

1 Crinkled Glass

The small girl never knew of the bullet that ended her life. She had, a moment earlier, run into the road. An uncontrolled shriek rang out and the girl slumped to the ground. A woman, probably in her mid twenties, ran from a doorway towards the body. She got halfway before spinning like a bad taste ballerina parody. She collapsed and emitted a pained groan. She crawled along the ground crying and calling after her daughter. She might have made it to her, blatantly dead, daughter before she died, but the jerky movement told any onlookers she had received several more bullets. She stopped moving and lost her blood to the street.

The bullet sounds continued. They had been non-stop for over fifty minutes. Crossing the street would have been unlikely even if the guns were not aimed at any potential street crossers.

Anne bowed her head and vomited. She had not meant to let it get to her, but the scene imprinted itself on her mind. She lost the pasta salad she had for lunch.

"You OK?" asked Dean.

"Yeah," she said, wiping her mouth. "Must have been the pasta. I thought it smelled a little off."

"Bad time to come down with food poisoning."

There was no reason for her to lie and no reason for him to back it up, but both maintained the conspiracy.

"How long before they're forced to make a move?" she asked.

"Could be days, we have no idea how much ammo and supplies they have. We'll have to make our move long before that."

"They obviously have enough Ammo to keep shooting."

"Yeah, I suspect they will run out of food long before they run out of bullets."

"Typical, just the right combination of insanity, ignorance and application and here we are to stop them killing everything in sight."

"Is that why we're here?" he said.

She looked at him as if this was not part of the conversation rules.

"We are here to clean up the mess and to prevent it getting worse."

"Whatever you say, but somehow I fail to see our importance here."

"What are you on about?" she asked.

"Well, who cares? If they want to kill each other, then let them. We don't care, not really. We look good. It gives us credit but we don't care. Most of them will get the death penalty anyway. Let them kill each other. Then we can go in and pick up the pieces, literally."

"What is up with you? You're talking like someone I don't know."

"Anne, I have been doing this for years, lots of years. I've sat here behind the barricades and waited for maniacs to kill each other, and potentially me, for what is amounting to decades, and for what? Tomorrow, another group of lunatics comes along and we sit here yet again."

"There are women and children in that fortress?" she said.

"Those are women and children who chose to be there and who are part of it. Anyway, what does it matter? Half die, more if they decide on suicide and the rest are either messed up because of it, or re-enact it a few years later, if they somehow get off. What is the point?"

"We save lives."

"No Anne, we look like we save lives."

"Dean, you sound like someone else."

"I sound like a man who has been called up to witness insane maniacs killing people. I'm only here for the show. The show, where those in charge are actually doing something. Who cares? Let them kill each other."

"You saw the girl, the mother?"

"I saw and you know what, there was nothing I could do. Tragic, but it happens."

"Dean, this is serious. You either need to get yourself together or get out, and I mean now."

"Why don't we just bomb them? We want them all dead anyway? Although, then we would not have the glory of picking up kills. That's what it all boils down to, a constant façade of statistics."

"Damn you Dean, stop this or I am calling you in."

"Call me in then, go on?"

"I'm not kidding Dean."

"Ten years of this, on this force, seven on the Anti-Terrorism squad and six before that in another squad. That is twenty-three years as a killer, as a creature that sits here waiting, then goes in and kills anything that might be a threat. I am thirty-eight, Thirty-eight and I have been doing this twenty-three years. There are people that go to college, go to learn things until they are twenty, more even. There are people that have lives and not a career from childhood. Those maniacs out there are fighting for something, I have no idea what that might be, but something. Do we listen? Do we care? No, it means nothing to us. They are fighting for something in which they must believe. Otherwise, they would not be willing to die. What do I believe in, eh? Whatever I'm told."

"Dean, I'm not going to warn you again."

“Anne, you threw up after the girl and mother got killed, I felt nothing. There was a sense of pity it happened, but not really feeling. I don’t care who lives and who dies. You could die now, blown into pieces. Your blood, brains and guts would shower me and you know what I would do? Do you now how I would react? I would get cover, clear my eyes, check my gun was functioning, check hearing and then go on the offensive. If there were an offender, I would kill them. I would take whatever lives opposed me, no problem at all. And it would be more kills for my total. We are players in a game of killing. Somehow, it now seems ridiculous. We are ridiculous.”

