
DEADLY COMPROMISES
EDWARD DROBINSKI

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By Edward Drobinski

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Chapter 1

He could see a brilliant yellow sunrise over the white capped jagged purple mountains in his rearview mirror. He only looked at it fleetingly, as it was of paramount importance to keep his eyes fixed ahead. He deemed it inconsequential for a second reason; it was too late in the season to catch a view of the vestiges of summer growth, now almost invisible. Before him he got his first clear picture of the road he was on. It seemed to be perfectly straight and two ways with a broken white line running down the middle. When he turned off the headlights and first used only the natural light, he saw another two lane, two way, perfectly straight road, about one thousand feet in front of him, which formed a cross with the one he happened to be on. This view was only possible because of the perfectly flat terrain which seemed to go on for miles in all directions. The roadsides were devoid of any living vegetation. The only things complementing the dirt and reminiscent of better weather, were scrubby, dying, tan, fifteen inch long, bent projections, which, obviously no longer had any interest in reaching for the sky. He assumed that these sad remnants were once unbent green grass, before the below freezing overnight temperatures set in, but

being new to the territory, he knew his instincts might be wrong.

Looking at the clear, crimson tinged, blue sky in front of him, he saw another mountain range. Given only quick, cursory inspection it seemed similar to the one at his rear, though not yet fully illuminated by the sun. He thought that at least he was heading west, his original goal, though he wasn't sure if he had yet passed his desired destination. So, he didn't even consider turning when he got to the center of the cross and continued on. After a few more miles, he encountered a large dry gully to his left. It must have once contained water, but there was no noticeable, likely source.

"Pay fucking dirt," he muttered at the car windshield. He thought he was entering a small town in the middle of New Mexico, maybe Arizona. He found it hard to tell the difference. For all he knew he might still be in Texas. He thought; "It takes forever to get out of that place." Whatever the precise location, it was almost nirvana to him, after having driven, what seemed the bulk of his life, in a dark, barren desert, the only sounds the hungry yipping of unseen coyotes.

Shortly after the fall sunrise, the town had a slow, sun bleached brown and green feel. He thought he also detected a

pleasant, laid back, relaxed atmosphere with old barns and farm equipment on five and ten acre lots covered by sparse, uncut grass.

His all night solitary journey necessitated a stop somewhere due to sheer exhaustion. He wasn't very good at directions, but thought he was somewhere near his destination, his mind somewhat clouded and confused by the joint he had smoked an hour ago. He didn't notice any sign naming the town, but also may have simply not been paying any attention. He thought; "There's no need to find out where I am until tomorrow," not realizing that this tired observation, would later prove to be central to an immediate business problem and maybe more. But, for now, he was content to see an electronic billboard with red bulbs, which indicated October 15, 1989, 7:15 AM. He thought; "Civilization, hopefully with the customary accoutrements."

"All right," he said as he passed the town's gas station, women's clothing store and hamburger place. He expected to soon see suitable accommodations.

Most of the tightly packed businesses and houses were built of wood forty or more years prior and the peeling faded paint precluded precise information regarding original color. Today

it looked as if they might have been a combination of greens, browns, reds and blues. He thought it odd that nothing reeked of white, prevalent in his home. Despite the bright color departure and bare wood spots showing, he thought the current patina was probably preferable to its supposed original perfection. In contrast, a ten room Motel 16 jumped out of nowhere and was startling in its plasticity. Today it was judicious to enter a professionally run establishment rather than run the risk of "getting friendly" in a private house's furnished room. He had already done his best to appear nondescript, a necessity in his profession. He looked 40ish, had uncovered graying light brown hair, was thin, wore blue jeans and a blue button down shirt, open to the third button. He entered the paved lot and diagonally parked his four year old, cream, four door Toyota sedan in front of the office. He exited his car and saw her through the glass front, seemingly oblivious to the world.

She looked around 30, with long, straight, jet black hair, parted on the side, with heavy duty bangs. She was looking down at something on the counter in front of her, he thought a newspaper. Her pretty face showed no makeup and she wore hardly detectable, thin, rimmed wire glasses. The counter precluded a lower view, so the only other visible physical feature were her ample breasts covered by a golden peasant style blouse, open to

the third button, as his shirt. As he entered she didn't look up.

He said; "Excuse me, do you work here?"

