

**Carlo Gabriel Garcia**

**Submission #1**

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I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. --Luke x. 18.

I gotta get focused. My ears feel like they've been hit with a hammer, and when I look up at the sky I swear to the holy angel that this must have been how it looked like when Truman dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. Then I hear it, a voice from hell:

"Oh my god John, I can't feel my ears, I can't hear, where'd it go, John, what the hell did you do to me!? WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO TO ME??!!"

It was 1976 and I was 21. I ain't gonna lie to you and tell you some shitbag story. You know, the kind you always hear. About how a great guy saved lives in Nam or how I walked the little old lady across the street. Fuck all that. I destroyed lives. I ruined people. And this was even before I got into drugs. Cocaine, heroin, morphine, ganja, smut, you name it, I got into it. But back then, at 21, you see, my thing was coffee.

You heard me right. Coffee.

Early that year, me and my first wife, Sara, just had a brand new baby girl, my little Angela. She was the best thing that ever happened to me. Looking back, I think out of all my life, when it was just us three, you could probably say I was really happy then . I had my own house, a good job, a new car and money in the bank. Money enough to treat my family out every once in a while. Sometimes, we all three of us use to get in my car and go out for breakfast. At any diner we went to, it used to be that you'd get coffee "on the house", you know, like

now, how you get water on the house. Hell, when Sara wasn't looking I'd even give Angela a sip or too. Then shit happened and coffee became crazy expensive and diner's started charging for it. That's where this whole fucked up story begins.

And it was all Timmy's fault.

Timmy was around 40 back then. But he acted like a kid. He was part of the Rat Pack that hung around my dad. Sure, Timmy was a fat ass, but he was a good guy. He dressed nice, always had a nice suit on, you know? He always had a brand new Cadillac, one for every year, it was just his style. And getting the money to pay for those nice new Cadillac's was part of his style too.

Even though he was a sharp dresser Timmy lived at home with his mom. She must have been like almost 73 1/2, from the looks of things, elderly, you know. She was missing a couple of teeth here and there but she was one of the nicest little old ladies, and funny as hell. It was horrible and strange, so do me a favor and don't tell anyone this, but every once in a while Timmy would just be drinking a beer on the porch and his mom would put one finger over her mouth, sneak up from behind him, and as quick as lightning reach out her hand and grab some balls. Through the pants, in front of everyone, just grab her little son's nuts, all 2 balls and everything else in it, in one fell swoop. Timmy would just laugh. He had a big goofy laugh and he would just laugh it off like things like that are normal. Hey, I know it's weird, let's not mention this again.

We grew up in De Moines and Timmy's old man and his old man's two brothers ran the biggest Italian employment agency in all of Iowa: a wholesale food warehouse that serviced most of the supermarkets in the

state. It was huge and when I say Italian employment agency, I mean that if you were Italian and lived in or around Des Moines, you worked there. And if you were over 30, you'd die there too. When Timmy's old man died there, the two brothers, his uncles, took full ownership. Of course they gave a portion of the profit to Timmy's mom, but Timmy felt cheated, he felt fucked over, he felt dicked out of his rightful inheritance. So what'd he do? He decided to take what was his. He fucking stole with shameless grace anything he could safely get away with from that place. And I, being the ignorant thief that I was then, I fucking helped him.

Don't get me wrong, I know now that what I did ain't right, but back then, you see, where I grew up it wasn't seen like that. It wasn't seen as "bad" to steal, I don't know why I'm saying this, but if you were Italian, it was ok to steal; it was almost even "good" to steal. And to maybe beat a few ribs in, or drive a fistful of pain down a couple throats once in a while, you brag about that shit. What matters is how you look, not how that poor bastard's face you just beat to a bloody pisshole looks... see what I mean? It was part of being Italian. An entitlement of the DNA.

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me - Malachi 3:1

My mind swirled back, my neck snapped forward, and my eyes beheld the glimmering shadow of a sad memory. A haunting chill churned up my spine. A wail never heard since Longinus pierced the light bearer spread its filthy lusty echo through my eardrums. And then

"John...John, are you okay?"

Sara's big beautiful eyes looked down at me. "Yeah. Sara. Go back to

sleep, cupcake. I guess I just had a bad dream".

One day, as I'm cooking some toast or what not, Timmy rang me up and tells me to get over to his place. He gets a "surprise" for me. That particular Saturday I had to drop my kid off at her nonni's house, so after that and a quick run to the bank I headed straight over to Timmy's. When I pulled up he was already outside, sitting on his momma's porch, can of beer in one hand and a cigar in the other.

"I got an idea Johnny boy!" He smiled and got up, lard jiggling in the wind "I was reading the paper...you believe these fucking guys nowadays? Anything to make a buck." He shuffled The Des Moines Register before me "it says here that these fucking guys are getting cocaine and mixing it with laxatives. Then turning around and selling it as pure. " Timmy was talking about "cutting". If you fool your average low life fiend with maybe 70% cocaine and 30% grease, your pockets are gonna start growing. "These guys were making a fucking killing before the feds busted 'em...and that's when it hit me, Johnny. It hit me like lightning from heaven " here he did the sign of the father on his chest " and it was like the Virgin herself came to me and said 'Timmy, you could do the same thing with coffee'. Coffee! Who'd ever expect?!"

I noticed that as Timmy talked he kinda kept an eye over his shoulder, just in case things came from behind.

So then Timmy starts telling me his plan about mixing coffee with soybeans and stealing our coffee for free from guys he knew in his uncle's warehouse, and having our own brand name:

"Antonio's morning brew" he said with a proud smile, because his real name was Antonio.

"And we're gonna have a nice container for it so all the ladies buy it, and we're going to sell it for less than Folgers or fucking Maxwells House and we're going to make a Killing, Johnny. A fucking Killing". It seemed liked a good idea but, you know, things were good the way they were, I had a new kid, and ...

"Come on Johnny I aint gonna fuck you, I watched you grow up for christs sake. I'm practically your dad's best friend, remember? Remember when you were a kid and I use to wait till u fell asleep, Johnny, then Una Peta! A huge juicy wet ass kiss right up your nose!" He started to laugh, and right then, with that awful memory of fart drenched in underwear sweat, I fucking wanted his head on a platter. I hated how his eyes bugged out or how goofy his face looked when he laughed. He had the kind of face, that when it laughs, it just makes you wanna punch it, just fucking punch it, til it don't laugh anymore.

"Yeah, I remember, and I remember fighting you in the living room because of it". Even back then, in his 20's, Timmy was a lard ass; with his whale blubber shaking and shimmying every time he held my head with his hand as I socked his gut.

"You know what, Johnny? On second thought maybe it's better you stay out of this one". Timmy gave me the evil eye and sat back down on his momma's porch, carefully looking behind him. Faster than a hand could grab 2 nuts, I was seized with regret. I felt like maybe I was blowing a chance at making myself rich and giving Angela a good life, a life any father would be proud of.

Fuck it.

"Timmyyyy." I opened my arms and hands to him, "Timmyyyyyy, who's your man, Timmy? I am!"...and that's how this whole fucking shit started.

Then one of the twelve... went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? --Matthew 26:14

"I can't do it no more. John. My wife's gonna divorce me, she's gonna fucking divorce me I know it."