“Dean.”

“What? How old are you, sixteen?”

“Seventeen.”

“You say it like it matters. How many kills?”

“Thirty-five direct and twenty-five indirect,” she said.

“You are seventeen years old and you have killed thirty-five other human beings. You have killed thirty-five and are still sick at the gunning down of a small girl. What does that tell you about us?”

“We are made like this. We are peacekeepers. We have been genetically modified and augmented with specialised parts to be able to have these abilities. It is better us than normal people.”

“That sounds like the official rhetoric I know so well. Tell me what happens. You call me in and I get a psyche evaluation. If I am lucky, I get out doing more of this, with a flag, supervised and reported. I have done it myself. If I am unlucky I get retired.”

“Retirement is good,” she said.

“You don’t understand what it is.”

“Retirement, you get the added parts removed, surgery and returned home.”

“Do you actually believe that?”

“Of course.”

“I stopped that belief when I was thirty-one. I realised how impossible it was. They are meant to take out the wires in the brain. You see heads getting blown apart in all different ways. I know the anatomy of the body, including the head. Because of this, I know our heads have lots of wires in them. There are chips, boards and, well, it is a fully integrated organic and inorganic computer, separating them is impossible.”

“What are you on about?”

“It is impossible, there is no way. The heart is encased, the lungs are virtually artificial. There is no way they can take the parts out.”

“Dean, they have medical science.”

“The clincher was when I met a guy I knew. I guess it was a mistake by those in charge, but I met this guy. Then again, I have met many people. He was one of the nutty types, you know, the fodder type. They run in there, into the danger stuff. Thing is, I met him before, I met him and he was sick of it. He was angry about everything we do and wanted to quit. Someone called him in and then I met him later, as a fully-fledged member of the fodder squad. He died, blasted to pieces.”

“Dean, the guy lost it, he went a bit loopy. That’s what happens to the fodder squad.”

“That’s what I told myself. I said, ‘Yeah, he was talking about getting out, but he went a bit gung-ho crazy and that explains it.’ I suppose it does, in a way, but I believe that once we go, once we’re ready for retirement, we get a one way trip to the fodder squad.”

“They don’t make people join the fodder squad.”

“They always seem to be a bit older, don’t you agree.”

“That’s what happens, they go a bit loopy.”

“It’s easy not to see it for what it is, but you cannot be blind forever. We do not retire. I have never met a retired person, have you? Of course you haven’t. If I haven’t, in all my experience, then you won’t.”

“Dean, are you here for this or am I calling you in right now?”

“As opposed to calling me in later?”

“You’re talking crazy. You’re a liability.”

“Thirty-five Direct Kills? I had eleven-hundred and fifteen when I lost interest in counting a few years ago. I spent a lot of effort to get to one-thousand. I am in the top ten of all time. Then again, you know this because that’s why you wanted to team up with me. Get into the real action at an early age.”

“You are a legend, which is why I’m giving you the chance to prove you have not lost it.”

“Well gee thanks.”

“Dean, what is wrong. You are a great, a legend. Only five people have more Direct Kills, only two have more Indirect. Only Walker is still in operation. Why go soft?”

He started to laugh.

“What?” she asked.

He fought his laughter and became serious.

“Soft, you think this is soft. What I am is sick. I’m sick of it. I kill. I do not ask questions. I have killed over a thousand human beings in my time. I have assisted in four times that. I am sick of it. I am a genetically modified cyborg that kills every week or so. I kill, I am made to kill. I am programmed to kill and when it is over and I get to an age where I get tired or sick, I will rush into battle as fodder. That scenario does not make me happy. I just want to let it go.”

I have killed too many people to take pride in it any more. Each one was a real breathing human being. Do you understand that, a real human being?"

"Dean, I'm calling you in?"

"Anne, you can't, the people inside the fortress have outposts. The child died with too sickening an accuracy for them not to have outposts. They also have comm-link tracker facilities, they always do. There would be a serious danger of exposing this whole operation if you call me in now. You have no choice. For the time being we have to maintain comm silence, otherwise they will pick up the signal and blast you before you manage two words."

She briefly thought on this.

"OK, but as soon as we're finished, I'm going to call you in."

"None of what I have said has meant anything, has it?" he asked. "I thought it might. I hoped it would."

