

The Wham, The Bam, and the Gray-Collar Man

By Ian Nicholas Carleton

I could have sat on JD's face, instead I walked into his office and threw him over backwards in his black pleather office chair. I pulled the chair out from underneath his doughy body and rested the seat of my khakis firmly on his chest while facing away from him.

"Look at it, bastard! Take a good look, this is you're fucking fault!"

I had warned JD about this type of thing the last time I was in his office with my ass in his face.

Then I had stayed on the other side of his desk, slightly bent over but looking back at him with the same disdain.

"I like my ass JD. This ass has a nice shape. This ass remains firm yet pliable despite spending too much time in this urinal of an office complex. It pains my ass greatly to think that bullets may destroy the man candy morsel displayed before you JD - it fills me, and my ass, with great fucking anxiety."

"Jesus, Simon. Can you take it easy with the ass already?"

"That's what she said." Actually I wouldn't bang JD's wife if he paid me to.

"What?"

"Never mind. You know I've got Melana coming tomorrow. I took the rest of the week off so I could hook up with a model, not so I can fly to Germany to do your dirty work."

"Our dirty work."

"Stop speaking for the company that I'm your superior in, ass."

"Orders come straight from the old man." JD pushed the memo across his desk. I didn't have to read it. The little bitch wouldn't have been so uppity if it wasn't legit.

"Look, it's just a quick meet and greet then you turn around and come right back home. The future of the company is more important than your little booty call, so stop sniveling."

"This isn't sniveling, douchebag. This is a slightly whiny and very pissed off tantrum, you fucking imbecile."

"Simon, the future of the com-"

"*Bullsh-*"

"Jesus!"

"They're supposed to be Russian mob JD! I read Davis' report. These assholes are supposedly ex-three-letter acronym from Siberia or Iberia or some other crusty tear duct of the planet. I don't care if they can make good on their promises - which they can't. I don't care if they found an elf up Stalin's ass that can turn cows into gold, it is very, very hard to get models to come to the sandy butt crack of New Mexico and I'm not fucking going!" I was going. There was really no way out of it if I wanted to keep the salary that allowed me to go to Tahoe and bring back models, but it was an opinion worth vocalizing.

"Hey! You can cry all you want, but the board wants you to check these guys out before we do the R&D deal with them. So sack up and strap on your lederhosen." I really wanted to punch the pudgy bastard. He was enjoying his chance for a cheap shot

way to much. He had probably even volunteered to be the one to tell me. There really wasn't any way out of it so I decided to storm out of JD's office so he could quit filling his spunk bank with the moment. The little fucker still tried to get his shots in as I was leaving.

"Sorry Simon, the board said-"

"Just! Just...cease blinking or something."

"Bye Simon."

"Die painfully. From crabs."

"Dickhead." I was already out of his office when he muttered it. I should've stormed back in and given the prick the beating he deserved. I should've at least trashed his office. Instead I gave his smiling face my dickhead middle finger from the parking lot while I got in my dickhead Ferrari and went to my dickhead condo to pack my dickhead suits.

The flight was enclosed hell - hell with peanuts, plastic beef, and a Pakistani neighbor that waved the safety card in front of his face every time he ripped ass, which he did constantly.

When I got to Munich I was greeted by an obscenely large man with one of those names that would have been changed to John Smith at Ellis Island. I nicknamed him Big Guy and hoped he would take it as dumbass American charm. He drove me to the hotel and said he would wait in the car while I got ready. It was already nine thirty at night and the behemoth said we needed to hurry so I didn't argue. I threw on the suit that I thought would go over best in a country where Hasslehoff was God and hopped back in Big Guy's Benz.

I didn't feel like taking in the scenery as we cruised through the streets of Munich. I was too bitter about the board sending me to meet with the prospective war criminals based solely on the fact that I was the only VP young enough to not yet need an IV of Propecia and a mistress on salary. We stopped on the curb in front of a long line of people in spandex pants and baggy t-shirts. I sighed as Big Guy opened the door and motioned me towards the entrance beneath the neon sign that probably said something really, really cool like 'Platinum Schnitzel'.