Enter Marco, an effeminate sort of guy. We use to call guys like this "half a fag." They were married, yeah, but still you never knew, you just never knew.

"She doesn't even know I'm doing this John. If she did she would kill me, fucking kill me, I know it!"

When I looked at him he reminded me of a little 8-year-old girl crying-wah wah wah. Except this 8 year old girl had a curly q mustache and was ugly as FUCK. Too bad. We coulda had a beautiful partnership.

"This machine was meant for roasting coffee, John, not barley! This is it, I've fucking had it!"

His breathe smelled like sardines bathed in underwear. Since he was a weak guy it didn't take but a second to change him around. If you gave me 2 seconds I could probably get him to strap a dildo on his head and run around town yelling "Fire!!"

Marco was the son of my parent's friends. I grew up with the guy and always wondered about him, even at that early age, I always wondered. I called up Marco when Timmy's soybean idea punted out. We went to sawdust after that, but it use to collapse the filter, too heavy. Finally, we found the sweet spot: barley. It was tasteless, odorless, and even gave us the hook we needed to market our coffee: 1/2 the

caffeine.

Antonio's Morning Brew: 1/2 the caffeine 1/2 the price. Pretty catchy, right?

"Come on Marco, stop dicking my balls. The only way your wife's gonna find out about this is if you cut out on me, and then maybe she'd have to know, u see what I mean?"

"You're gonna get me in trouble" He went whiter than he usually was as he looked behind me and out the window at a car passing by. " It's a cop, John. That cop knows my mother in law. He's gonna tell her, I know it!"

We were at Davey Coffee Company on a Sunday morning. For three generations, Marco's overbearing, fat as fuck wife's family owned and ran this place. His mother in law was the official owner now.

"My wife will leave me! No more John. Can't you hear me? I said No more!"

"No I don't fucking hear you, cuz you're going to roast this fucking barley and you're gonna take care of yourself."

I pulled out a hundred dollars and put it in his hand. " I need to make a phone call, and when I come back I have 2 thousand more of those dollars for you."

I would have stayed inside Davey Coffee Co. and finished watching Timmy's barley roast, but those fucking coffee roasters got hot when you turned them on. I needed some fresh air.

I got in my car and called Timmy at a payphone up the street.

"Hey Timmy, I got the fucker loaded, I stuffed the roaster like a pig,

but it ain't gonna be good enough."

In order to satisfy Timmy's buyer, we needed to make 800 pounds of coffee, and that meant roasting 800 pounds of barley. 1 to 1. The thing with roasting barley was that it disintegrated into little dust particles, so you had to burn a lot of it just to get a little bit. Timmy was fucking pissed, " No, you gotta stay there til u get this thing done. I got a lot riding on this, Johnny. Don't you fuck me". I drove back, thinking to myself how am i gonna tell this kid we're going to have to stay there all night? I pulled up across the street from the front of the building and Marco ran up to me. Tears were in his eyes. "Please, John, no more. Please. Look at me, John. You think any other woman's gonna wanna marry this face?"

I felt kinda bad for the guy, he was right, no woman in her right mind would kiss that face much less want to marry it. Dam. Me and Timmy were gonna clear at least 25 grand from this deal alone. Dam. "Please John". I reached in my pocket for Marco's money then my mind swirled back and my head snapped forward. My ears felt like they'd been hit with a hammer, and when I looked up at the sky I swear to the holy angel that this must have been how it looked like when Truman dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.

Then I heard it, a voice from hell:

"Oh my god John, I can't feel my ears, I can't hear, where'd it go, John, what the hell did you do to me!? WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO TO ME??!!"

I reached out my hand; my head was hurting from the explosion and a shadow passed into my heart. I looked at where Davey Coffee Co. used to stand and saw fire and sorrow. The door had flown off its hinge and if

Marco hadn't been on the other side of the street crying and wailing at me he'd be dead. I had stuffed so much barley in the roaster, it combusted and exploded the whole fucking building. Everything in it was obliterated. It looked like a fucking atom bomb had landed on it. The sound pierced my ears and the flames blinded my eyes.

I reached out my hand and saw that I was trying to give Marco the money, 2 thousand bucks. Looking up into the sky I saw the remains of his business, and probably his marriage: it was in the shape of a fucking plume.

And that was that, the end of 3 generations of sweat and tears and money. I felt kinda bad for the guy but it was 1976 and I was 21. I looked at the money in my hand. This was Marco's money; by every single moral just law of Jesus this was Marco's money. I looked at it one more time and gently slipped it back into my coat pocket. He ain't gonna miss it.

**Matthew Randazzo V**

**Submission #2**

Vote for this submission at <http://cs.createsurvey.com/c/01/4201/survey/5682-4Xp4yB.html>

Underworld old-timers have a saying: a real crook has to be waterproof. He has to be able walk through the rain without getting wet. That was never me; I'd step into the rain and damn near drown. While my dad's generation of gangsters somehow emerged from the gory bootlegging wars of Prohibition as polished black market tycoons, my track record wasn't quite as impressive. I nearly blew myself up trying to bootleg barley and coffee.

My downfall was the same as a lot of kids who came of age during the 1960s and '70s heyday Italian American organized crime: we grew up spoiled. Our battle-scarred dads wanted their kids to be comfortable, to never want for a thing, and to never take shit from nobody. I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth, and it didn't take long for my dad to tell me I had a license to steal all the other silver spoons in the nursery, too. My dad had swallowed enough bullshit for the entire family growing up in the downtrodden immigrant ghetto called "The Patch" in Chicago, and he let us know the rules didn't apply to us.

My brothers, my friends, and I got away with anything we wanted in my neighborhood during the '60s and '70s. Even our teachers and local beat cops made excuses for us; they didn't want to have to punish us and face my dad! After all, my dad owned the police, the mayor, even the local Catholic church and schools; who do you think was dumping all of those \$100 bills in the collection plate every Sunday?

The law didn't exist for us kids in those days. We learned by example, and my father and his guys were getting away with *everything*. We figured that immunity from the law was an inherited genetic trait of all Italians, our ethnic birthright. My brothers and I never suspected that our father, who was an admired local institution and a colossus in the

legitimate business community, was a criminal genius who had mastered the street game at every level during his long, bloody rise up from Taylor Street Gang at the turn of the century.

I was a rich kid who assumed that all of my dad's toughness and street smarts were given to me at birth like a lion's instinct to kill. In my junior goombah circle in high school, committing street crimes was just like joining the football team: an accepted way for young guys to show off and get their kicks. Crime felt like harmless, innocent fun; we were just goofing off. My friends and I would brag about screwing people over in the same way we'd brag about screwing the hottest piece of ass in school.

We were like little kids stuffing firecrackers in an ant pile. Since there were never any repercussions, we never learned through cause and effect what really worked on the streets. A lot of us became preposterously arrogant for beginner wiseguys, strutting around like criminal masterminds when really we never passed the underworld equivalent of elementary school.