"You're talking crazy. What do you want to do, eh? What would be your idea for the situation? Talk to the people in there? Ask them to stop this nonsense?"

"In theory, why not? In theory, I don't see a problem with that tactic. It's not as if we ever try that sort of policy. Yet this idea is supposedly naive. The people in there might have a point. Yet, by now, because we haven't spoken to them, they are so wound up they're not going to listen anymore. They have got to the stage where they're ready to die for their beliefs. No, you are probably right. By now there's no way. No matter how I might wish it, they are not going to talk to cyborg killing machines are they?"

"Well what do you want?"

"Leave them to it. Evacuate as much as we can and let them do what they want. If they want to talk, let them. If they want to kill themselves, let them. If they want to stay in there for weeks, let them. Let them do whatever they want. In the end, the difference is minimal. They will probably die."

"Crazy, absolutely crazy. You really are a crazy man."

"Given your point of view, I don't actually see that as a bad accusation. I see nothing I have said is going to matter to you. We are going to kill them. You know this, I know this and I am pretty sure they know this. In the very near future, orders will come and tell us to get into position for some form of assault. Then it's a case of target practice."

"Soon as this is over, I'm calling you in."

"Assuming you are still alive. If I am so crazy I might get you killed."

She looked at him as if seriously considering this. This was the first time she appeared to have seriously considered anything he had said.

"It is more likely I will kill myself though, isn't it?" he stated, showing her a wry smile.

"You have to be on the ball when we go in there," she said.

"Either of us might die. Do you know how many partners I have had? How many squads I have been in? Fact is, you probably do, but the answer I'm thinking of is not the precise figure thrown up by the stats. My answer is, 'too much'. I have twice been the sole survivor in a platoon. Do you really think that looked particularly dangerous before we went in? If it had, we would have made provisions and not been wiped out. That is one of the things about this life - this job. I suppose it is one of the thrills. We never know when it will end. Will it be easy and routine or one of those times we are cornered and wonder if we're going to make it through the next ten seconds? You're lucky enough not to have lived through one of those nightmare experiences yet, those times when there is only luck between you and the grim reaper. You were sick at the sight of the girl and her mother. You have no comprehension of the times when you realise it could be seconds before you die. There are times when if you don't manage to make the right decision now, it will be certain death, not in a minute or two, but now. You have no idea if you have what it takes to live or die when the other person is as good as you. You do not understand what it's like to have been a peacekeeper for over twenty years because you've not even lived that long."

"Dean, I am grade A, special Gold Award Winner, four times. I hold records in marksmanship at the academy. I have technology implanted into my body that makes yours look like clockwork toys. I am genetically modified to the extent that you look like a chimp. I am a superior peacekeeper and killer to you. I outscore your psyche, accuracy, mobility, reactions, stress and logic tests. I am virtually superior to you in every aspect. The only thing you hold over me is experience and since my database holds three hundred times what yours does, then that doesn't count for much. I have every single one of your missions in my head and I can predict your next move with ninety-seven percent accuracy. I am more advanced than you. I hate to put this on you, but I am. So less of that, 'I have been a peacekeeper longer than you have lived' nonsense. I am here and the augmentation I have makes me as experienced as you and then some. So cut it, OK. You're the liability in this partnership and I'm determined you won't get me killed. Today: I watch your back. Tonight: I call you in."

'Code-green-amber-green,' flashed into both their heads. They knew what it meant and they knew what to do.

"Time to go," she said.

"Yes, it definitely is."

They got into position. They waited for the explosion to start off the manoeuvre.

"Anne, I understand. We all have to do what we have to do."

"Glad you see it like that."

The explosion went off. She moved first. They started to fire. She was supposedly watching his back. He followed her around the side. They would use stun grenades, tear gas and make sure the left rear corner was secure until a code blue. Simple as that.

With IR on the, dazed by the blast, figures that stumbled around were easy targets. They took out three apiece. Unknown to Dean, he became only the sixth peacekeeper in history to cross the fifteen-hundred mark.

Anne thought about her partner and how he seemed to have lost it. She briefly thought about her safety, but their guns were designed not to fire on each other during the mission, it was a safety feature. She also believed Dean was such a professional that he would not compromise her. Regardless of this, she watched him as closely as she could.

She felt she hardly needed Dean anyway. He might be a legend, and she had noted the fifteen hundred mark, but he was old and so completely of the old school. He probably wouldn't last long anyway. She believed she was doing him a favour by calling him in.

