

Organ Grind

By Kieran Shea

I frigging hate Texas.

Texas has got to be the fattest state in this failed republic as far as I'm concerned, home to countless grotesque crimes of human anatomy, fashion, and taste. It can't be a coincidence that a long line of rotten eggs either are from or ended up in the so called 'Lone Star' state. Mark David Chapman, David Koresh to that shitheel transplant from Connecticut that ended up as President. Something is definitely wrong with Texas. Maybe it's just me. Maybe I should keep my mouth shut because I'm from New Jersey, but for the love of God can we begin with those stupid phrases?

Never slap a man chewin' tobacco.

Don't squat with yer spurs on.

Hey, Roy Rogers? Here's a phrase for you. Shut the fuck up.

The belt buckles, the cowboy hats, the *aww shucks* phony Christianized Wal-Marted bullshit. I've read that they want to build a giant wall along the Rio Grande to keep Mexicans out of lawn care and fast food kitchens. Let them have it as far as I'm concerned, every last battered fried two-stepping acre.

Santa Anna must be laughing in his grave.

Thank Christ it was December. Last time I was there in Dallas it was like the sun decided to reach down your throat, crush your lungs, and suck out all your fluids out for good measure. That day though, it wasn't too bad - low sixties - but still I hated it.

Fucking Dallas. For a job. And the job was to deliver a cooler of fresh cut flesh to Homer Drake.

Homer. What a name. Unlike the corn dipped cartoon character, this Homer was a lean, mean, adjudicating machine. From what I'd read on the American flight from Newark, Homer Drake was a total class A dickhead from the get go. The kind of arrogant self-styled legal superstar who would screw you to the wall just for bumping into him on the street. Guess his sharp Harvard legal fangs couldn't save him from seeking out my kind of employers though. Men from Secaucus with overseas shipping concerns.

Bad for Homer, good for me.

Profile gave a whole mix of particulars. Before his personal malfunction, when he wasn't pressing the flesh with clients, ramming paper up opponents' asses or pumping his paralegal honey pot with the solid doctored double Ds (photo attached... *nice*), Homer Drake swam twice a day and practiced combat jujitsu.

Jesus H. Christ. *Jujitsu?*

Now isn't that a pisser? Not only is Mr. Legal Eagle a painful liability in court but apparently he also wanted to be Neo in *The Matrix*. No wonder the profile said he could be a problem. Difficult, it had said. A man with hobbies like that could get pretty bitter.

I never imagined doing this, you know, being a black market organ courier? For the longest time I was content just working construction. But then one day I was introduced to my future employers by a friend over a few drinks and the next thing I know, *bang*. Racking up the frequent flyer miles.

The money is really great. Who knew? I certainly didn't, I mean, you hear about people waiting for organs, but you don't know how many there actually are out there. Let me tell you, there are thousands. *Thousands*. Ripe market. Apparently with the aging baby boomers it's getting better every day. Don't get me wrong, it can be a risky endeavor, jail time notwithstanding. Most times though, people are so desperate for the liver, pancreas, or kidney...so grateful...it's a simple transaction and everybody's cool.

Where's the money? Great. Here's your blood-matched hunk of meat and best of luck dodging the reaper. But every once in a while something goes wrong. Some kind of blowback. Company policy is you're on your own if you're caught. Cut a deal and they'll find every single one of your loved ones, young or old, and harvest them.

But I'm careful. I take steps to cover my tracks and get the hell out of Dodge right after the deal, not to get all *Texan* on you and shit. No chit chat, no pictures of your wife, or daughter, or brother or whoever is getting the transplant. Just pure cold commerce. Then I like to get started on my tan and tequila far, far away.

I've only had two instances where I had bad deliveries. One, believe it or not, was on Saint Patrick's Day back '98. The solicitor was a union bigwig looking to score a bone marrow match for his sister. The guy missed the meet and I had to track his sorry ass down. Found him drunk and taking a leak in an alley behind a bar on West 57th. I reminded him of the specific instructions he received but he decided to blow the whole thing off as his sister took a turn for the worse. Not cool at all. When it gets to the point that I'm involved it's pretty much a done deal as body parts and the like are only good for so long, and dying sister or not, my employers expected to be paid. But this union guy told me to go fuck myself. Started bitching about life being not fair and have a heart, but then he saw my gun and all he could say then was, "Wait a second..." before two up close .22 caliber bullets scrambled his brain.

My second face-down, coincidentally, was another lawyer like Homer. Asian-American, immigrant parents scraped to put her through NYU or some smug law school shit. Gets a big shot job and her liver craps out on her. She started griping to me about price, the perils of extortion, how she had federal friends from law school, and blah, blah, blah. The sick cooze actually wanted to bargain for her new liver, can you believe that? It took far too long to explain to her why it was non-negotiable and when I was distracted she out and nailed my ankle with a cast iron doorstep shaped like a black Buddha. Now *that* made me really mad. And sloppy. I just emptied my whole fucking gun into her head until it was just slack pulp and splintered condo floorboards. My ankle looked like a rotten plum for months.