A perfect example was my friend Antonio, who everyone called Timmy, an immature nickname that unfortunately fit his personality. Despite being twenty years older than me, Timmy still lived with his mom in the house where he grew up. My younger brother Willie mocked guys like Timmy as "porch kids" — two-bit neighborhood hoodlums who acted like flashy big shots on the streets but secretly lived with their parents. In Willie's mind, guys like Timmy spent most of their adulthood sitting on the front porch of their family home, killing time as they waited for their parents to die. Timmy was the prototypical porch kid: a tubby, middle-aged wiseguy in a slick suit who drove his brand new Cadillac home every night for a dinner cooked fresh by mama. I used to bust his balls

because he had to rent dumpy apartments around town so he could have a place to lay his sleazy girlfriends without upsetting his mom.

Timmy had the money to live a life of leisure because of his father, a self-made Italian businessman with the right connections, built a wildly profitable food brokerage business. Timmy's dad and his brothers ran a warehouse that employed half the Italians in Iowa and wholesaled food to grocery stores across the Midwest. Timmy figured his dad's multimillion-dollar business was his by generational gravity as long as he was patient and outlived his dad.

Timmy was wrong. Since Timmy had never proven himself competent at anything besides eating, sleeping, and pissing away money on bullshit, his uncles cut him out of the family business when his dad died. The forty-year-old Timmy felt betrayed and started looking for revenge; besides, he felt like it was finally time for him to make his move, make his name, and get the hell out of his mama's house. In the summer of 1976, when I was at the age when most kids are graduating from college, I was naïve enough to be convinced that Timmy's cockamamie scheme to get even with his uncles might be the beginning of my own criminal empire.

Timmy was hardly a gangland visionary: his idea was to sell illicit cans of coffee. Thanks to his knowledge of the family business, Timmy knew that the price of coffee was consistently rising, making it something of a luxury for most working class households. After reading in an article how Colombian cocaine smugglers "cut" their product with much cheaper powders like baby laxative to increase their profit margin, Timmy decided that the same method could be used to conquer the coffee market. Timmy was an ass-backwards crook: the Colombians were inspired by Juan Valdez to take their coca

distribution business international; Timmy was inspired by coke dealers to become Juan Valdez!

“Johnny, it’s simple,” Timmy told me in his best conspiratorial Ralph Kramden voice. “We rent a moving truck, drive up to my family’s warehouse, have a couple of paid-off loaders fill the truck up with coffee, and drive it away. With all the trucks stopping at the loading docks all day, no one will notice, and then all we have to do is figure out a way to step on the coffee with nobody noticing.”

*Sounds good*, I thought, which shows you that I was just about as good a crook as Timmy. I knew about as much about coffee, “cutting,” and grocery distribution as Timmy knew about independent living.

At least the first part of Timmy’s plan proved solid: obtaining 800-900 cases of free coffee really was as easy as renting a Ryder truck and paying a couple of warehouse grunts a C-note apiece. I drove the truck right over to the warehouse in broad daylight and within ten minutes had a few thousand dollars worth of coffee. I would have avoided some close calls with death and jail if I had just driven the coffee across the state line, took 25-cents on the dollar from the closest wholesale food brokerage, and made a good profit for one day. Instead, Timmy and I became experimental agricultural scientists.

As if we didn’t have enough trouble filling our dad’s shoes, Timmy and I were now trying to become the goombah versions of Louis Pasteur and George Washington Carver. In our planning sessions for this dumb scheme, it had never occurred to us how hard it would be to concoct a cheap cutting agent that could be packaged and roasted with real coffee without leaving a trace. After we filled the shithole apartment Timmy used for his dates to the ceiling with Folgers and Maxwell House coffee cans, we looked at each other and realized that we had no idea what step to take next.

As the days rolled by, Timmy became paranoid that his uncles were catching onto him and insisted that we move the coffee into the basement of my house. Initially, I had no objection, but I quickly learned that keeping a couple tons of coffee in one building creates a smell so intense that it qualifies as chemical warfare. Even while still in the packaging, the coffee's smell was so noxious that it gave my poor dog a permanent caffeine contact high that drove him mad. My hopeless mutt chased his tail for six or seven hours at a time until I finally had to give him away. Meanwhile, my newborn daughter Angela smelled like a burnt out roaster, and my wife was going cross-eyed. Timmy was worried that his uncles still might "catch wind" of our schemes, which wouldn't have been too fucking hard since any draft that passed my house sent the stench of coffee halfway to Chicago.

Finally, we decided to move the coffee out of my place to a warehouse in Mitchellville, Iowa where we planned to do our experiments with cutting. Timmy, of course, didn't want to take the easy way out and just load the coffee cans right into another Ryder truck and drive away. Instead, to avoid "being conspicuous", he told me to empty each of the 900 cans of coffee into garbage bags for transportation — since sweaty, nervous Italians loading ultra-heavy, nondescript black bags into the back of truck would never arouse anyone's suspicions.

I added to the stealth of this top-secret operation by simply tossing the empty coffee cans in a giant heap on the curb for the garbageman to pick up. I certainly wasn't going to follow Timmy's orders to take the cans to the town dump; if I was going to load my car full of coffee cans anyway, what was the point of emptying them in the first place?

In retrospect, it's incredible we managed not to get caught. We were two spoiled, lazy motherfuckers who were too arrogant to give a fuck about precautions or adequate panning. We were dummies, but so far we had been lucky.

In Mitchellville, Timmy unveiled the coffee brand that would make us millionaires: Antonio's Morning Brew. The name was attractively displayed on a colorful label wrapped around an ahead-of-its-time plastic coffee jar that looked nicer than any of the tin cans in the stores. I had to admit the brand sounded professional and the label and jar were attractively designed. I thought to myself that even I might consider making Antonio's Morning Brew an impulse buy if I had passed it in the store. For the first time, I was impressed with Timmy — but only for a fucking second. In a moment, that brief spell of begrudging respect transformed into slack-jawed wonder: Timmy was the dumbest motherfucker I had ever met.

“Timmy, I gotta say, you did a nice job in a lot of the ways,” I said with an edge of sarcasm in my voice. “The jar looks *great*. Nice and lightweight, unbreakable even.” I paused for dramatic effect. “The name! The name is great too — Antonio's Morning Brew! I can see it in stores.” I paused again, looking at Timmy with a scowl that must have made my eyes look like they were about to burst. “Timmy, there's only one problem. Though I can see Antonio's Morning Brew taking off, I *cannot* picture ‘Antiianos's Morning Brew’ in stores!

“You dumb motherfucker, you misspelled your own name!” I screamed, raising my hands in the air like a hopelessly frustrated father reading his teenage son's report card. “I'm in business with a guy who steals from his own family and can't spell his own fucking name!” I don't know who was dumber: Timmy for continuing to delude himself that he was a businessman or me for staying in business with him. Worse than that, whenever I try to get my mind off Timmy and his Antiano's Morning Brew, I can't because everything from my wife to my cereal tastes like coffee!

Unfortunately, at this point, I was pretty much pot committed to Antonio's Morning Brew – no pun intended. Combining the cost of a couple thousand jars and new labels with the moving truck and bribery expenses, we were officially in the red. With a grimy warehouse full of garbage bags of stinking coffee in Mitchellville, Timmy and I started our science experiments in the kitchen at my house. We tested everything from soybeans to sawdust in our quest to find a cheap, widely available ingredient that could be invisibly, tastelessly, and scentlessly roasted and ground with coffee.

Finally, the two street corner alchemists discovered their philosopher's stone: Barley. Barley burnt to tasteless ash in experiment after experiment; the coffee tasted like shit, but no more than any other shitty cheap coffee. We were made; we had our secret recipe. Timmy was positive he was going to become the Pablo Escobar of java.