They moved to their right, exposing the avenue to their sight line. They did so with efficiency that was admirable. She thought again about Dean. They seemed to work quite well together. They could have had a good couple of years as partners. Then she would most likely be ready for the big time, ready to lead her own partner, troop even. Despite the intense situation, this amused her. However, it annoyed her that Dean was going soft already and so she would be assigned another, more experienced, partner before she was ready for promotion.

She fired repeatedly. She moved ahead of Dean on kills for the day. It was a first. They had been together four months and she had never been ahead. This, she believed, was because he always took the lead role, as was his right as senior partner. Now she was two ahead. She was close to forty kills, forty Direct Kills. The thought of it thrilled her.

Dean fired and missed. She took over and took the offender out – forty. She almost let out an excited laugh but retained her calm. Dean was getting old. It was obvious she was the new star. The pupil was becoming the master. It was still possible she might get an equal partner, especially outperforming Dean here and then turning him in. That would be something.

He blew the wall and then fired, but he missed again. He was useless. She took care of them.

Then it was temporarily over. They now had to wait for a code blue. It was only the hard core enemy still in there. Well-aimed tear gas would bring them out and if they did not hold up the white flags, it was target practice. It was the perfect time to increase that score. She could get close to fifty if they scurried conveniently into her path. Her kills total for the day was already her highest in single combat.

Some shots randomly sprayed out from the enemy, showing some were still in range.

Code-blue-yellow-cyan - an explosion was due any second and then it was positions for target practice. She smiled, killing was fun, it just was.

Dean moved, he was getting into position, but it was out the way. She smiled again. He was soft, it was almost sad to see. Still, new blood was necessary.

She would remember Dean. One day, in the future, when she overtook his total, she would remember him. Her ambition was to be the greatest killer ever and Dean Coleridge she simply knew she would surpass. On that day, however, she would remember this time, the four months together and this last day. She would say some nice words about her old partner, before he lost it, and pay respect as she overtook him towards legendary status.

The small clunk beside her was strange. She had no idea what it was. She looked. She had an immediate recognition but no comprehension. It was the comm-link and it was on. She looked to Dean. He bowed his head at her. He could not bring himself to watch. She suddenly understood. She would be targeted by the open link.

She lifted her rifle to Dean. Of course it would not have fired on him, even if she had managed to pull the trigger. She realised her fate, but could not grasp her destiny, as she saw it, was never going to transpire.

She only felt it briefly and it was not exactly pain. She never had time to register pain, just something and then it was over.

Dean fired a portable rocket at the direction of the vaporiser beam. He hit. He invariably did. He was good. He rolled into what was left of her and took out the other four dazed by his rocket strike. He passed her daily total and waited.

The main explosion went off. He wanted them to hold up white flags but instead they ran out shooting. It did not matter, they were most likely to rot in prison or be executed anyway.

He waited, no point giving himself away too early. They ran in his direction but perhaps they would still surrender or go somewhere else. No, they continued toward him and firing. He took his time and fired back.

The total for the day was twenty-five, that was good, very good, even for him.

As the dust literally settled he looked at the remains of Anne, there was not much, it was mostly red mess and mangled circuitry. He shook his head.

Moments later Lieutenant Marshals arrived at the scene and looked at the mess.

“Anne?” said Marshals.

Dean nodded.

“Rookies, eh?” said Marshals.

“Oh, she had a whole year of experience.”

“Will they ever learn?”

“Probably not,” said Dean and they walked back to camp together.

2 Droplets of Blue

Dean walked into the shuttle. He was tired and weary, but not physically. It had been an easy day with little risk and lots of glory. He had scored well. He had reached a landmark. His fellow killers congratulated him. Every time he was slapped on the back he nodded, smiled and took whatever the plaudits were, expressing gratitude and humility.

"Nice one Dean", "Great day, eh?", "Some tally today," "The legend grows, eh, the legend grows."

In the last year or two, comrades had started to call Dean a legend. It was not something with which he was vastly comfortable. He had heard of legends in the past, the great generals, thinkers and doers, but he could not quite grasp the reality he was getting the same tag. The thing that made it more unbelievable was that this was not false adulation. It was not a label that was merely a label and nothing more. This was a title given to him by people he respected, possibly not liked but respected.

