

The equalizer

by Chris Miller

It all started with a middle finger. This is where the chain of events began in Benjamin's mind as his mouth filled with the metallic taste of blood and the crunch of broken glass rolled against his teeth.

The pickup followed much too closely, but Benjamin was too preoccupied to notice or even care.

The claustrophobic city commuter traffic slowed to a standstill and as Benjamin slammed on his brakes, the man in the pickup truck behind him grew more impatient, irate even. And if Benjamin were paying attention to his mirror, he would be unable to read the front plates on the truck, looming and weaving behind him like an angry steel gorilla.

All the guy in the truck could think about was getting to work so he could mindlessly plow through his miserable day, maybe slam a couple of beers at lunch to make the afternoon tolerable. All Benjamin could think about was his wife, who never came home last night, but rather than call the authorities and file a missing person report, he knew exactly where she was. If he were to wager on the matter, she's probably rolling over in bed right now to gaze longingly into the eyes of a man who once called him a friend.

On the off chance that she was home, she was only there in a physical sense. Her vacant stare and demeanor told Benjamin all he needed to know. But she usually wasn't home.

It was almost 8 a.m. and this red light was taking forever. Benjamin's body ached from sitting up all night ruminating over how exactly he would confront that cheating bitch and what he would say to her, but he wanted to wait until morning to contact her, so he could be sure that she would read it promptly.

He scripted a number of pithy put-downs in his head all night, but he was disappointed at the end result of a sleepless night of self-edits. He decided to settle on the phrase, "cheating bitch" and he typed with shaky hands, unaware that the light had changed to

green, along with the crush of anxious commuters behind his tiny fuel-efficient car.

A loud horn beeped behind him, between typing the words “cheating” and “bitch,” and Benjamin's train of thought was interrupted. A horn beeped again before he could even process the first outburst, this time at short choppy intervals, and in the same manner someone would use to swat away a fly, Benjamin lifted his middle finger in the air for anyone behind him who would take note. He kept staring at the phone, ready to finish the terse text and press send.

What happened next would occur within the span of time that was the length of precisely one green light, but Benjamin could recall the details with such precision, it could have lasted an hour.

He heard the grunt of the tall man before hearing his side window shatter, pelting his face like angry hail. Benjamin couldn't see the man's face, which was obscured by a baseball cap, only the crowbar that smacked the side window a second time. It knocked away another large section of glass.

Benjamin reached for the handgun in his glove compartment out of pure instinct. In order to obtain his concealed carry license, he completed a number of classes, which imparted to only use the weapon if absolute force was necessary. He called his gun “The Equalizer” and often joked about leveling his own playing field when faced with bullies in life, never even fathoming that he would be forced to use it.

He again heard the whoosh of the crowbar, this time against the windshield, which buckled and creaked like a tired, wounded animal. By this time the honking had stopped, replaced only by the screams of the tall man wielding the crowbar, which was conversely swung to the already broken side window making contact squarely with the side of Benjamin's face.

The impact practically threw him out of his seatbelt, and as the man reared back the crowbar like a batter, Benjamin realized absolute force was necessary. As effortless as the trigger was to pull,

so was the ease with which the bullets sank into the angry man's torso, throwing him back.

It sounded like nails being driven into soft slabs of meat. It was probably adrenaline taking over, but Benjamin fired at least three more shots, and time likely stood still for the line of commuters behind him. Dead silence. The light was still green and Benjamin drove away.