I called up some of my dad's friends who ran a coffee business in Kansas City and gave them a \$1000 down to mass-produce Antonio's Morning Brew using their industrial roasters. The Kansas City guys figured that I was just a kid who could be pushed around, so they fucked us on the deal by cutting corners with the first batch of coffee. I didn't know what exactly they did, but the coffee tasted even worse than in my kitchen, and I refused to pay.

Unfortunately, these corner-cutting coffee distributors were also friends of Kansas City's fearsome Civella Crime Family. Luckily, I had some diplomatic muscle of my own, and we got away unscathed. If Timmy had been handling the deal by himself, those sick fucks in Kansas City probably would have ripped off his nipples and hung him by his dick from the Liberty Memorial.

Since we honestly did not have the muscle to be doing business out of state, I zeroed in our target closer to home: Davy Coffee Company in Des Moines. My 'in' at

Davy was my lifelong acquaintance Marco, a homely dweeb who had married the equally unappetizing heiress to Davy Coffee. Davy was *Leave It to Beaver*-square, a devout churchgoer who dressed and carried himself like a down-on-his-luck door-to-door salesman from the Eisenhower era. Marco was a pushover with badly parted hair, so I decided that I could convince him to let us roast our barley at his wife's factory.

Marco looked like he was going puke on his lap when I told him what we were going to do. "Johnny, my wife is going to kill me!" he squealed, his jowls gushing with sweat.

"Marco, it'll be great," I said with all the insincere calm of a customer service representative.

"Johnny, the police are going to find out!" Marco hissed as if the G-men were camped outside, just waiting to hang a case on an infamous menace to society like him.

"Marco, our parents are friends how long? I've know you forever! You *have* to do it!" I cooed to him with a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

"Johnny, I'm going to get divorced!" he bawled.

"Marco, you deserve a little cash in your own pocket," I reasoned with him. "Do you always want to be begging your mother-in-law for an allowance?"

"Johnny, I really don't want to do this!" he screamed, reduced almost to madness.

"Sure you do!" I retorted unflappably.

"Johnny, do you even hear what I'm saying?"

"No, Marco, I honestly don't," I said with the same sunnily indifferent tone. Every "no" was just another "yes" to me. "I don't hear what you're saying because you're going to roast this fucking barley no matter what you say ... *and* take care of yourself, too." I always

tried to remind him that, *deep down*, this was really *me* doing *him* a favor — an involuntary favor, yes, but a favor nonetheless.

What Marco didn't know is that I had already lined up a supermarket buyer for 100 cases of Antonio's Morning Brew, and after hassling with the Kansas City mob Marco couldn't possibly slow me down. Finally, he let me steamroll him.

One night, I drove up to the Davy Coffee factory in a cattle feed truck as Marco looked on in horror. I pulled a lever, and barley came dumping out of a chute no different than what you would find on a cement mixer. Marco nearly shit himself to the ceiling. "Johnny! This isn't safe to feed to humans! This food isn't fit for humans! The FDA is going to kill us! This is unsanitary! People are going to get poisoned!"

"Marco, what the fuck are you talking about?" I said in the most soothing tone I could muster. "We are burning this shit. If you cook food, you can eat *food*," I said, an argument which sounded more convincing in my head. "We are going to burn some shit, people will soak the ashes in hot water, and drink it. Nothing is going to fucking happen — just calm down and let your friend Johnny handle this."

I needed to roast about 800 pounds of barley to make enough cut for the supermarket owner's bulk purchase of Antonio's Morning Brew, but there was a problem. Normally, that much barley would take a couple rounds of two-to-three hour roasting cycles, but it was clear that Marco would not last that long. After a cop car innocently drove by, Marco snapped and began maniacally ranting like Danny Devito doing an impression of Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*.

"The cops are coming for me, Johnny! I'm going down! This is what I get for letting fuckers push me around! No one's pushing Marco around any more! Ya hear me, world? Marco's fucking *done*! If my wife finds out, I'm a DEAD MAN!"

I tuned out Marco's babbling freakout and started dumping as much of the load as possible into a single roaster batch. Clearly, I needed to avoid a marathon roasting session at all costs to prevent Marco from jumping into the roaster in despair or spontaneously combusting. I drastically exceeded the machine's suggested limit on the first load, but that's how an impatient prick like me does his laundry and dishes his entire life. What's the worst that could happen? It's just barley for fuck's sake.

Worried about Marco, I ran to the truck and drove to the nearest phone to call Timmy. I tried to suggest that Marco could go home or that one big batch would be enough, but Timmy was having none of it. "Listen, we got 800 pounds of coffee in your basement for this batch. We need 800 pounds of barley to match. You're going to burning barley all fucking day. He has to stay!"

Rushing back to the factory, I parked across the street and was immediately joined by Marco running over to me, his face the color of flaming red pimple. This dumpy little toad is fucking *steamed*, so steamed that he's convinced himself that he's a pretend-badass too! "Where the fuck did you think you were going? Why do you leave me here? You're going to get me killed!" he barks at me like a real tough guy.

I leaned out of my window and started waving a roll of cash in his face like I was fanning a fainting woman. Just as I get ready to talk, I feel the temperature rise twenty degrees in an instant.

**BOOM!** That fucking building detonated like an atom bomb. This wasn't a case for the Fire Department; this blast made geologists double-check that there were no active volcanoes in Des Moines. The building was leveled, evaporated off the face of the planet. It was just a hole in the ground.

For an Italian, Marco was already the whitest motherfucker, both in skin tone and personality, that I had ever met. At that moment, this fucker became Casper the Overeating Ghost; he was translucent and crying with rage. I tried to comfort him by reminding him that I had saved his life. He should be grateful! If I hadn't pulled up that moment and drawn him across the street, farmers would have been finding his limbs in cornfields across the Midwest.

Instead of thanking me, the spazzing meatball ran bawling to his car with his hands flailing in the air. With nothing to do but save our own asses, we both sped away in different directions. The next time I saw him, his hair had a grey lightning bolt that went right across his head.

A month later, Marco called me and within moments gave away that he was speaking on a bugged phone in an attempt to trick me into implicating myself. There were no hard feelings for his rattings; in fact, I still felt guilty about not giving him the few hundred bucks I had promised him for roasting the barley in the first place. I didn't feel guilty about blowing up his family business — just the cash I promised him. Marco's wife's family received a healthy insurance settlement for their business, and Marco today is a well-respected executive at FedEx. I did that miserable fuck a favor; I'm told his balls have grown now that he supports his own family instead of living like a parasite.

You might think that I would have immediately abandoned the clearly cursed Antonio's Morning Brew brand after that near death experience. If you thought that, you clearly haven't been paying attention to my book. I was one crazy, reckless fucker. Within a few weeks, a new batch of barley was transported in aluminum canoes to a brickyard industrial kiln and roasted by some Mexicans who needed bail money for their *hermano*.

The ashes were sent in garbage bags to Mitchellville to be mixed with the stolen coffee and packaged in our attractive plastic jars. We still had national ambitions for Antonio's.