So now, yeah, I'm real careful.

What was Homer Drake's ailment? Easy. Bad kidney. All that exercise, eating right, and life laughs in your face and hands you a faulty filter. Kidneys, fortunately, were not hard to arrange. We got tons of those from the slums of Brazil and South Africa.

Homer's photograph didn't really reveal much, just another guy with tons of charisma, solid pedigree living the dream. Material said he had a wife, but dumped her when he saw what he could have. No information on whether it was before or after miss D cup was hired at his firm. If his transplant tanked, my guess was his ex-wife wouldn't be weeping for him so much but for the loss of her fat alimony check. Vibe on Homer was he apparently squirreled away a ton of cash in an offshore bank down in Panama. I

suppose this was because of the ex-Mrs. Drake's expensive Short Hills tastes. Naturally this information upped the price.

My cash and my backup hardware were stashed behind a brand new blue dumpster next to a strip club near the airport, place called Candies. Good joint, decent pour on with the Jack Daniels and ice even if it was twelve dollars a pop on top of a twenty-dollar cover. Nice leggy parade of Croatian talent. A bony junkyard dog next door in a long-term storage facility went positively apeshit when I was retrieving the drop. So I went back inside the club and ordered a bloody cheddar burger to go and hooked the poor mutt behind the chain link fence. That chilled him out.

Man, I love dogs.

Back in my rental Camry I unwrapped three items. My final fee, a plastic room passkey, and Sig Sauer P229. Homer better not get all nasty. I sat there and played with the gun and checked the action. Nice little piece, the Sig - kind of a law enforcement piece - .40 cal, just over two pounds with a twelve round clip. A little much but hey, who's complaining? Apparently someone knew someone who knew someone who boosted a bunch of these at a branch office of the Department of Homeland Security. Or maybe it was a Coast Guard Station, I forget. Who cares? The bureaucratic brass is so fucked up at DHS no one knows how many they have or don't have and apparently they don't care or are too embarrassed to admit they lost them. And the Coasties? Please.

Once the delivery was completed, the plan was to deposit the gun in pieces inside various drainage ditches, dumpster bins, and road shoulders. I was to leave the money at a prearranged drop as always. Then I was to park the rental car in long term, catch my flight, and be gone daddy gone.

Drake was booked in at the Hilton Dallas Fort Worth Lakes Executive Conference Center. Quite the mouthful, but five seconds from the airport. Big corner suite, top floor, stairwell across the hall. Electronic passkey worked flawlessly. I wore a classic dark suit, white shirt, solid green tie. If something went wrong and the goons dragged through the video, I would have been unrecognizable, just another business Joe. Trick was to keep moving, bow your head and don't look up. Even if some security staffer was concentrating on his cameras full bore, I'd be a muddied ghost on playback, moving fast and with confidence.

On my approach I set up a small 1000 foot range micro camera in a hall plant so as to cover my bases in case anyone was (A) with him and (B) anyone else accessed their rooms before Drake's arrival. Good camera. Came with a with a palm sized receiver.

The profile told me the cleaning crews on his floor were out by 2:16 pm and Drake's schedule that day included an early dinner meeting. So I thought, unless Mr. Exercise Nut ran long, he was likely to come back to change into his Speedo before dinner say between 4:30 and 5 PM. Homer knew someone was coming to Dallas, he just didn't know when or where that somebody would show up, and me in the room ahead of time gave me an edge.

I stood there in the suite. Gloves on, gun ready, its weight hanging thick in the back of my waist band. A quick sweep of the room led to the discovery of metal briefcase tucked under the spare blankets on the closet shelf. I assumed this was the money. I could have walked right then and there with it, but to disrespect a business transaction would be bad form. Word gets around.

My back teeth hurt. After the job I wanted to get down to Mexico and get that

pain fixed for good. There's this clinic, I shit you not, that advertises *Mexican Dental Vacations* on the internet. A top-notch place right on the beach in Mazatlan. Easy on the wallet and get it all taken care of. Clinic even had a nice little dipping pool. Get a gold crown, knock back some Don Julio Respedo, and chill out on my floatie. That was the plan anyway.

I ran down my check list. Flight ticket, fake passport, money, contingencies. No glaring slips, and just enough planted evidence to whet the appetite for some other guy. I gave myself a quick sniff and caught a shot of b.o. from my pits. Jesus. I needed a shower. My glands always got going on a job.

