

You're Gonna Get Yours

By Stephen Allan

Raymond winced every time someone from his old life called him Brick House, and got right pissed when some young punk called him that; almost as pissed off when someone called him "nigga". So, when the little snot ran up to him while he was eating his lunch on the back end of his rusting truck, and said, "Brick House, my nigga," Raymond wasn't pleased.

"The name's Raymond to most people," Raymond said as he took another swig from his beer can, hidden in a brown paper bag. He had held the laborer position for nearly a year and felt comfortable enough with the foreman to drink a beer or two on the worksite.

"Nigga, please."

Raymond dropped his beer and snatched the scrawny punk by the neck.

"Some white trash piece of shit called me a nigger once and I spent fifteen years in jail," Raymond said. "That racist prick spent those years in the fucking cemetery. I don't give a shit what color you are, nobody calls me a nigga. Do we understand?"

"Goddamn, man," the punk said, "I just come over to tell you about Jerome."

Raymond let him go.

"What about him?"

"They say he's in the ER."

"What for?"

"That nig... I mean that boy got himself beat up real good."

Raymond hadn't seen his son since he got out of Angola four years ago. He tried to make contact, but Jerome was too much into the gang life. Guns, thefts, drugs and whatever else he and his buddies could find. All of them barely in their twenties.

"What's your name?" Raymond asked the kid.

"EZ."

"Your mama give you that name?"

"Nah, but people been calling me EZ most of my life."

"Well, EZ, you gonna tell me which hospital he's in?"

EZ told Raymond.

"His crew gots to knows," EZ said. "You know where they hang?"

Raymond didn't know any of Jerome's friends.

"Can't help you."

Raymond walked away to tell his foreman about his son and ask for the rest of the day off.

The woman behind the ER's triage desk gave Raymond directions to Jerome's bed. He found his son sitting on a stretcher, bandaged around the head with his arm in a sling. There was dried blood on his Saints t-shirt.

"What happened?" Raymond asked.

Jerome looked up from a Sports Illustrated, but went back to his magazine without answering.

“You gonna pretend I’m not here?” Raymond said.

“I don’t need you here.”

Jerome was a skinny kid, not quite twenty. While Raymond was away, his ex worked two jobs and didn’t have time for Jerome, and the school system couldn’t have cared less.

“Where are your boys?” Raymond asked as he pulled up a plastic chair to the foot of the bed. “I figured they’d be here.”

“They’re gone.”

“What do you mean gone?”

“Dead.”

“Shit,” Raymond said. “Accident?”

“Yeah, someone accidentally shot ‘em all.”

“When?”

“Man, what the fuck you care for?” Jerome’s eyes seemed wild, but there was fear in them. “Why are you even here? How’d you even know I was here?”

“Some piece of work, called himself EZ,” Raymond said.

“Fuck,” Jerome said and stood up. The first step caused his face to wince. “Fuck.”

“What are you trying to do?”

“Jesus, it hurts.”

“Just stay there.”

“Can’t,” Jerome said, his eyelids pressed tight. “Gotta get out of here.”

“You ain’t gotta do nothing but wait for the doctor,” Raymond said. “EZ was going to tell your friends where you are.”

“Are you deaf or just dumb? I just told you that they’re all gone.”

“EZ didn’t know that. He was asking about where to find them.”

“What’d you tell him?”

“What could I tell him? Nothing.”

A nurse opened the privacy curtain. She grabbed Jerome’s arm and injected a syringe of liquid into it. “Tetanus,” she said, holding the empty syringe for Raymond to see. Jerome asked when he could leave.

“The guy will be right in,” the nurse said and left, pulling the curtain closed behind her. Raymond watched her ass as she went.

“At least they got some good looking nurses working here,” Raymond said and turned back to his son.

Jerome was grabbing at his throat. He scrambled out of the bed and fell onto the white floor. His lips turned blue and his body began to shake wildly.

“Nurse,” Raymond yelled. “I need someone in here.”

The curtain slashed open and two women in scrubs crouched down beside Jerome.