The biggest problem he had with the label was that he hated his job. He hated what he did. Dean had become a legend at something he had grown to detest. He had expressed his feelings to his last partner and she had reacted as he himself would have reacted not that long ago. He had to deal with her. It made him feel even more worthless and less like that legend. He got to his seat. Another hand patted him on the shoulder.

"Great work Coleridge, fifteen hundred, man that's just amazing," said the hand owner.

He nodded and smiled again. The hand owner left him and he closed his eyes. He wanted to affect the look of sleep, although sleep was unlikely while the endorphins and adrenaline still pulsed through his body, those same endorphins and adrenaline the circuits of his brain had pushed into him through the genetically modified glands. Of course his body was now rapidly breaking down those chemicals and washing them away, but it would take a while. He breathed deeply. He just wanted to get back to base.

The shuttle roared into action. He felt the vibration of the craft lifting off and despite himself, looked to his left to the second seat in the two-seat arrangement. The empty seat held little emotion for him. He had seen too many partners die to have any feelings about such tragedy anymore. If he felt anything then it was pity, pity for her overestimation of herself.

His enhanced body was now well into breaking down the stimulants that had been pushed into his bloodstream and he was starting to feel relaxed, sleepy even. He closed his eyes once more and thought about the day he had experienced.

"Right peacekeepers, some announcements," said a loud and hard voice.

Dean looked up, he didn't have to, he knew it was General Sean Byron. The General looked to the crew and waited for them to give him their full attention.

"Right ladies and gentlemen," he said, "We have had a good day. Intelligence reports that the enemy was the Campaign for Human Democracy. Now, I don't have to explain how good it was to get one over on the CHD, even to the greenest of you. This was a major coup for us. This was a biggie. There were well over one hundred of them were in there. The initial inspection suggests there were several major figures in that building today. This is a potentially major development and we have been at the very core of history. My hat is off to all you peacekeepers, a good job well done."

"Whoop," said a voice, this was followed by the usual sounds that showed people were applauding themselves.

Dean smiled a raw smile. He had heard it all before. Every now and then the event would be a major coup, or a strategically important development. No battle had ever been a complete waste of time, not officially. The whoops of self-adulation had started to annoy Dean almost a year ago and by now he had to fight his rage.

"Right, on the personnel front, we lost six. This, coupled with twelve civilian casualties, means it was not a great day, in that respect. I think we should take a moment to honour the people who lost their lives today: Buckley – Means – Crenshaw – Parker – Woods – Robertson."

There was a minute of silence, everyone held their heads bowed. Dean looked sideways at the seat beside him. He tried to feel something, but all he could feel was glad she was not there to talk to him on the way back.

"They did a good job and were unlucky. We salute them," said Byron.

"Hear, hear," said one of the crew.

"Amen," said another few.

"They will, of course, be honoured in the traditional way back at base. Anyway, for those who have fallen, they did so in the knowledge they did so for freedom, democracy and liberty."

"Damn right."

"Yeah," said the crew.

Dean had to stop himself sneering. Of course he held himself back. He was too in control.

"Right, despite the tragedy of the casualties, we have some special news, not just on the military tactical front of freeing the innocent, which as you all know is vitally important for democracy."

"Yeah."

"Right on."

"Damn right."

"No, what I am talking about is a wonderful achievement in this hell we call freedom fighting. We have a guy that today killed close to a quarter of all enemy. At twenty-five kills in one siege, we are usually talking career high figures, but this tally only ranks a mere sixth on his all-time high score chart. However, despite the low rank on his personal tally, it does make him the sixth person in history to get over fifteen hundred kills. Fifteen hundred Direct

Kills, fifteen hundred. You know what that means. If you could kill one hundred a year, one hundred a year, it would still take you fifteen years and need I remind you that of the seven people to get the hundred in one year, the person I am talking about is actually one of them. Despite the extra years in Anti-Terrorism, and we all know the lower kill rate that gives, he still has, this very day, made over fifteen hundred. He is now less than two hundred from making his way into the top five of all-time. So now, right now, I would like you to all give a big hand for the man with more kills than most of you combined. With one thousand, five hundred and twenty two kills. The one, the only, Captain Dean Coleridge.”