My rib cage started vibrating the second I walked through the double doors. Melana had mentioned something about the New Rave movement sweeping across Europe and I had pictured it as being slightly less dorky. The lights flashed as even more spandexed cogs in the machine of the Audi-state pulsed in unison to the hottest new beats that were really the same beats from 1992. Big Guy pulled me towards an elevator and I thanked Hasselhoff that I didn't have wade through the crowd of cubicle rebellion.

As I walked off the elevator I realized that I hadn't eaten since I was over the middle part of the Atlantic and even then I had barely been able to choke down a couple of bites. My escort and I walked across the balcony above the sea of bouncing fashion victims and brought me to four guys divided between two couches and six girls where he announced my arrival.

"Yankee pig's here." It's always great when cultures can clash in the vicinity of an open bar.

"Hi, I'm Simon." And I will be your unwilling embittered ambassador from the corporate west for the evening, thanks for the invite to the classiest place this side of the time warp between Europe and the sane world.

“I’m Ivan.” The one nearest me stood up. “This is Dimitri and Mikhail, and that is Boris.” Boris was looking like a Russian cherub that had obviously taken some of the ecstasy that was sure to be floating around downstairs. “We have been waiting for your arrival.”

“And hopefully you’re approval,” Dimitri chimed in. I was just super psyched to have found the four guys with the dumbest, most stereotypical Russia names ever.

“Ah, but tonight is Boris’ birthday, tonight we drink away your jet lag and tomorrow we talk business, OK?”

“Sounds great.” Except for the fact that my stomach had enough food to soak up maybe a third of a shot of vodka and these guys looked like they were extremely mad at their livers and expected them to be spiked on their bedposts in the morning.

“Come, Little Brother.” Mikhail reached into a fishbowl filled with ice and pulled out a handful of test tubes filled with vodka. “To globalization.”

“It’s a small world, after all.” I slammed the shot back and knew that the small world was going to be spinning faster very soon. I was introduced to random people by Ivan and Mikhail while Dimitri hung back and babysat Boris by making sure the birthday boy had a steady stream of girls to grind on him. It was pretty much the universal language of bars; this is Who Cares, lets take a shot...this is Nobody Cares, take a shot...this is Fuck I Don’t Know with huge implants, take two shots and cop a feel. We soon ditched the test tubes in the fishbowl, leaving them for Boris and Dimitri while we opted for the whole bottles of vodka handed to us by the bartender. It was a lot less of the back and forth and reaching that wasted our limited motor skills. After we took shots with Big Guy, Ivan announced he had to piss and Mikhail pulled me aside to the bar for what he drunkenly assumed was privacy in a throbbingly loud eurotrash club.

“Little Brother, you big shot corporate America hot shit, no?”

“That’s what they tell me.” I really hoped this wasn’t turning into a rant. I also really hoped I could keep from puking on Mikhail.

“So,” he swayed a couple of times and took a swig of his vodka in dramatic pause, “you’re collar white criminal, right?”

“Um, white collar criminal? Yeah. Pretty much.” I mean what was the point of lying to the guy? I was thousands of miles from home and drunk with a bunch of guys that could probably kill me without making me drink till I gain Russian citizenship. My honesty must have been well received because Mikhail threw his arm around me in that kind of scary drunken intimacy sort of way.

“I like you Little Brother. You not bullshit me. We know you check us out before you come so we check you out. You’re pretty good with money Little Brother. You move it around very well, like magic.”

“I try. You have to be pretty good to stay out of jail.” It also helps if you give a little to your bosses so they help protect you because they’re more experienced in the finer points of corporate fraud.

“See, I...we...want to be more like you. More, white collar?”

“Yeah, white collar. You guys seem to do okay.”

“Yeah but this is shit. We have to kill too fucking many people.” I know, I should’ve left. I should have waited until Ivan got back then said I had to piss and slipped out and got the hell out of there, but in actuality Mikhail was just confirming what we were all pretty sure of anyway. Why hold it against him?

“Yeah, that sucks.” It was still hard to come back with anything valid to say to someone who just told you that they killed ‘too fucking many people’.

“We’re trying to be more like you man; easy life, white collar criminal, not blue. Blue sucks, man. We come up to your level, maybe you, just for a little come down to ours?”

“Um, OK.” Actually not OK, really not fucking OK, but when the guy next to you has a genuine and sincerely fucked up look in his eye, it’s kinda OK.