A few weeks later, I walked into my meeting with the sales management of the Safeway supermarket chain in a dazzling, finely tailored business suit. I was young, handsome, and serenely confident – a thief who has honestly conned himself into believing he's a business mogul. I had our national ad campaign all mapped out: "Antonio's Morning Brew: Same Great Taste, Half the Caffeine!" By shitting some burnt barley into our jars, we had legitimately reduced the caffeine level of our coffee by 50%, resulting in a less jittery cup of joe.

I have three pots of coffee – one Folgers, one Maxwell House, and one Antonio's. I passed the pots around to the dozen finely dressed, smiling businesspeople sitting around the boardroom table. "These are three pots of coffee: one from Folgers, one from Maxwell's House, and one from Antonio's Morning Brew. Take a sip of each one ... and concentrate." I said in a slow, dramatic delivery that I thought raised the suspense level in the room. Everyone seemed legitimately enthusiastic; I was an attractive spokesperson for an attractively packaged new brand. They eagerly began to sip from my samples.

"Even though Antonio's has *fifty percent* less caffeine than the other two brands, I *DEFY* anyone in this room to tell me which coffee is Antonio's."

In retrospect, I should have tasted the coffee before I served it. Every single hand in the room pointed without hesitation to the pot that only I was supposed to know contained Antonio's. I scanned from the shaking fingers up to faces distorted in all manner of disgust. In shock, I grabbed the pot, poured out a shot, and slurped it down with confidence that I was about to enjoy something that at least resembled coffee.

It was like I had just stuck my tongue up Satan's colon. The barley had failed to burn completely in the brick kiln, causing Antonio's Morning Brew to taste like a horse's morning shit. Never in the history of college dorms has a freshman girl performed a walk of shame half as humiliating as my stumbling, apologetic exit from that boardroom. I was defeated.

But only for minute. So what if Antonio's tasted like it was poured from a Clydesdale's ass? There are places where substandard products thrive: mental hospitals, prisons, halfway houses, homeless shelters. Championing the rock bottom price and the reduced caffeine ratio, I convinced the Iowa state government to purchase our entire stock of Antonio's Morning Brew and distribute it to the jailhouses and mental wards.

Whenever there was an ax murderer in need of a pick-me-up, Antonio's Morning Brew was there; whenever a macho nurse tipped a cup into a straitjacketed maniac's drooling mouth, Antonio's Morning Brew was there. I made \$100,000 on the deal – a decent payday for a 22-year-old without any clue what the fuck he's doing. I bought a baby blue Lincoln Mark IV and a diamond Rolex; what was left over I pissed away. Saving was for squares.

This story illustrates one thing I've always said about the underworld: there's always more hope for an incompetent crook than a brilliant crook. It's hard for civilians to understand that a good crook commits felonies from dawn to dusk; he's getting away with a million scams for every time he's pinched, easy. It's nearly impossible to convince a good crook to quit the Life. That's why even the greatest criminal masterminds usually end up dead or in jail – they stick around so long they eventually hit that one-in-a-million job that leaves them busted or dusted.

On the other hand, a shitty crook like me receives daily reminders that he would be better off shaping up and living like an everyday Joe. For years, I thought I was just unlucky, but when I got older and wiser I realized that I was the luckiest damn guy in the entire underworld. I had the best luck imaginable: I was unlucky enough to learn that I would be a sucker to continue committing crimes — without being so unlucky that I had to learn that lesson in a jail cell.

**Ian Kelk**

**Submission #3**

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“Let me see if I have this correct,” I paused as if really mulling it over before continuing. “You want to start selling coffee with fucking baby laxative in it?”

I stared at the guy incredulously, thinking that there was slightly off about this plan.

Unabashedly fat, well dressed, and impeccably groomed, Timmy Akery had just finished explaining to me his new idea to swipe thousands of dollars worth of coffee and then double our profits by cutting it with anti-constipation medicine for infants. I just couldn’t really imagine how we could possibly sell a half-coffee, half-laxative brew and somehow not reap the whirlwind of thousands of people dealing with both the diuretic powers of coffee and the unpleasant side effects of sipping stool softeners with their morning bacon and eggs.

Someone would get the shaft, and it sure as hell wasn’t going to be me.

“What are you nuts?” he retorted and shot me a look. “That was just an example, like what they do with coke, and who gives a shit anyhow what we use. Point is, when people sell dope, they don’t sell it pure. They mix in some kind of cheap, inert material that cuts down the purity without anyone noticing a change in odor or appearance. Blow gets cut by the truckload with that shit, and nobody cares about all those retards walking around with talcum powder and dental anesthetic up their noses. We couldn’t use laxative anyhow, it’s white, and we need something to blend in with coffee. It has to be brown, like cocoa powder, or oregano, or we can just spray-paint sugar for all I fucking care. We grab a

shitload of it, cut it, and sell it cheaper than anyone, and nobody's going to suspect a fuckin' coffee company." He smiled, triumphant after covering all angles in his proposal.

I nodded; it was a good idea. It was 1976, and coffee prices were through the roof, and there was a lot less government interest in coffee than there was in narcotics. Timmy was around twenty years older than me, in his early forties, more a friend of my father and someone I had always looked up to. A short, squat little guy, he always appeared with a new Cadillac every year and sported a look straight out of the rat pack. His father owned an enormous wholesale grocery store in Iowa, and employed just about every Italian in town. If you were an Italian over thirty living in the area you'd probably spend the rest of your life in that place. It wasn't for me though; I figured I'd try a different path that would skip that whole life of low paid teamster labor.

The mentality of that time and place definitely made me not give a shit about any of my actions. Crime was omnipresent; everywhere I looked it was like our Italian DNA gave us some kind of entitlement to steal, have something stolen, or pay to get people hurt. In fact, it was something we were proud of and spent nights banging our chests bragging about. The only thing that really mattered was how you looked and how much respect you received, and Timmy's plan of ripping off a massive quantity of coffee looked like it would lead to the mother lode. However, my initial assumption of a reduced level of risk was a bit premature. Timmy planned on stealing some seriously massive quantities of java.

His plan was to steal the coffee from his own father's warehouse. He had always carried a chip on his shoulder about being hustled out of the business by his two uncles. Although they threw money his way every now and then, they didn't really let him in on the business,

and his resentment led him to do whatever he pleased with the place guilt-free. He had some guys on the inside that would help him with whatever he needed for the right price, and he wasn't the only one. The uncles were rich, and people were ripping that place off left, right, and center; the actual theft of the stuff turned out to be relatively easy.

When the day came Timmy got a straight Ryder truck, and I drove it to the warehouse. I was a known face there, and had no problem paying off a couple of the guys a few hundred bucks to load the truck with crates of coffee. I watched in amazement as they filled the truck from back to front and top to bottom with all kinds of brand names, including *Maxwell House* and *Folgers*. By the time that truck was full we must have packed it full of thousands of dollars worth of the brown stuff, and nobody even glanced at me twice as I drove away.

The plan was to store the coffee at an apartment Timmy had on the other side of town, which also happened to be the worst side of town. The place was a complete dump, the area populated with vagrants and some seriously frighteningly ugly women – a truly unpleasant area to spend any amount of time in. The only reason he had it was his occasional habit of getting laid; he still lived with his mother who didn't really appreciate him bringing home women for his own personal bedroom Olympics. My brother Willy calls guys like him “porch kids”; either they never get married, or they get married then divorced. Either way they'd go running back to their mother's place where they would stay until she died, and then they would die. Timmy had been the latter, and had been married for a time before giving up and moving back home, and his life mostly consisted of hanging out on the porch all day.

