

Killing Fear

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Extract

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ONE

Present day

Dear Robin:

I think of you every day, dream of you every night. So clearly are my visions of your perfect naked body dancing just for me that when I wake each morning I see you at the foot of my bed in this godforsaken prison you sent me to.

I will come for you, but you won't know the day or the hour. I long for the wonderful day when I watch your face next to mine, the truth in your eyes as you surrender to me.

Theodore folded the letter and stuffed it back down his pants as he leaned against the fence of San Quentin's East Block exercise yard. Exercise? Most of the men stood in groups talking or arguing or hiding an illegal smoke, easier in the cold when smoke could be mistaken for breath.

Defeated. That was the expression on most faces. Fated to spend the rest of their miserable lives in a crumbling, foul-smelling prison. Urine, fungi, and the stench Theodore could only describe as “wet dog”—but worse—permeated the interior. But here, in the patheti-

cally small exercise yard, he tasted salt in the air, heard seagulls call, and remembered freedom.

Freedom that had been stolen from him by a stripper whore and the cop she was screwing.

The fog hung like a wet blanket over the exercise yard. Depressing and unnatural—Theodore despised the entire area. He missed the sun of San Diego, its warm beaches and hot days.

His appeal was only two months away, and he wouldn't be returning to prison no matter what happened in court.

He pulled out the letter to Robin and tore it into tiny pieces. *Fucking lying bitch, you will pay for what you did to me!*

As Theodore watched the paper float to the ground, the earth began to shake violently, back and forth. It threw him to the ground. What he would remember most about those thirty-two seconds was the overwhelming sound. He'd never realized an earthquake could be so loud.

It wasn't just the quake that caused the ear-splitting noise, but the collapse of the twenty-foot-high concrete wall separating the condemned inmates from the San Francisco Bay.

There were six guards posted on the catwalk outside the East Block wall, with .223 caliber mini rifles trained on the yard. But if Glenn couldn't stay upright, they certainly wouldn't be able to. He was banking on it.

Dust hung heavy in the air, burning his lungs, but Theodore Glenn jumped up and got moving. He'd felt more than seen the collapse of the concrete walls. Right in the middle they'd tumbled down, the weight of the

crumbling rock yanking more of the wall to the ground, including at least one of the guards.

He ignored the sirens vibrating through the complex. Freedom was only a dozen yards away—over the concrete rubble. Theodore couldn't see the guard tower outside the fence. Had that collapsed as well? He could hope. If not, he would hope that enough of the condemned ran and he would not be shot.

Barely heard over the squeal of the alarms, there was erratic gunfire. Shouts from the catwalk caught Theodore's attention. He looked up, barely able to see the guard at the far south of the walk. The man was limping, but functional. Where were the others? Had they fallen to the other side? Twenty feet probably wouldn't kill them, but they'd likely be immobile.

Theodore carefully started up the slope that had been the wall. Razor wire, embedded in the destroyed wall, was now everywhere. While his sturdy shoes protected his feet, he couldn't use his hands for fear of slicing them. If he made it over the debris, he didn't want open cuts because there was only one way out:

The San Francisco Bay.

He sensed other inmates following him, and two were ahead. He saw the crooked arm of a guard, his green uniform covered in dust. Trapped by the concrete when it fell. Dead? Very likely. Theodore scanned the area for a rifle as he continued moving forward, up the concrete mountain. The weapon must be buried with the dead guard.

A voice from the far side of the catwalk ordered Theodore to stop. He didn't hesitate, but continued climbing the collapsed wall. He spied another guard near the top of the rubble, this one not dead but injured,

blood pouring from a head wound. He kept shaking his head as if to clear it, but held fast to his rifle, which swung erratically to and fro. It didn't look like the guard could see much of anything, blood covering one eye. His expression was panicked. Fearful.

Theodore realized then that the guard who had ordered him to stop was trapped on the far side of the catwalk, which had partially collapsed, pulled down by the weight of the falling wall. Where were the other guards? The air was thick with dust and fog, Theodore wasn't sure what he was seeing.

"Stop!" the guard called again, but he was aiming his gun behind Theodore. How many were following him? Why wasn't the guard shooting? Afraid to hit a fallen officer?

Over the loudspeaker, a voice commanded, "Down! Lay face down, hands behind your head or you will be shot."

Theodore ignored the warning. A guard was pursuing him, but the yard guards had non-fatal rubber bullets. Behind him were shouts and screams.

Reaching the wounded guard, without hesitation Theodore ripped the rifle from his shaking hands. The bastard should have shot first, he thought with a tight grin. With the stock of the rifle, Theodore hit the fallen guard twice—*wham! wham!*—on the head.

He collapsed, unconscious and probably dead. Gun in hand, Theodore rolled down the far side of the wall.

"You bastard! You didn't need to kill him!"

Theodore turned to fire the rifle, thinking it was a pursuing guard. Instead, he saw convict Thomas O'Brien, another condemned man recently transferred

from North Seg, the country club of death row. O'Brien rolled down behind him, cutting his hand on razor wire.

Theodore aimed the rifle at the traitorous prisoner. He'd had a suspicion about O'Brien ever since he walked into East Block last week.

A bullet whizzed past Theodore. He wished he'd had time to retrieve the guard's sidearm, but it was buried along with the dead guard's legs. Instead of killing his fellow prisoner, Theodore turned and returned fire. Enough to give him cover.

The earth rolled beneath him. Aftershock.

He didn't fall, but O'Brien did. The guard pursuing them also stumbled.

Gunfire echoed around him and he zigzagged through the short open space. He spared a glance toward where the main guard tower should be.

It wasn't there.

Sirens, shouts, gunfire sounded all around. Theodore ran. The two convicts in front of him jumped into the bay. He followed.

He swam northeast, away from San Francisco and the violence of the bay; toward the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. If he could reach the bridge, he'd have a better chance of escaping.

The cold water burned his hands. He realized he had cuts all over them, small nicks that the saltwater turned to searing pain.

He slung the gun over his shoulder. It would be worthless in the water, but he could dry it out, use it again, if he was lucky.

He swam. Heard splashes behind him, others following suit. His active, rigorous lifestyle before prison had

given him physical strength, which he'd maintained over the last seven years. If anyone could survive the San Francisco Bay, it was him. He was certain of it.

The more convicts on the run, the greater chance he had to escape. They would be slower than him. Already he had passed the two convicts who'd jumped ahead of him.

The water froze and burned, it was early February, light was fading, all he needed was the cover of dark and stamina, and he would be free. He'd been waiting for this opportunity, the first chance to be free. To think he'd wasted the last seven years on appeals when all he'd had to do was relax, and wait for an act of God!

He almost laughed. Instead, he gritted his teeth against the pain and cold of the San Francisco Bay, found his rhythm, and swam hard through the choppy water.

Adrenaline surged through his blood, triggering every cell in his body. He'd never felt so alive.

TWO

Robin McKenna lingered in the Back Room—her VIP lounge—one ear tuned to the plasma-screen television in the corner. It usually aired whatever major sporting event was being telecast. While the Eighth Sin wasn't a