“Just for a little bit. It’s no big deal Little Brother. You come down to maybe gray collar for a minute and then we all come up together - as one!” At this, Mikhail dropped a blue pill in a shot glass and filled it with vodka - it was obviously the ecstasy that put Boris in such a good mood.

“Wouldn’t it be pale-blue collar?”

“What?”

“When you mix white and blue it would be pale blue.” I hoped Mikhail didn’t kill me.

“Yeah, but gray sounds better! Like more of the dark side Little Brother. Like, we be our own criminals, yeah?”

“Hells yeah.” Yes, I was now redefining the academic structure of criminal behavior with a drunken psychopathic killer but hey, if anybody asks, it was the vodka talking.

“Now drink! Drink, Little Brother.” Mikhail nudged the shot glass in front of me and I hoped we had bonded enough that he wouldn’t let me die later. I took the glass and raised it to his direction.

“To gray collars.”

“To gray collars!” Mikhail *chinged* his bottle against my shot and I tried to swallow the pill without thinking about how the living blanket of spandex pants beneath the balcony was about to officially become the least fucked up part of the evening.

Yes, the pill should have slid right through my throat like the vodka that blazed a trail down my esophagus. It should have gone down smooth and easy so I looked maybe half as badass as the Red Army of One that stood next to me - but of course it didn’t. Instead it took a little fellatio and a larger chunk of pride mixed with a pinch of desperation. I was pretty sure Mikhail didn’t see me, since Ivan was strolling back in and walking a remarkably straight line.

“Lets go.” Mikhail nodded and grabbed me while Dimitri managed to get Boris upright and stumbling in the right direction. Mikhail made sure I didn’t forget my half-full bottle of vodka and we made for the door and hopped into what was probably the only Chevy Suburban in Germany.

I paid closer attention to the scenery as we left the club, mainly because the pill was starting to kick in and made the street lights streak and throb together into one giant sheet of ‘oooooo, pretty’. Everybody was talking in Russian, so I mainly stared out the window and was sure to laugh every time Mikhail elbowed me in the ribs.

I needed to go back to the hotel. Fuck, I needed to go home, or to detox or wherever Melana was spreading her legs tonight. We got to where we were going and I was a little bummed because it was a dark alley and there were no pretty lights and it kinda struck me as an acceptable place to murder a American businessman that you had gotten fucked up on vodka and MDMA. We rolled out of the Suburban and Mikhail

laughed as he guided me by the shoulder to a door that looked really out of place in a dingy European alley. It was so shiny I wanted my tongue to crawl inside of it.

There are fates worse than death, and the argument can be made that a German S&M club is one of them.

When you think about a German sex club, (or any sex club for that matter) you, well, fuck you - who knows what the fuck you think about sex clubs or even if you think about sex at all? When I think about sex clubs, which, no, isn't that often, I picture something very sleek and modern. Lots of black and chrome and pulsing lights and blaring electronica - like the stuff that people who think they're still stuck in the Matrix spank it to. This place looked more like a cabin in Tahoe, bright hardwood everywhere. Apparently it made the blood easier to find and clean up because, yes...there was blood on the fucking floors. And not like a little bit of blood either, more like somebody's nipple accidentally got ripped off, that kind of blood.

There was more rowdiness in a foreign language as we made our way through a long narrow corridor. Mikhail had to keep pulling me along because I kept pausing to look at the car wrecks of sexual exploration and rubbing my face against the hardwood walls (they were really glossy). We went through some rooms and past more scary people in black leather, then upstairs where the four musketeers were practically chanting. And then Boris was promptly thrown in a room. Four women drenched in different shades of neon latex followed him. Ivan slammed the door shut behind them to a roar from the crowd of Mikhail, Dimitri, and myself.

We went back downstairs where things were getting...well, not dark and hazy... they were more bright and fuzzy. I was pretty sure that the three men with me had resorted to speaking solely Russian even though I was probably fucked up enough to not recognize English either. I just kept sucking on the bottle and laughing and swaying to drinking songs and rubbing the light blue couches because they were so fucking amazing.

I woke up lying on the floor in a bedroom getting the shit beat out of me by a girl wearing a leather hood, black tape over her nipples. She was swinging jumper cables that took chunks out of the floor when they missed my head.