“He can’t breathe,” Raymond said.

The women rushed as they tried to put some metal instrument into Jerome’s mouth. One said she couldn’t get through. The other hurried to a drawer beside the bed and grabbed a scalpel. She handed it to the one knelt beside Jerome. She took the scalpel

to his throat and slit it open. The first woman handed her a piece of tubing, which the second one pushed into the bleeding hole. Instead of air, blood and what looked like vomit spewed out of the other end. The shaking stopped and the blood and bile slowed its flow from the plastic tubing.

“What the hell happened?” the first nurse said.

“The tetanus shot,” Raymond said. “The nurse gave him the shot and when I turned around, he was choking.”

“Tetanus?” the second nurse said. “He didn’t need a tetanus shot. Who gave him the shot?”

“A nurse,” Raymond said.

“What was her name?”

Raymond tried to recall a nametag or an ID badge hanging around her neck, but he couldn’t remember seeing one.

“A Tetanus shot wouldn’t do this to someone,” the first nurse said.

The cops came but they didn’t care. Raymond was in too much shock to ride them, so he sat and answered every question, staring at his son covered with a white sheet.

After the detectives left, orderlies came for Jerome and wheeled him away from his father. One of the officers had said that an autopsy would need to be performed. A nurse told Raymond that Jerome’s body would be released to the caretaker when the pathologist was through.

Raymond left the hospital and headed home. Not wanting to take the bus, Raymond walked close to four miles to his small efficiency. When he reached his place, he didn’t bother to turn on the lights. He simply grabbed a cleaned-out jelly jar and a half-empty bottle of Wild Turkey and sat down on one of the frayed lawn chair he used for furniture. The whiskey was gone by the time the moon came out. Raymond stared at a small picture of Jerome that hung on his grimy wall. He was six or seven and wearing a football uniform. Three teeth were missing from his smile. Raymond kept his eyes on the photograph until the heaviness of the drink consumed him and he fell asleep.

The pounding on the door woke him. He stood up from the chair too fast and his head swam from the alcohol. The microwave’s clock read 3:30. Raymond didn’t own a gun, so he went to his kitchen utility drawer and brought out a chef’s knife. He went to the door,

“Who is it?”

“It’s EZ, man.” His voice was low, a conspiratorial whisper. “Open up.”

“I don’t know you,” Raymond said, looking through the eyehole.

“You know me, we met today, nigga,” EZ said. “Sorry, not nigga. I mean, yeah, whatever. But you know me.”

“Just because we talked for five minutes, it don’t mean we’re close.”

“Just open up. This is about Jerome.”

“Jerome’s dead.”

“Yeah, I know. People been saying he was juiced.”

“What else have people been saying?”

“Let me in and I’ll tell you.”

Raymond unlocked the door and opened it. “Put your hands up in the air,” Raymond said, motioning with the knife in his hand.

EZ did as he was told and Raymond patted him down. He told EZ to turn around and saw the gun hanging out of the back of his black jeans. Raymond took it and slid it into the back of his own pants.

“What’s the gun for?”

“I get scared of strangers when I walk home from school. What do you think it’s for? This place is mad since the floods, man. It’s like cowboys and Indians out there on the streets some days.”

Raymond had been in Angola during the Hurricanes and flooding. He got out four months later to find his city, or at least his part of the city, virtually destroyed. Almost everyone he knew had moved away.

“Alright, come in and sit down,” Raymond said and turned on the light.

EZ stood next to the chair Raymond had been sleeping in and pointed down at it.

“Man, don’t you got like any real furniture?”

“It’s hard for an honest man to have anything nowadays,” Raymond said.

EZ sat down in the chair, shifting his weight back and forth. Raymond grabbed his one dining chair from his kitchen table and sat in front of EZ.

“You said you had something to say about Jerome,” Raymond said. “What is it?”

“Can I get my gun back?”

“Don’t trust you.”

EZ pleaded, but Raymond remained firm.