She showed a grimacing smile, indicating that she didn't like being interrupted, but was somewhat ready to perform her required business obligation and replied; "Yes, yes, I'm sorry. I was reading a compelling story."

"What's that?"

"Oh, 'The Plague,' by Camus."

"Have they shut the port down yet?"

She replied indignantly, as if someone had just called her stupid; "No and of course, they're not going to. The only question is what subterfuges they'll use to keep it open."

They looked curiously at each other for a moment, his brown eyes detecting her surprised green ones behind the glasses. He was impressed. He also got his first below the waist glance and saw very bountiful hips covered by the tightest blue jeans imaginable. Overall, she appeared to be about five feet, four inches and 110-120 pounds. His own blue jeans felt a bit tighter.

He said; “Sorry I butted in and sorry that I underestimated you. I hate it when somebody barges in on me, when I’m in the middle of something. I could kill them when they then compound the faux pas by affecting superiority. My weariness sincerely apologizes.” He bowed at the waist in a mock chivalrous manner and she obviously chuckled. Relieved that he had not caused a permanent breach, he continued, in an offhand manner; “But I do need a room for today and tomorrow.” He realized that for no reason in particular, he liked her.

“Sure, I’ll get you squared away in a second. Do you have a favorite room?”

“I’ve never been here before, but eight has always been my lucky number.”

“It’s your lucky day. Eight is right next to the office and is unoccupied. Here are the keys. I’ll need your credit card.”

He handed it to her and attempted to keep the conversation moving, by saying; “Have you read a lot of Camus?”

She seemed more interested in the credit card machine and vaguely answered, “Some.”

Undeterred, he followed up with; “What’s your favorite?”

She looked into his eyes, widened her own, turned her head slightly to one side and said; “The Stranger.”

She continued the gaze and he was at a loss for words, considering the many possible responses. He didn’t want to risk offending her twice in so short a time, so he lamely replied; “Me, too.”

Business was done. She had trouble returning to her book, her mind now on the new arrival.

He took the keys and walked to number eight. On the way, he thought about how it was imperative to not attract attention, but that she was extremely compelling, in all the important ways. Upon entering his room he was only surprised at one thing. A small, wooden, open box was lying on the bed. When he took a look, he found CDs of Bruce Springsteen, Led Zeppelin, Patti Smith and others. Pleased at the sight, especially still being a little stoned, he looked for the CD player and found none. He decided he was too tired and would continue his search tomorrow. He closed the blinds, put his bag down on the orange, thinly carpeted floor, took off his shoes, pulled down the two blue and white crazy quilts covering the bed and climbed in, thinking about her.

Chapter 2

He woke up around 9PM, a bit tired and hungry but, really, just needing to further recover from the twelve hour drive, which was necessitated by the fact that he was told this was a "rush job."

He took a shower, shaved and felt better as soon as he was covered by the warm water. His appetite seemed to multiply. But, first he wanted to see her, under the true pretense of finding his room's CD player. He walked off to the office and for the first time took note of the facility's "L" shaped one story structure.

In luck she was still perched in the office and she again had her head down reading.

"Got'cha once more," he said as he entered.

She made a small laugh and said, "This is garbage anyway. What can I do for you?"

"Before I get into that subject, I'm curious. What kind of garbage are you reading?"

"Twelve Days on the Road with the Sex Pistols," she replied, smiling and shaking her head from side to side.

"I liked some of that one."

"Me, too. Maybe I'd say a little, rather than some," she corrected.

"Well, anyway, I came here to inform you that the CD player is missing from my room."

"There isn't supposed to be a CD player in your room."

"There are CDs of Patti Smith and a few others in a box."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Those are mine. Besides standing behind this desk, I've also been cleaning rooms here the last year or so and I play music when I do that. I must have left them."

"You must expect to be getting rich someday, working that hard."

"I think I'm going in the other direction. My husband owns this place, but I don't think it's going well financially."

He was surprised she volunteered that. He said; "Somebody that looks like you ought to have lots of leisure time to play, maybe enjoying some music."

Again she smiled softly. “Maybe someday, what can I do for you now?”

Sorry to hear an answer that wasn’t on his desired wavelength, he managed a small smile and said; “If I can’t have a CD player I’d just like to know where to get something like hamburgers. I had been driving a while and I slept about ten hours. Now, I’m so hungry I could eat a horse.”

She pointed outside and calmly said; “Turn right on the street out here, go half a block to a small fast food place. I don’t know about horses, but they can get you a gigantic hamburger with all the trimmings.”