Mikhail and Dimitri were laughing uncontrollably in the corner and didn't see fit to step in until I honestly winced in pain. Apparently, Sado-Barbie had brought me into the room and thought it would be a good idea to let me handcuff her to the top rail of the four post bed, a bed entirely too nice for a sex club by the way, German or otherwise. I had managed to get the restraints nice and secure before passing out and leaving her to stand there for six hours. Mikhail had been nice enough to set her free and watch me scream like a schoolgirl at my wake up call. Looking back, it was probably a good thing that I passed out. I didn't really want to see what she would have done with those fucking jumper cables. I mean, Jesus Christ. Fucking jumper cables.

After Dimitri carried Leatherface out of the room, Mikhail picked me off of the floor and we walked out into the hallway to meet a smiling Ivan. Everybody seemed entirely too happy, considering I felt like ass in a bag without even factoring in being beaten with automotive accessories.

"Good night?" asked Ivan. Mikhail chuckled like he was still high.

"Sure."

“No worries. We get Boris, then breakfast.” Thank fucking God. I needed something to turn my stomach back right side out. We headed down the hall to the room where we left Boris and Ivan flung the door open.

From the looks of the blood on the wall, Boris had lost more than a nipple. Way more.

Ivan said that it wasn't foul play, or “the fucking whores” that Dimitri demanded be tracked out and “ripped out”, which probably meant apart, maybe not. Ivan was convinced that it was one of the forty-six steel barbells that had been skewered through Boris' chest that caused the wasted alcoholic to lose enough blood through the course of vigorous sexual activity that his heart gave out. Basically, he fucked himself to death. After, the neon nympho fairies finger-painted some designs on the walls with at least a couple of pints. Dimitri punched a hole in the wall and then came a lot of sentence fragments that I didn't really understand and I hoped didn't have anything to do with me.

“But what about?”

“It's fine.”

“How?”

“It still works.”

“With?”

“Da.”

“Really?”

“Da, we got Yankee pig.”

Fuck

I followed the three remaining members of the emerging global conglomerate back outside and into the Suburban even though I didn't really want to. I would've asked what was going on but they were obviously a little stressed out. And as much as I felt for their loss, I hoped that this didn't mean that our breakfast plans were canceled - and that they didn't fucking kill me.

“So?” was the only thing I could squeak out.

“So,” Dimitri put his hand on my shoulder, and not in that ‘start laughing Little Brother’ kind of way. “So, now things get a little more interesting, Little Brother.” It didn't sound like an answer that involved strudel.

“I just want you guys to know that I won't say anything. As far as I'm concerned, nothing happened and the deal still goes through and we're all still drinking buddies and I'll do whatever you want.” I was so relieved to see Ivan and Mikhail smile that I almost shit myself.

“Relax, Little Brother. We just need you to fill in for Boris for a little bit.” That did not sound like something that I wanted to hear.

We started driving through Munich and after about three blocks Ivan nodded and Mikhail set a handgun in my lap.

“It's time to come down to our level, White Collar. Just for a vacation.”

Shit.

Ivan began to explain that the group hadn't exactly procured the assets that they were offering to the American bidders. They had one other person as their sole competition for the necessary rights and deeds, someone they would turn into no competition as soon as an official act of interest was made, like a young, handsome VP sent to Germany.

“It’s easy, Little Brother. Point and shoot. You’ll be so close, you can’t miss”
It was at this point I began rehearsing my return to JD’s office.

There were a million questions I should’ve asked, but I tried to just stick to the ones that would hopefully lessen the chance of me dying in a foreign country on an empty stomach.

Just pull the trigger?

Yes.

What about the safety?

It’s already off, be careful.

How far away are we?

Five minutes.

Do I actually have to kill somebody?

Hopefully. Relax Little Brother. It’s easy, fucking hopscotch.

I tried to get my mind off breakfast and abbreviate a rationalization for killing somebody. A million questions shot through my mind and I couldn’t answer a single fucking one of them. The good news was that I really didn’t have to; I was in a car with three ex-whatevers that told me I was going with them to knock some people off in the name of financial gain. I didn’t really have a lot of, or any, fucking wiggle room in the matter. I just had to try to stay alive so I could kick JD’s ass when I got home.