“What is it that you know?” He still felt a little drunk and wished he had splashed some cold water on his face. He even looked over at the faucet when he talked to EZ.

“OK, first of all, I liked Jerome. He was always nice to me. Helped me with shooting baskets, things like that. I never ran with him and his boys, because the others were complete motherfuckers.”

“Stop jabbering and tell me what you know.”

“Word is, it was Harold, the guy who runs the gang Jerome was with. I guess Jerome went around about this money they’d taken during some bank robbery during the floods. Everyone suspected these motherfuckers, but no one ever saw the cash. Jerome said the money was real and he was getting big enough to take it himself.”

“He came out in the open and told people he was going to rip off these guys?” Raymond asked.

“Like I said, it was what I heard. It looks like Harold is takin’ care of things. I think you hurry, you get him and the money.”

“Don’t care about the cash.”

“Well, you can hunt him down.”

“You know where I can find this guy?”

“Yeah, he’s been staying with his cousin. Lives in one of them new trailers the government bought. It’s in a boarded up lot on Christopher Street.”

“What’s the cousin’s name?”

“Wallace.”

“OK. I’ll hit their place today.”

“You better take something with you if you plan on knocking on that door. Those motherfuckers be holding a lot of fire power.”

Raymond took out EZ’s gun.

“This should do,” Raymond said.

“That’s my gun, registered and everything,” EZ said. “Something goes down, and they trace the gun, the cops are coming for me.”

Raymond thought about it for a minute, then unloaded the gun’s clip and took out the bullets and handed everything back to EZ.

“Go home,” Raymond said.

“So, what are you going to take with you?”

Raymond looked at his kitchen counter where he had placed his chef’s knife in the sink. Getting caught with a loaded weapon was not good for someone on probation, but cutlery wouldn’t be a problem.

“I guess I’ll think of something.”

“You hear anything, I’ll be at the courts down by Christopher,” EZ said.

The knife didn’t feel like enough; he wished he had a gun. Those guys in the trailer would be packing. It was hard to close the distance to someone when all they needed to do was pull a trigger to stop you. He concealed his weapon by holding the blade along his arm, the sharp edge out. He knocked on the door and heard them scramble inside. There was some mumbling that he couldn’t make out, and he was sure he heard a clip click into some kind of firearm. He knocked again.

The door opened a crack and a pug-faced man looked out.

“You got the wrong place,” the pug-face said.

“I’m looking for Harold,” Raymond said.

Pug-face looked back into the trailer, said something to the others and then returned to Raymond. “Nigga ain’t here.”

Raymond let the words slide.

“You know where he’s at?”

“No,” Pug-face said. “I don’t know no Harold. Get out of here, old man.”

Pug-face went to close the door, but Raymond put a brick in the way.

“The fuck, man?” Pug-face said.

“Where’s Harold?”

“Nigga, I’m gonna shoot you, you don’t move that brick.” Pug-face lifted his foot to kick the brick out of the way, but Raymond grabbed him by the back of his knee and pulled him down. He then pulled the punk closer to him and placed the point of the knife against the man’s stomach. Pug-face tried to break free.

“You squiggle anymore, you’re liable to get stabbed, man,” Raymond said.

Pug-face called to his friends. The door swung open wide and Raymond saw the barrels of two semi-automatics pointed at his head.

“Stop it with the knife,” one of the gunmen said. “I ain’t afraid to blast your brains out of your skull.”

“I didn’t come here for trouble...”

“You found it, motherfucker,” the same gunman said.

“I’m just looking for Harold.”

“There’s a shitload of Harolds in this city.”

“This one runs with a gang that supposed to live in this trailer.”

“Who told you that?”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“Like hell it don’t matter,” the gunman said. “I want to know the name of the dead man who told you about this trailer. Was it Marco?”

“Don’t know any Marco, besides that ain’t neither here or there right now,” Raymond said.

“What the fuck you talking to this nigga for?” Pug-face said. “Shoot him.”