We unloaded all the coffee in that fetid apartment, and everything was going smoothly until paranoia set in and Timmy decided it just wasn't safe in his hideous love nest. He suddenly

felt that his uncles had somehow gotten wind of the theft, and I got a call from him the next day.

“Man, we have to move that stuff now. It’s just not safe there; I can’t let them find it. You’ve got a basement, let’s move the shit there.” His voice had an edgy, nervous twinge to it, and I was concerned. I was married, and my daughter Angela had just been born. I don’t like to shit where I eat, or for that matter store 900 cases of stolen coffee below where my family sleeps. But I had little choice at this point, and my brother Willy, a guy named Terry Rivera, and I spent several hours lugging enough coffee to keep the entire fucking state awake for days to my basement, where I learned of another unfortunate problem with storing that much coffee. It stunk.

The smell wasn’t just limited to the basement; the entire house reeked of coffee. What was amazing to me was that this was coffee still in it’s original brand name containers; we had *Nescafé*, *Folgers*, and *Maxwell House* all piled to the ceiling. Who would ever have thought that vacuum-sealed branded coffee would still carry such a strong odor? My wife wasn’t pleased, my daughter made faces, and my dog lost his mind. I remember my niece and nephew visiting around that time and watching as the dog, driven mad from having his extremely sensitive sense of smell hammered by wave after wave of coffee stink, chased its tail for hours on the lawn until it collapsed from exhaustion. In the end, we just gave the poor animal away, and I imagine it lived out the rest of its life terrified whenever it heard the distinctive drip of a coffee maker.

Thankfully, the coffee didn’t have to stay in the basement forever. Timmy found a place called Billings & Gage Manufacturing in a town called Mitchellville, Iowa. They agreed to do

the mixing process for us as well as the packaging of our “new” coffee. Timmy was quite pleased with his container design and brought me a sample one day, smiling as he handed it to me.

“What do you think? Looks awesome don’t it?” He was right; it was a very attractive clear plastic bottle with an elegant sticker describing the contents – only one thing bothered me.

“What’s ‘*Anti Iainos*’ Morning Brew?” I asked, wondering if this was some kind of private joke of his.

He looked surprised. “What do you mean? It’s my name, Antonio. ‘Antonio’s Morning Brew’. Nice ring to it don’t you think? We’re going to sell shitloads of this stuff.”

I showed him the bottle. “Wait, what does that say to you?” I was not sure if this moment called for a painful cringe or a moment of laughter.

He looked at me confused. “I just told you, it says ‘Antonio’s Morning Brew’. What’s wrong with you, can’t you read?” I realized at this point that I shouldn’t ask any more questions. It appeared that I was in business with a guy who couldn’t spell his own fucking name.

The next several hours we spent dumping can after can, vacuum pack after vacuum pack of coffee into large black trash bags. Billings & Gage were going to need to dump our entire “product” into their machines, and we couldn’t show up with case after case of brand name coffee. It took what seemed like forever, hour after agonizing hour passed. Open the can, dump the can, toss the can, next. By the end of it my fingers were raw and blistered, and I was too exhausted to be bothered to take proper precautions. In a move which in hindsight seems unbelievably foolhardy, rather than trucking all of the hundreds of empty cans to the

dump where we could leave them anonymously, I ended up leaving them all on the curb for the garbage collectors, happily covered with my fingerprints and a true plethora of evidence for any John Q. Lawman who might have been passing by. Whether the error was the result of balls or fatigue, it was a miracle we weren't pinched.

With all the coffee now happily wrapped up in dozens of garbage bags, the next step was to finally figure out what Timmy's mysterious 'cut' material would be. We needed something that was cheap, accessible, looked a bit like coffee, and ideally it should probably be safe for human consumption. Not that FDA regulations were a priority for us, but we figured it would be best to limit the fatalities associated with our particular cup of joe.

We began experimenting, and examined all manner of materials from soybeans to sawdust. Sawdust would have been a wonderful option, as it was certainly the easiest to get our hands on, however it had a tendency to become heavy and soggy, and would collapse the coffee filter. We finally settled on roasted barley, a cereal grain that was also easy to procure as a major animal feed crop that we could buy by the truckload. Barley is tasteless and odorless, and when cooked at a hot enough temperature it would burn down to brown ashes. We prepared several batches in a kitchen oven with great success, and it was nearly undetectable when mixed into the coffee. There was only one problem: you couldn't buy large quantities of cooked barley. We were going to have to buy it raw and roast it ourselves, and on a massive scale.

Our first attempt at getting hundreds of pounds of roasted barley was to contact some associates in Kansas, the Savela Family. We reached a deal where they would roast the barley and charge us two grand, with a thousand up front and the other half upon delivery.

Unfortunately, they took the opportunity to do a shit job and try to con us out of the money. The “roasted” barley they provided was barely cooked and completely unusable. They insisted they had fulfilled their part of the bargain, and in the end I had to head down there to straighten the whole mess out. Luckily they were young guys, kids really, and so was I. They let the issue go; in fact, we’re friends to this day, but it was a close call. Friendships aside, money is money, and situations can escalate quickly when cash is at stake.

After the disappointment with the boys in Kansas, I began looking for solutions that lay closer to home. I recalled some of my parent’s friends, a family with two sons whom I had known my entire life. One of them, Marco, had married a girl whose family had run the Davey Coffee Company in Des Moines, Iowa for three generations. The kid was a square; a church going, clean-cut geek who parted his hair like it was still the fifties and not the seventies. It almost looked like one day he had crawled out of the TV during a *Leave It To Beaver* marathon and had been trying to return to the Cleaver household ever since. He had married a woman, a heavy-set, domineering harpy whom he had pretty much presented with his testicles in a nicely trimmed elegant little purse on their wedding day. He was terrified of her, yet at the same time he acknowledged that neither of them was a particular prize, and it was somewhat of a miracle that they had met at all. Apart from each other, nobody in their right mind would have seriously considered marrying either of them, and he knew it.

Of course Marco’s life problems were all trivial bullshit to me. I needed him because he had access to the Davey Coffee Company coffee roasting machinery. I approached him with the proposal to help me burn all the barley, and he didn’t really respond all that positively.

“Absolutely not,” he stated matter-of-factly, “my wife will leave me, or just straight out kill me, and I ain’t exactly swimming in options.”

“Come on man,” I said with a disingenuous air of great familiarity, “our parents are friends; we’ve known each other our entire life. Tell you what, I’ll make it worth your while.” I saw a sudden gleam of interest in his eyes and I knew I had him, and slyly continued on that tack.

“Wouldn’t you like to have some money in your pocket Marco? I’m guessing you don’t have much of your own cash these days.” I knew that his despotic wife kept him on a ridiculously short leash.

A bit more goading and he was mine. He agreed to roast a few loads of barley for me for a few hundred dollars. As I expected, after just two or three loads of roasting the guy tries to weasel out of the deal. “I never wanted to do this, you’re going to get me in trouble! My wife will leave me...” He kept the same song and dance going every time I saw him, and I had to remind him that we had a deal, and that he’d given me his word, and it was seriously in his best interests not to go back on it. The kid backed down; he was just a ping-pong ball bouncing between competing fears of his wife and of myself, and I’d just knocked him back over again.