The suite was nice but average. Amazing how a cheap Chinese terrycloth bathrobe, some finer hardware on the doors and closets, and a stocked mini bar can jack the bill. I helped myself to the two mini Patrón Silvers and poured them into my mouth in a dual micro waterfall. As I stuffed the empty minis in my suit jacket pocket I poked the television on. Oprah. I briefly wondered what it might be like to hear Oprah jabbering away as your last cognitive thought before an accelerated chunk of metal ripped apart your brain. Wow. Talk about a suck-ass finish. I watched Oprah for a few minutes and she was all hyped up to be talking to some doughy chick next to her, talking all misty about her life changing around. Oprah was so into it that I thought she was going to fall off her perch and start bawling too. A brief girl on girl fantasy flashed through my mind with me and Oprah and her doughy guest. You know, a lot of guys might think Oprah is too heavy, but check out those curves, man. Check out that *altar*.

Me? I'd kneel in Oprah's church anytime.

Ah. The elevator ping. I checked the palm-sized video receiver and what do you know? There was Mr. Exercise, right on time. I stuffed the receiver in my jacket as Oprah's theme music came up and the frame switched to a Vagisil commercial. I turned the TV off and slipped into the bathroom.

Swipe. *Cha-chick*. The door swung wide.

And in came Homer Drake.

But I never saw it coming.

- *Who are you?*

Tile. Can you believe that shit? A piece of fucking tile that had been forged in some industrial ceramic South Korean hell, laid here by bottom notch, no-talent day laborers just so happens to crack under my wing-tipped toe at the precise moment of Drake's entry.

And that sound sends my man into full blown Jackie-fucking-Chan.

Now my whole head hurt, not just my back teeth and I believed he was about to snap my left elbow. I noticed that the carpet, a deep blue, smelled like lemons and ammonia.

- *I am one second away from breaking this arm got it, asshole?*

Oh yeah, I got it.

Now, I have been in tough situations. Many life threatening, the Army and small jolt in East Jersey State to name two. And I am no stranger to pain. But my guess was, no matter how tough Homer thought he was, he most certainly did not have the will to kill me, shocked if he even had the balls to...

Click.

Wow.

Wowowowwowow. Nice thin white line of pain. Now that HURT. I groaned. He was as surprised by what he had done as I was, putting all that jujitsu to practical use. Nice one, Homer. Jesus. He looked over at the cooler I had dropped on the floor.

- *My kidney! Shit!*

His grip went slack as his weight lifted off of my back and he reached for the fallen cooler. I heaved up and Homer pitched forward, cracking his head on the credenza with a grunt. Next, there was a mad limb scramble right out of a Three Stooges comedy, but then I whipped out the Sig and flopped back on the bed turning on the TV remote as I fell onto it. Homer's eyes went wide when he saw the gun. Then he dove on top of me - and I just kept pistol whipping his stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid skull until he went all slack on my chest.

Phew.

Homer was not as heavy as I thought he'd be even we were roughly the same size.

Maybe I should start swimming, I thought. Yeah right, I'll get right on that one once my snapped left elbow heals. Son of a bitch. I rolled him off of my chest and he tumbled to the floor in a heap. I grabbed the briefcase tucked under the blankets on the closet shelf and snapped it open. Quickly, I flipped through the bundles and did some fast eyeball math. It looked like Homer was short by ten grand.

What is it with these cheap fucking lawyers?

I painfully dragged a pillow with my buzzing, tenderized left hand and draped the bedspread over his face to control the spray. Two quick squeezes up close through the pillow and I felt half of Homer's face cave in, right cheek to left eye. Next, I dropped the gun, reached under his ass, and with a shake I proceeded to clean out his wallet. All in all, about three hundred in twenties and fifties. Bonus for me. I was up on my feet just in time to see Oprah on the television say she was back.

Before the shock wore off, I took my gun, the money, the kidney, and retrieved the micro camera from the hall plant. Next I found myself leaping down ten flights of stairs.

Boom. Out the exit, walking slow.

I called in to my employers when I got to the car. That it all went wrong didn't faze my guys one bit. They actually saw it as a plus. There was another match in Los Angeles and my ticket was waiting at the airport check-in. Details to follow.

Jesus, I was sweating sheets. Bound to happen sooner or later, I told myself, long odds will always bite you in the ass...just a matter of time. Queasy cold tremors seeped up from my stomach as I rolled through afternoon traffic. I puked the Patrón and the remains of my lunch on the passenger side floorboard. Great, I thought, that's just great.

That's what I get for eating goddamn Texas barbeque.

Have you any idea how difficult it is to disassemble a gun one handed while driving? Let alone get a tamperproof cap off of a vile of Percocet? I kept swearing under my breath. Man, after L.A., that fucking Mexican clinic better have someone who sets bones.

I am *never* coming back to Texas.

Kieran James Shea grew up on the Jersey Shore and believes everyone is guilty of something. He is bitterly suffering through writing his first novel.