The gunman’s pistol had lowered a bit, but he raised it back up. Raymond dropped to the ground and rolled under the trailer; the gunshots echoing through the hot air behind him. The tight fit under the trailer caused Raymond to shimmy on his back. The three guys jumped onto the dirt. Raymond managed to scramble out the other side before they were on their bellies and shooting at him.

“Go around,” he heard one of them say. Raymond ran to the end of the trailer and leaned against the side with his blade out. The second gunman sprinted around the corner. Raymond brought his knife around and sunk it into the guy’s belly. As he doubled over, Raymond pulled the knife out and brought it down into his back. Raymond felt the steel hit the sides of bones on its way in. The guy let his pistol fall as he dropped to the ground. Raymond grabbed the gun and came up in time to see Pug-face come around the opposite corner with a shotgun. Pug let off a few rounds, pumping the weapon with each explosion; but the shots went wide.

The gun in Raymond’s hand jerked several times with massive power before Raymond realized that he had squeezed the trigger. It was more reflex than conscious thought. Pug’s shoulder and chest burst with blood. He slammed down to the dirt on his face. Raymond paused too long at the two bodies in front of him. A gunshot came from underneath the trailer and Raymond felt a sudden scorching heat hit his calf. A few more shots missed him as he ran to the front of the trailer. He found some cover behind a Ford Bronco and held the pistol up. It was out of ammunition. He no longer had his knife and the gun was useless.

He crouched up to see through the vehicle’s windows, but they were heavily tinted. He tried the driver’s door and found it unlocked. He looked inside for a weapon of some sort, but found none. The keys were in the ignition. Raymond climbed in. From inside the cab he could see his surroundings. He watched the trailer from both sides for the gunman and then spotted some movement underneath. The gunman pulled himself from under the trailer, his gun in ready position. Raymond turned around for anything in the backseat, but as he did, his hip hit the horn. The gunman swung around and started blasting the Bronco’s windshield. Raymond ducked under the dash, reached up and turned the truck on. He put the thing in gear and pressed a hand against the gas pedal. Raymond slammed against the insides of the truck when the vehicle hit the trailer. He heard a scream and looked up over the dashboard. The gunman was pinned between the truck and the trailer, his arms trapped at his sides. Raymond got out of the truck and went over to the gunman.

“I’m gonna kill you,” the gunman said, but it came out soft. He was a dying man.
 “Tell me about Harold,” Raymond said.

“...kill you,” the gunman repeated and then went limp.

The sirens were close and Raymond knew that this was a dead end. He stood up and went back and looked for his knife. It was still in the second gunman’s back. He pulled it out and wiped the handle with the bottom of the second gunman’s t-shirt. He grabbed Pug-face’s shotgun and ran off in the opposite direction of the cop cars speeding toward the scene.

EZ was leaning against the metal fence of the basketball courts watching a three-on-three game. Raymond came up beside him.

“Harold wasn’t where you said he’d be,” Raymond said.

“If he weren’t there, he could be anywhere.”

“What do you know about a guy named Marcus?”

“Marcus? Good man.”

“He got some kind of beef with Harold and his buddies?”

“Something like that. He used to hang with all of them niggas. Then there was some fight and he took off and joined up with some motherfuckers.”

“You know where I could find this guy?”

“Sure,” EZ said, and pointed to one of the players on the court. “That one in the green shorts, that’s him.”

A cruiser with its lights flashing and siren screaming flew by. Raymond ducked.

“Damn, why’re you acting all wiggedy?” EZ asked.

“Got into a bit of trouble back at the trailer.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“The kind you don’t want anyone asking about.”

One of the players on the court sunk a shoot from twenty feet back. “Game, motherfuckers,” the kid said. Marcus grabbed his stuff against the fence on the opposite side from Raymond and EZ.

“Yo, Marcus,” EZ said. “Got a man here wants to talk to you.”

Marcus stood up with a Gatorade in his hand. He looked at Raymond and downed the drink, but kept his eye on Raymond.

“What’s he got to talk about?”

“You know Harold?” Raymond asked.