The whole time I was babysitting Marco, I was also searching for buyers of *Anti Iaino’s Morning Brew* with limited success. A few scattered purchases here and there, but nothing that would unload our pungent mountain of stolen coffee. It was then that Timmy suddenly found a buyer who owned a grocery store willing to take on a hundred cases. Suddenly we were going to need a LOT of roasted barley.

Marco’s reaction was tired and predictable.

“You promised this would only be a few small loads into the coffee roaster. Now you’re saying you need to fill a hundred cases? This is way beyond what we agreed upon, and I’m not doing it. These roasters aren’t designed for this kind of product, and my wife will have my ass in a sling if she ever finds out about this.” His voice was whiny, almost pleading despite his insistence. It was as if he was begging me to allow him the dignity to say no. The poor bastard didn’t know whom he was dealing with.

“Look Marco, grow a pair for fuck’s sake. This is one last load and we’re done, you’re out, and you can sit back and enjoy the money. We’re doing this just one last time no matter what.” I gave him a look that conveyed how like it or not, this wasn’t his decision. I was getting tired of holding this guy’s hand, and the sooner this whole ordeal was over the better.

He kept talking the whole time, almost to thin air, doing his best to be confrontational when it clearly wasn’t in his blood. Every time he tried to argue I kept talking over him as if he hadn’t said anything. I wasn’t making an offer he couldn’t refuse, I was simply telling him what was going to fucking happen. I didn’t afford him the respect to say yes or no; I shamed him into accepting the inevitability.

He did offer one last strand of resistance when he saw the truck backing up to the coffee roaster and deploying the giant feed chute as if to nourish a trough of swine.

“What the FUCK is that?! That’s food for animals! Who knows what’s in it? It could be dirty, contaminated, or full of bacteria. There are laws about this shit! You can’t give animal feed to humans! What the hell is wrong with you guys?” He had started full out shrieking.

Visions of FDA officers descending on his wife’s business with his painful castration the

inevitable conclusion had filled his head, and for the first time I actually became concerned about what he might do.

I managed to calm him down somewhat only by assuring him we were about to heavily roast the barley, and that any dirt or bacteria in the mix would be destroyed. He became withdrawn, his face ashen, and he started mindlessly walking around mumbling to himself and occasionally yelling that he was tired of people telling him what to do. He wasn't being directly aggressive at me per se, but he was clearly pissed at the hand he'd been dealt.

For a moment I felt a brief pity for the guy; his whole life was completely run by his wife and mother-in-law, another witch. Of course, she'd had no idea what he was up to at that moment. He wasn't allowed to so much as slip out of her sight for a meeting; in fact, that day he'd invented some kind of doctor's appointment so that he could meet me. With every passing car he became more and more nervous, and convinced that sooner or later someone would notify his wife or mother-in-law.

Finally we finished loading the coffee roaster and turned it on. Normally it tumbled the contents and roasted them for a few hours, but this time we had packed it as tightly as possible. Marco had proven so undependable and flaky that there was no way we were going to risk not roasting as much as possible with each load. The downside of course was that there was very little movement in the roaster, and I wasn't sure how long this was actually going to take. I decided to slip out for a few minutes, and drove over to a payphone a few blocks away and called Timmy.

"It's all set roasting, should be done in a few hours," I told him. It's then that he mentioned one minor inconvenience.

“You have to do all of it,” he said. “If you’ve got 800 lbs of coffee, we need to match that pound for pound with barley. We’re doing this with a fifty-fifty mix and we need all of it now. And you need to stay until it’s all done,” he gruffly ordered.

I wasn’t pleased. When barley gets roasted, it disintegrates into piles of dust that are much smaller in volume than the original material. This means you need to burn an awful lot just to get a little bit, and I realized that this was definitely going to take longer than I had originally assumed. Chagrined, I headed back to the coffee company and pulled up on the other side of the street, trying to think of how I could slip this kid the bad news. I started thinking – fuck, I could do this on my own. I’d seen him do it, all I needed to do was throw everything in, close the doors, and hit the switch. I was about to get out of the car when I saw him.

Marco was already outside; he’d come running out as soon as he heard my car approach, and he was and fucking furious. He couldn’t believe I’d slipped out for even a few minutes, and continued with his pathetic diatribe about how I was ruining his life and his wife was going to leave him. Sighing, I once again made the move to calm this freak down with money. I grabbed the wad of bills I had previously counted for him and held it out the window, and he saw it as he walked up. Surprisingly, he didn’t seem to care about it anymore and started pleading with me to stop the operation. The poor kid had tears in his eyes, and I was forced once again to explain to him that he had no choice, and that if he screwed me over his wife would find out anyhow. I was dangling the money in front of his face and he still hadn’t grabbed it yet, and the whole scene took on an air of the ridiculous as I waved a wad of bills in the face of some crying pussy-whipped little nerd.

Then the building exploded.

Marco had just been about to launch into Act 4 of “Oh My God My Wife Will Leave Me” when his performance was interrupted by a lesson in basic chemistry. Any tightly packed grain subjected to intense heat and movement eventually builds up a massive amount of friction and combusts. That building went up like a fucking atom bomb, with a mushroom shaped plume coming off the top of it. Flames shot out of every window, and the debris from the initial blast littered the lawn and surrounding streets. If anything had been even slightly near the building, it would have been engulfed in the flames as well. The door was blasted hundreds of feet away, and debris rained down upon Marco’s parked car, heavily damaging it in the process. The only reason we had been left unharmed was because I had pulled up on the opposite side of the street; had I approached from the other direction there’s a good chance we would both have been incinerated by the blast.

Marco, already a very pale-faced man by nature, had gone completely snow white. Right before I took off I saw him running around in circles like a decapitated chicken, madly searching to see if the whole building had really been destroyed. When he realized that the explosion had been so extreme that nothing could be salvaged except a smoking crater, I watched him in my rearview mirror jump into his mangled vehicle and race away down the street. Nobody called the fire department; it just wasn’t a fire department situation. I briefly considered calling 911 but abandoned the idea; I didn’t want my voice recorded on anything to do with this fucking mess.

I realized at that moment that Marco had never taken the money out of my hand. The explosion had been such a shock that we had both taken off, and I hadn’t even thought to

throw it at him. In the end I paid him nothing; it's the one thing I admittedly feel bad about in the whole incident. Even though the guy blew the chance to take it, I do regret not leaving the money.

After the explosion my contact with Marco dwindled to nearly nothing. I figured that the kid had turned rat once his mother-in-law had sunk her claws into him after finding out her family's business had been razed to the ground. That bitch had probably even threatened to press charges against him, her own son-in-law. He'd call me from time to time and start asking me all kinds of shit about the explosion, the barley, and the coffee company, and there was little doubt in my mind that he was recording the conversation. I'd always tell him I had no idea what he was talking about, and he should probably get some help to deal with his delusions. When I did see him four weeks later, I was shocked to see he had a shot of gray running through his hair; the destruction of the Davey Coffee Company had apparently had a physical effect on him.

