

8 The Hospital

Friday night, July 4, 2003

While Tato and Katiana watched Christy at Bird's house in the hills, Bird and I went directly to the hospital with the cargo of precious life, formerly known as Dan. Indeed, we were transporting what was previously the life of Dan, the love of Christy's life, the robbing hoodlum of Studio City. What a contemptible prick this guy was. This one is legit. He deserved to burn. He deserved to be a donor in The Program — and Jim, at Cedar-Sinai, would be thrilled with the delivery. Thus continues the reallocation of assets amongst our fellow Angelenos.

James Dresden was the Assistant Administrator for the Santa Monica Critical Ward Facility off Bundy Ave. He had gone through med school along with me at the same time, and we have been close buddies ever since. Jim was bred from physician stock. His father was chief medical surgeon at Cedar-Sinai for 12 years, and had only recently stepped down from this demanding post to practice primarily out of his own private office in Brentwood. *Mrs. Dresden, Jim's mother, was an OB-GYN at the UCLA Medical Center for a number of years and had actually assisted as Audrey Hepburn was admitted in 1974 for emergency surgery dealing with what was an imminent miscarriage.* As Dominic and I near the hospital, I place a call to Jim's cell phone.

"Hello, this is Jim speaking."

"Jimmy, what's happening on your floor this bewitching evening, schedule-wise? You got any "battle gore" on deck? — got your hands in deep this evening?" I inquired. Surgeon-speak is commonplace between us staff, especially in the E.D., that's the Emergency Department. The E.R. has been upgraded to its own "department", which makes sense; it's at least on the level of any of the various other "departments" in this or any legitimate hospital.

"That's the only way they serve it around here. What's up Ethan? Hey, do you need to see me?" Jim glanced around the series of back offices and patient rooms in the bowels of the hospital, and ducked into a small, private office.

"That I do Dr. Dresden, and we're actually almost there, at the hospital. Can you get away right now?"

"Absolutely. I'll meet you there in 10 minutes."

"Perfect. Oh, what's up with that new guard?"

We would typically meet for these kind of "transactions" in the counseling wing, and would proceed together to the secured sector where we could store the delivery in a climate controlled freezer station. *The last time down*, we had difficulty with an unknown guard policing the sector. Charlie, the old-timer who had been around forever, had finally retired from his career as hospital Security Coordinator, and we were left with his replacement, Pete. Pete was just a little too zealous about his job. He was digging deep into our "activities" when Jim sent him to investigate a concocted issue that was supposedly happening on the 11th floor regarding a paralyzed patient who had witnessed a shooting and had gotten himself shot but didn't die. The perpetrators were supposedly seen on the 12th floor and the patient was in danger.

With that, Pete had hurried off, radio squawking out commands to his crew, and we stashed the large Nike sport bag that contained the organs in the freezer. The bag was black with all these mesh compartments

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inside, perfect for our purposes, because it was reasonably insulated, held the ice around the organs, and it looked innocuous enough.

“He’s not on duty tonight. It’s just the usual crew.”

“Great.” I wasn’t in the mood to deal with any nonsense. “See you downstairs.”

“Ten minutes.”

“Alright.”

The three of us met in a relatively empty corridor and filtered down a few halls and into the secured area where Jim swiped his security badge and we were admitted through a lock-down door. I could have used my badge, but the computer logon system tracks which codes open which doors and when and stores all of this information in a comprehensive data log. So it was just safer to have Jimmy swipe us in, in case some overzealous, desk jockeying, data snooping, Pete protégé makes a connection between my security breaches during off-hours and the coinciding and mysterious arrival of organs. Once inside, we were completely alone and free to discuss the delivery. Walking over to the table, I listed the organs we retrieved, and the condition they were each in. The donor was physically in good, clean shape, since he rarely put any drugs into his system. The donor, Dan, was a deal orchestrator, not a user.

We opened the bag and removed the individually wrapped organs, snug in their icy zip-locks. The list was thorough this time as there was no damage to the body below the neck. The going rate for a strong, healthy set of lungs was anywhere from one hundred thousand dollars to half a million – even a full cool million in some situations. It all depended on who was desperate and how much money they were willing to exchange for the right to use some of our “life”. Hearts were a standard \$400,000.00 each, a price that had been stable for a while. The lung transplant procedure is very new, and prices are still jumping around, searching for a common mean. At eighty thousand each, kidneys were actually some of the hottest items, in constant demand, and generally in low supply. Finally, the liver and the pancreas both brought in 50k, for an additional \$100,000. We tallied the group with a \$250,000 rate on the lungs, which totaled \$910,000 for the lot. Our deal was a third split each, which seemed fair to everybody. Dr. Dresdon needed us for the supply, and we needed him to facilitate the sale.

We moved the organs into the freezer and I dumped the ice in the large basin across from the freezers. Jim said we could expect the wire within three days. The total transfer would be twice the \$303,333 each, an unfortunately diabolic amount that he said he would gladly raise to an even \$610,000. Bird and I would each get a tidy \$305,000 for our efforts on this patriotic endeavor.

We all said goodbye and went home for the evening. We would deal with Christy tomorrow.

This was not, by any means, the first kill and recover effort. We had already left a veritable trail throughout the underworld of Los Angeles. A little less evil in the world, and someone will get to live because they will have the organ they need to survive — very easy to justify.

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