“Yeah, I know that motherfucker,” Marcus said. “But you should try his cousin, if you’re looking for him.”

“His cousin is dead. Along with the rest of his crew,” Raymond said.

“Harold do it?”

“No, I did.”

“Well, you’ll excuse me if I don’t cry,” Marcus said.

“When I went there they asked me if you were the one who told me where they were. Why would you be the first person they’d think of?”

“Maybe because things between Harold and me never got solved.”

“What things?”

“Why should I tell you?”

“Because Harold killed my son.”

“Who’s that?”

“Jerome.”

“He that scrawny thing used to hang out at the 7-Eleven on Burbank Avenue?”

Marcus asked. “He was OK. Sorry.”

“What happened between you and that crew?”

Marcus looked at EZ. “You vouch for this guy?”

“Yeah, he’s OK. Just looking for the guy who did his son.”

Marcus thought for a moment and then nodded his head. “Yeah, OK, I’ll tell you.” Marcus put his fingers through the chain fence and rested his arms there. “I was part of that crew. We’d do the usual shit that every other crew out there does. Everything was split between all of us, so everyone got the same amount of money, no matter who did what. If you were part of whatever was going down, you still got your share. Now, just before the flood I went up north to my grandma’s, so I wasn’t around for the mess. I found out that Harold and the boys came across a lot of money during that time, but when I got back to the city, Harold said I wasn’t with them no more. I told him I knew about the money, but that little bitch ignored me. That money never surfaced. No one in that crew spent any extra cash, you know, like some crazy amount out of the ordinary. So, maybe there wasn’t any.”

“If Harold wasn’t with his cousin, where would he be?”

“If he ain’t there, and he ain’t on the streets committing crimes, then that nigga must be flying in the air or something.”

“There’s got to be somewhere,” Raymond said.

“Well,” Marcus said, “his grandmother used to live in this house on Asylum Avenue, before she was kicked out by the bank. He used to go out there and take care of her. Do her shopping and shit.”

“You remember the address?”

“Can’t remember any house numbers, but it was on the corner across from a drug store. It had a big picture window on the side and on the porch. I think it was yellow back then.”

Raymond thanked Marcus and started walking toward Asylum without saying another word to EZ.

The drug store was abandoned, still boarded up with trash strewn all over its cracked parking lot. A realty sign was nailed to one of the plywood panels. There were still a lot of houses and buildings up for sale on Asylum Avenue, but the house that Marcus described had a new coat of yellow paint.

Raymond walked up the porch steps and knocked on the door. He looked down the side street the house shared, Grant Street, and saw a lot of *For Sale* signs. Something on the ground caught the corner of his eye. He walked over and saw that it was another for sale sign, but this one had a giant SOLD sticker on it. When the lock turned,

Raymond's attention went back to the door. It swung open and a medium-sized man in a wifebeater shirt stood there. Raymond had a good six inches on him.

"You Harold?" Raymond asked.

"What you want?"

"I wanna know if you're Harold."

A car horn blared behind Raymond and he switched his footing so he could look at the car without losing sight of the man in the door. It was a small foreign car with a couple of different colors - bodywork done with whatever panels were available. EZ was behind the wheel. He got out of the car.

"That's him, that's Harold," EZ said.

Raymond reached up and took Harold by the throat and pushed him inside.

"Why'd you kill my son?" Raymond said. "Why'd you have to go and kill my son for?"

"I didn't kill nobody," Harold said.

"Bullshit," Raymond said. "You paid some crack whore to poison him."

Raymond took the pistol he stole from the trailer out of his pocket and placed the barrel in Harold's mouth.

Harold sounded like he was trying to say something, but Raymond pressed the gun's metal down on his tongue.

"Wait," EZ said. "Don't shoot him until he tells us where the money is."

"Don't care about the fucking money," Raymond said. "I only care about seeing this motherfucker's brains on that wall."

"Man, that's just stupid," EZ said. "Nigga, where's the fucking money at?"

"That's it," Raymond said. "Say good-bye."