Timmy was heart broken over the latest setback; how could we possibly cut the coffee now? He didn't seem to understand just how difficult and dangerous roasting barley had proven to be. I told him "unless you want to shoot a fucking capsule into the sun and pull it back on a wire, there's nothing we got that's hot enough to burn this shit." Add on to this the fact that heating it while it's moving causes it to explode meant we had no real means to our end. What really amazed me was when I asked around and found out that the most dangerous, combustible moment when heating and roasting barley is when you first turn on the machine. We'd just thrown the switch and stood there like goons, and the whole time we'd been risking our necks without even knowing it. That explosion had been so powerful that

even the heavy coffee machinery had been nearly vaporized, leaving nothing but a giant smoking hole in the ground where previously had stood tons of metal.

Then Timmy called me. "We're back in business."

He'd found a whole new scheme; we would load the barley into canoes, and roast the entire fucking things in brick kilns. Canoes! I guess these are the sorts of creative ideas that come to you sitting around on a porch all day. I meet up with my brother and another guy at the brickyard, which, like every brickyard, was in a shit area of town. The only side benefit was its location next to a drive in theater. When I arrived we filled these canoes with the barley and dragged them into the brick kilns, these giant brick igloo like structures. We lit the kilns, and then started the waiting. Timmy had been clear; we had to stick around the whole time and not let anyone near the kilns, even though for the life of me I couldn't figure out who would want to get remotely close to this dump. In a happy twist of irony, *The Godfather* was playing at the theatre that night -- something we were intimately familiar with to accompany our illicit activities. We ended up watching it sitting under the stars drinking beers, the only accompanying sound the occasional snapping and popping of the canoes being summarily immolated in the kilns.

Around 5:30, when the dawn was just peaking over the horizon, we dragged the canoes out of the kilns, and it was an incredible sight to see the damage wreaked upon them by hours and hours of intense heat. They were nearly unrecognizable, like someone had taken a sheet of aluminum foil and crushed it in their hands. All the paint had melted right off, and dangled here and there in strips. I stared at it for a moment... *fuck, did all that paint just get*

*absorbed directly into the barley?* All it looked like was a dark brown ash, and I shuddered to think about what kind of chemicals had seeped into it.

But that just wasn't my problem – I wasn't planning on drinking this stuff. We scooped up all the barley, loaded it into trash bags, and lugged it over to Billings & Gage. I sat back and watched them load it into the machine and mix it with the coffee, then pour it into these nice, labeled plastic jars proudly sporting the *Anti Iainos' Morning Brew* brand. I was pleased, here we were producing case after case of coffee and we had barely spent a dime. Just a few hundred dollars here and there for Marco, bribing the guys at the warehouse, and of course for our ill fated encounter with the Kansas gangsters. Now we just needed a hook that would get our diluted, paint contaminated coffee into grocery stores.

So how could we promote a product that was half pure, and half roasted animal feed? What might be a negative aspect of pure coffee that we could claim to have defeated? Then it hit me: half the caffeine. I was pretty sure that our barley didn't have any caffeine in it, I mean, maybe some brick dust and canoe varnish, but definitely not caffeine. It was such brilliant irony; all those people looking to be a bit healthier and drinking reduced caffeine coffee were instead going to get a stomach full of goat food and canoe guts. I took the idea to a grocery store called Safeway, which at the time was nowhere near the massive grocery chain it is today, where it comprises more than 1700 stores across the United States.

I put together this whole presentation, and rather clumsily organized a "demo" involving three pots of coffee. *Maxwell House*, *Folgers*, and *Anti Iainos Morning Brew*. Since I didn't have enough time to get any of the brick kiln cooked barley brew, I used some of our previous supply that I had cooked in my kitchen oven. I show up all professional looking and

dapper, wearing a suit in the guise of a businessman when deep down inside I know I'm just a common thief. I set up a taste test with the three pots, all the while kind of wondering "is this even safe for humans?"

I gave a short presentation, extolling the virtues of our reduced caffeine brew. "You're not going to get all jittery with *Anti Iaino's Morning Brew!*"

The response was promising until I finally let them try my little blind taste test. "I defy any of you to identify which of these three coffee's is ours," I challenged them.

As one, every person pointed to the correct coffee pot.

In my haste to put together the presentation, I had failed to notice that the barley I had used hadn't been cooked enough, and it had expanded and blocked the filter, forcing all the coffee to come out the top. I slithered out of the meeting in complete shame; here were almost a dozen people waiting to be introduced to this revolutionary new product, and all they got was a filter blocked with chunks of barley and the most apologetic mobster-cum-businessman they had ever laid eyes upon. Needless to say, *Anti Iaino's Morning Brew* did not become a staple on the shelves at Safeway.

Success arrived from an unexpected quarter. I had left samples – good, brick kiln cooked samples – in as many different locations as I could think of. One of them was a detention centre for juveniles, and the response was very encouraging. I received the call from an enthusiastic manager there.

"This coffee is great! A lot of the people and kids in here really like it, and it doesn't create the same high energy levels that we're looking to avoid. How soon can we get more in?"

I shipped her several cases that very day, but it didn't stop there. Once word leaked out of our delicious, low caffeine brew, which could be enjoyed by any group of high risk, delinquency prone people without causing rampant hyperactive behavior, we were contacted from all kinds of different institutions. We ended up signing a state contract and provided our pilfered beverage to prisons and mental health facilities.

Our own state government ended up purchasing our entire inventory.

We were done. All told we cleared well over a hundred grand with our little enterprise, and at the same time may have fed a decent amount of paint to mental patients. I don't recall my specific cut of the profits – essentially all the income was profit – but I ended up purchasing a Corvette and a Lincoln Continental at the ripe age of twenty-one.

Thirty years later, I decided to call Marco.

“Hey Marco, It's John calling, from back in Iowa. How are you? It's been years, and I've started writing a book and I'm including the story about the Davey Coffee Comp-“ I began.

“Not this fucking shit again!” he barked, “thank god my mother-in-law is dead because I never lied to her about this shit. I can't believe you did that to me, do you have any idea what kind of shit I've been dealing with over the past thirty years since you blew up my wife's fucking coffee company?”

It was as if no time had passed at all. He was still furious! As he ranted and eventually calmed down I began to see why. His mother-in-law had in fact threatened legal action, and throughout the rest of her life she and her daughter had brought up the subject as often as they could. When the mother died, the daughter continued the tradition, and to this day she

tortures him with it at least once a week. Even his son had brought it up in school, and told the story about how his father had blown up his grandfather's business.

They never rebuilt the business; both because the insurance wasn't sufficient to purchase new equipment, and because the destroyed machines had been so old that they had been responsible for giving the coffee its distinctive flavor. The mother-in-law had just accepted the lump sum insurance payment and kept it for herself.

Marco himself went to work for UPS immediately after the destruction of the business, and today has reached the level of an executive there. Despite the never-ending tirades from his wife, he never left her, although after the explosion he seemed to develop a bit more control in the relationship. On the phone that day I told him that I'd done him a favor, but he didn't really seem overly grateful. I briefly thought of him standing ghost faced in the street, debris and flames surrounding him, and once again felt a pang of remorse for taking off without handing him the money. If any single act from the whole story deserved an apology, it was probably that one, and I truly felt bad about it.

But that's just not my style. I hung up the phone.