the floor.

â Baby no!â I screamed, taking her limp body in my arms. The pain grew in my chest. It hurt worse than ever, but I didnâ t care. â No baby! No God! No no no! *NOOOOOOOOOO!*â

I shook with my baby in my arms, my sobs controlling my movements like some great spirit. My baby, the only true love I had ever known had been taken from me. Taken by some monster that I may never know or see.

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The sadness was forgotten briefly then, as rage enveloped me suddenly, and I hated everything, from the person who did this to the police that let it happen, and to God for allowing me to live to experience it. I hated all of them. Everything.

I screamed again, loud enough to painfully tear at the inside of my throat. More tears and snot came, running down my face as if from a broken faucet. Then I screamed another time, a long, wet, drawn out scream that could've awoken a city block. Two seconds later the door opened.

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â FREEZE!â

I heard the voice clearly. In my mind I was back in the seventies and all of a sudden cops didn't treat blacks the way that they did today. But I didn't let my baby go, I couldn't. She was all I had. This girl had been my life, she had been my everything.

Flashes of nights looking at each other across a modest wooden table, our noses over many different dishes cooked, all the smiles flashed and laughs enjoyed, ran through my mind. Thoughts of our first born flashed before me, seeing him arrive into the world amid pained groans from my wife as I clenched her moist hand by the hospital bed, the moment enjoyed after when she held our child, and the moment when I held our child, and when I kissed my wife softly on her sodden forehead to let her know that she'd done a good job. All the picnics, the movies, the walks on warm days, the talks to discipline our boy, the early death of our child by a drunk driver, the fact that my wife wasn't killed in a robbery and had shot herself, ran through like a film reel. Then my memory came back, if just for a couple of moments, as I reflected on my effort to hide this fact from everybodyâ the heartache, the anger, the strain on my body and mind, the career change in my early forties, all this ran through my head. And I saw that I wasn't holding my wife. I was holding Melanie.

The cops were on me then, my screams apparently drawing some officers who may have otherwise have passed by after the whole mess, or cops that may have been called by nearby residents. Their guns were drawn and my arms and T-shirt were sticky with Melanie's blood. Melanie's head hung like a sleeping baby.

One officer, wearing white gloves, snatched my wrist from Melanie and a second cop grabbed the other one. They forced me away from her and cuffed my hands behind my back.

â Why didn't you run asshole,â one cop hissed in my ear, his breath thick with the scent of dollar gas station coffee.

My memory blanked again, my eyes falling back on the body and seeing my wife. I screamed. The cops, buff and evidently pissed at a brother, tore me from the warehouse and shoved me against the warm hood of a cop car.

â What did I do,â I asked myself, as one cop slid his hand over my crotch, my spread pant legs, or anywhere I might have concealed a weapon. Then I said to the cops: â Did I do that to her?â

â That's up for the evidence to decide,â he said, then read me my rights.

I was taken to the police station after, a fresh crowd gathered near the alley where the cop car pulled out. The biggest question for cops, who quickly found out that I didn't live in Houston, was why? Why did I kill this girl? They couldn't find a motive. Sex was out of the question because there had been no evidence of intercourse. And I admitted nothing.

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Still, it was easy for the cops to charge me with a single count of murder. And years later, locked down in a prison cell, the memory of my wife continued to haunt me. More than that of the bad food, the bad inmates, and the treatment from the guards. And time and time again Iâd ask myself how things couldâve been different if I had just taken my pills. If I had slowed down and taken my goddamn dementia pills.

But the pills I take now, given by the head nurse in the infirmary, donât do much. They make Melanieâs face just a little bit clearer. Not clear enough though, seeing how I keep getting her mixed up. Itâs still hard for me to know who she is sometimes, Ms. Melanie Jackson, the girl that had called me granddad.

Every night, as I fall asleep on the hard fabric of the bottom bunk, I think about her. Even losing my mind, I donât feel regret though. At least I try to convince myself of that. I had done my job, and if I didnât someone else would have come along in my place. The thought is comforting. Still though, forgetting used to be easy. Now Iâm finding it hard to put Melanieâs death to the back of my mind like so many others. And day and night thatâs all Iâm really trying to do.

Because to this aging, shrinking mind, sheâs beginning to look more and more like my first wife, *every single day*.

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