Ivan stopped to drop off Mikhail and Dimitri and the pair began walking towards the large, old building that we would be pumping bullets into. It’s okay. It’s not like they don’t have plenty of large, old buildings in Europe. Ivan and I circled around to the side of the building and crept up to the window of the soon-to-be-dead bastards office. This was going better than expected. I hadn’t thrown up because the ‘holy shit’ wrenching in my stomach that comes from committing espionage was counteracting the ‘fuck you’ wrenching that came from being half-hungover and still-wasted and malnourished and generally bitchy. I will admit, being with slightly unhinged professionals when you attempt something like this does help set you at ease, like they’re probably apeshit crazy enough to actually get away with it.

Mikhail and Dimitri stumbled up to the front door singing what sounded like an oddly rhythmized version of *The Boot-Scootin Boogie*. I was trying to figure out if they were at a verse or a chorus when Ivan said: “Go”, like he was starting a children’s karate match and burst through the window while Mikhail and Dimitri blew the hell out of the whoever answered the door. Ivan walked straight past the rotund Pakistani and opened the door to the office, signaling to Mikhail to watch the front staircase while he focused on the rear of the building.

“He’s the one. Do him.” Ivan indicated the man in the round navy suit that was looking at us in shock - not fighting back, not resisting, not even a hint of defeat, just blank slate dumbass fucking bewilderment. That’s when I recognized him.

The man we had come to kill was the flatulent little bitch from my plane ride over.

I pretended to channel my annoyance into hate and hate into rage and I was almost at murderous rage when Ivan started shooting at the security coming down the staircase and told me to fucking hurry so I shot him in the head. I hit him on the second try.

Ivan looked back to check my work and was convinced that the three bullets that had actually made it into the guy's body had sufficiently done the trick. He stepped out of the office and yelled to Mikhail while he drove the security guards further back up the staircase. I assumed that he wanted me to follow him so I stepped out and shot a few rounds in the same direction as Ivan and then I heard a sharp whiz followed by a crack as a hole appeared in the wall beside me.

“Sorry, Little Brother.” FanFuckingTastic.

Ivan turned around and shoved me back through the office door and out of the window. We heard more shots, but I don't think any of them were coming our direction. And that's what really pisses me off.

We made it. Got away with it clean and clear. Ivan picked up Mikhail and Dimitri around the corner from where we dropped them off and then it was all congrats and smiles and laughs. Mikhail said Boris would be proud and, “Welcome to the Gray-Collar Club.” Then Mikhail and I had to explain to Ivan and Dimitri what the hell a gray-collar criminal was. Ivan said the magic word – breakfast - and I could've kissed the bastard.

It was enough to convince me I might actually be a badass.

We got to the restaurant and everybody else was putting their guns in the back of their waistbands. Of course, since they were more along the lines of actual badasses, they remembered to put their safeties on. Everybody jumped when small pieces of my left ass-cheek exploded. Instead of breakfast I got a lecture about how we couldn't go to the hospital and about how Dimitri was trained to suture my butt back together and how Mikhail had actual antibiotics in addition to painkillers better than what I could get from a doctor.

By the time I ate again, my plane was headed back over the Atlantic and I was so fucked up on pills I had called three different stewardesses Mommy. I also told my neighbor that if he ripped ass I would hunt him down and fucking kill him.

When I landed I took some more pills and headed straight to JD's office. I even curbed my fucking Ferrari but was too pissed to care.

That pretty much catches us up to, well...

“Look at the blood JD. I told you! You little ass-fucking bitch!” I knew it was still bleeding a little because people had been staring at me in the airport and the valet was shocked that I would put my slightly bleeding ass into an Italian sports car.

“Jesu-“

“He can't help you now, bitch! It just you and my ass!” I stood up and almost fell over when I kicked him in the ribs. It's really disappointing to be too stoned to kick somebody's ass, especially when you predicted them deserving it. JD let out a fucking puppy's whimper as I walked out of his office.

“Do the fucking deal JD! My deflated ass cheek demands it!” And because Little Brother gets Boris' cut. Here's to gray-collar globalization.

Ian Nicholas Carleton was born and raised in Springfield, Missouri and currently resides at a random bar downtown. He graduated spring '06 from Misery (MO) State University with a BA in Creative Writing and has been trying desperately to whore himself into the writing world ever since. This is his first success. He has about a dozen other pieces out there in the void. His hobbies are writing fiction that makes people laugh, cry, vomit, or any combination of the three and finding out what the bottom of liquor bottles look like.