“Thanks,” he smiled and left. He thought; “I got dismissed, dammit, I like her. Dammit, she’s married.”

Her mind was not where he thought. She watched him turn and leave. “Not bad,” she thought. “He looks good enough and sounds interested. He focused in on Patti Smith when he said which CDs were there and Patti is my all-time favorite. Most people don’t understand her at all. I’m not sure I do either, but I think I’m pretty close. I wonder where his level of understanding is.”

She had lived all over the country and outside of it all her early life, moving every year or so. Her prolonged college

years were spent in California, where she got degrees in English, math, teaching and other subjects of passing interest. She played hippy for a long time and really believed in the psychedelic philosophy. She had done some acid and smoked a lot of weed. She wanted children someday, but never encountered any guys who wanted to go that route. Some paid lip service to not wanting to bring another living thing into this horrible world. They seemed to be interested in every other possibility, but not that one. At 35, she married Alan, 20 years older in body and eons in mind. He didn't take much notice of the whole hippy thing, thought it was just a quickly passing fad for dumb spoiled brat college kids, playing bohemian on their parents' money. He believed that in the long run, it would have as much significance as goldfish swallowing in the 1920's and became a businessman in this small town. In retrospect, maybe he saw clearly, through his absurdly gigantic spectacles. She, too, opted for financial security and that was now open to question. She originally thought of children, but the more she got to know Alan, the more she decided that she didn't want to reproduce and care for anything that might be like him, or inflict it on the rest of the world. She considered having someone else father the child, but rejected the thought, because Alan would still be the most significant influence the poor thing would have. She wanted no responsibility for a potential monster, let alone

watching it grow. She occasionally had liaisons with single men traveling through, just to relieve the boredom and melancholy. For today, she decided that she'd like to know more about the motel's new guest. He sounded strange enough to interest her, with knowledge of the Sex Pistols, Camus and Patti Smith. She had a plan.

She saw him walking back with a bag of something. She went outside and locked the office door behind her, carrying her boom box.

"Got anything for me to eat?" she said flatly with no inflection. She defiantly looked him up and down.

He thought; "Fantastic. She feels playful now." He shrugged, grinned and returned her matter of fact tone, saying; "Probably can find something."

"I'm off duty, now, so let me get my CDs from your room."

"C'mon."

They walked together about ten steps to the door. He opened it and they both silently walked in. Some natural sunlight remained, but the blinds were still drawn. No one put on an internal light. She went to the box, looked at it curiously and said, "The '*Radio Ethiopia*' CD is not here." She

wasn't really lying, but knew he would draw the wrong conclusion. She always kept that CD at home, as it was her favorite and she wouldn't risk losing it. She played at least one song from it daily.

He tried to keep things jokey and said, "I didn't steal it. I already have it."

Seemingly distraught and angry, she said; "Well, it's not fucking here."

"Look, I really didn't take it. Maybe it's on the floor."

They both dropped to their knees and crawled around the orange plushy carpeted floor.

She thought, "He looks even better in the dark." It was now nearing 10PM. She put on one small room light. She thought, "His pants look like he's in a friendly mood."

He thought; "I don't know what game she is playing, but I like it." Besides, now that he was getting a fuller view of her, the more he saw the more he liked, especially her very meaty hips.

He purposely backed into her, pretending to stumble a bit, putting his left arm around her waist to regain his "balance," accidentally tangling up legs a bit. They were looking at each

other face to face. They both thought; "You're very interesting. I think I like you."

He looked into her smiling green eyes and she into his mildly surprised but happy brown ones. They both moved their faces closer to kiss. He leaned on her a little, she balked just a bit, he pushed a little harder and.....

No one put on a CD, but music played.

They drowsed for a while right on the floor. He was on his back facing the ceiling. She was on top of him, facing down. Her left leg sat on his left leg and her face and left arm were on his chest. She woke up first and said loudly, "I still want my fucking '*Radio Ethiopia*' CD."

Startled, he said; "I really didn't take it. Maybe it's been left in another room."

"No, I'm very careful with that one."

"Obviously," he said sarcastically. "Look, I told you I like Patti Smith a lot, too. She's in my top five all-time. I have my own '*Radio Ethiopia*' CD in the car. I'll get it and give it to you. Don't be upset. I'll go get another." He also realized that she couldn't be sure if he was merely returning