The crew stood up, they whooped and cheered. Most were jealous. Most wanted his title and Dean knew it. Most wanted what he had. They respected him, but not in the way they would tell him, or even each other. He stood, raised his hand in the air and turned around, smiling, taking in the moment. It was one of those times that people remember. He had it every hundred after a thousand. However, this was special. This was a figure he would have done anything for only a few years earlier. It was a figure he had done almost anything for. He remembered one thousand. It was reaching the level, he was with the elite. At the time, less than ten had ever made one-thousand Direct Kills. He had seen one when he was on the two-fifty mark. It was a joint operation in Special Forces and they all cheered the millennium man. Dean was convinced he would one day get that honour. After years of service, when he made it he loved it. Then he found that somehow things were not quite so great. He was endlessly marching onwards when small things happened, things that made him think, actually think, about what he was doing. Those small things mounted up and his brain started to consider his life and occupation. Slowly he came to hate his job and life.

Now he stood, waved and smiled. The crowd gradually sat down. He knew he was required to give a speech. He hated doing this, but he had no choice. Despite being a trained killer, had kills in excess of fifteen hundred people, his body engineered and modified to be a killing machine, despite all this, he was still forced to make the speech.

“Comrades in arms. My brother and sisters. I have over fifteen hundred kills.”

“Whoopee,” said a voice.

“I am stunned to be completely honest. I made a thousand and was amazed. I was there, you all know what I mean, and it was great, it was something just amazing. I was of the elite.”

“Damn right.”

“Twelve fifty, I was like, wow, this is fantastic, but this, this is just so unbelievable. What can I say, I don’t believe it.”

“Fifteen hundred and counting.” Dean smiled.

“Yes, fifteen hundred and counting, which is nice for me but, as I stand here, the person I should be congratulating on my day, the person I should be praising for making this day a twenty plus day for me, is not here. The person would have been a large share of that twenty plus. That person, Anne Woods, is gone. My partner, a person who helped me get so many kills, is not here any more and somehow this great achievement is tainted. I am sorry guys. This is a great day and there are usually some casualties and I usually take the plaudits, but Anne, my partner, is not here to share it and that gets me. Buckley, Means, Crenshaw, Parker and Robertson, they too all died today.”

Dean stopped. He knew he was starting to possibly sound weak and weakness would not be tolerated, no matter how much he emphasised his dead partner and no matter who he was. His audience were not civvies. These were hard core killers. Despite wanting to shout at them that they were insane and the killing was at best pointless, he could not show weakness. He nodded his head rhythmically. He had to give what they wanted.

“Did you hear? Buckley, Means, Crenshaw, Parker, Robertson and my partner, Anne Woods. They are dead because of that scum today. It makes my blood boil. It makes me mad. Fifteen hundred I have and I got twenty-five today. You know how many I let go because they had the white flags. You know how I could not avenge my partner because they were waving the stupid little handkerchiefs. ‘Oh I give up,’ they say. It makes me sick. I could have had thirty plus.

“Today, my score, my triumph, of over fifteen hundred, I dedicate that to you Anne, and when I get to two thou, I will dedicate that to you as well. You would think, after getting to fifteen hundred, I would want to celebrate, but I’m just annoyed at that scum.”

“Right on.”

“I tell you, maybe you think getting fifteen-hundred would make me want to party, but all I want to do is go out and get me some more stats. Keats, I’m closing in on you and I can’t wait. Bring them on. Bring them all on.”

He lifted his fist in the air and started to punch upwards.

“Bring ‘em all on.”

The peacekeepers stood and joined in. After several seconds the whole shuttle was stamping and punching the air, shouting the same cry.

After the testosterone bonding they sat down again. Dean sat and stared ahead with fists clenched and jaw firm. He looked the embodiment of what he had preached. He was not betraying his thoughts.

He had to stop doing this. He could take no more. He had to find a way out. He knew that no matter what, he had to get out. He was sick of killing. He was sick of the bloodlust. He was simply sick of almost everything in his life. He wanted to see something grow, he wanted to see people smile at beauty, he wanted to see happy faces but most of all, he had to stop seeing the life he had created for himself, for which he had been created. There were dire consequences for anyone going AWOL. Desertion was punishable by death and there was no way they were going to let someone like him go easily. He knew what they would do to him. They would make an example of him. However,

whatever they could do and whatever they threatened was not an adequate deterrent anymore. Dean was getting out. There was no question. He could not take it any longer.