Before he could pull the trigger, he felt the metal end of another gun pressed against his ear.

"We're gonna get that money first," EZ said.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Raymond said.

"You think I was following you around because I cared about Jerome? I barely know that nigga. And yeah, I said nigga, nigga. What are you gonna do about it?"

"Put the gun down."

"Fuck that," EZ said. "Harold, where's the money?"

Harold mumbled something and Raymond took the pistol out of his mouth.

"There ain't no money."

"Don't give me that bullshit," EZ said. "Everyone knows you got that money."

"There ain't any money," Harold repeated.

"He's telling you the truth," Raymond said.

"How that fuck do you know?"

"This house we're in, it was just bought. Fresh paint outside and a realtor's sign with a sold sticker on it laying on the lawn."

"Shit, a hundred thousand is a lot, but not enough to buy no fucking house," EZ said.

"You notice these places around here?" Raymond asked. "Every other one is up for sale. There's still trash and shit all over the neighborhood. The prices of these places aren't what they were. This piece of shit just waited until the house went on sale and used the entire bundle to pay for his grandmother's old place. I bet this place went for

real cheap. Ain't that right?"

"Something like that, so what?"

"So, you had my son killed for this house," Raymond said. "Every memory, everything he was, it's all gone so you can have some dumpy house that someone you used to know used to live in. It ain't nothing but plywood and paint, but my boy was a good person. He may have fucked up a time or two, but he could have still gotten away from people like you. He could have left this godforsaken place and become something, instead of a piece of meat on some coroner's cold slab.

"Now, I gotta ask you, was this place worth it? Was this place worth my son's life?"

"Place got memories for me, man," Harold said.

"Well, you only got so much longer to remember them before I kill you,"

Raymond said.

EZ backed away from Raymond, but kept the pistol pointed at him. "You ain't killing no one until..."

"Until what?" Raymond asked as he moved away from Harold. "That money you keep thinking about is in the hand of some lowlife real estate guy who's picking up percentages off people's devalued property. There's nothing here."

EZ stepped forward again, but Raymond pulled out his knife and hit EZ's gun arm. EZ dropped the gun and grabbed his forearm. Raymond picked the gun up and pointed it at both EZ and Harold. He looked around the room and saw an electric drill attached to a long extension cord.

"EZ, take that extension cord and tie up Harold."

EZ did as he was told, tying Harold to the staircase.

"That little bitch Jerome was talking shit," Harold said. "He deserved it, saying about how he knew about the money and was going to take it from me. Can't let shit talk like that go ignored."

"You heard him say this?"

"Nah, it came from EZ here. EZ was the one told me."

"He's lying to you," EZ said. "Why would I say something like that?"

Harold grabbed EZ by the collar and slammed his fist into the little prick's stomach. EZ went to the floor.

"To get Jerome killed," Raymond said. "You knew about me, about my reputation for dealing with people. You knew I'd go looking for Harold, and you served him right up for me. All you had to do was follow me."

"I was going to give you a cut," EZ said. "But I didn't say nothing to this motherfucker about Jerome."

"Bullshit," Harold said.

Raymond tied EZ next to Harold, ignoring EZ's insults. He went outside and unraveled the garden hose, cut the metal end off and then cutting off a piece of hose about six feet long. He took empty paint cans from the porch and took the hose and can to EZ's car. He unscrewed the gas cap, placed one end of the hose into the tank. He put his lips around the other end and sucked up the gas. As soon as it hit his tongue, he placed the end of the hose into the metal can and spit. When the can was full, he pulled the hose out and went back inside.

He dumped the gas all over the living room floor and then went back out for

another can. He splashed gas all over the walls in the small dining room and on the staircase. When Raymond stepped into the kitchen, he found the girl who slipped Jerome his deadly shot. She was sprawled on the linoleum, still wearing the nursing scrubs she had on before. Rubber tubing stretched tight over her bicep and a needle hanging out of the crook of her arm. She could have been dead or alive; Raymond didn't care. He splashed gas round her and then spit in her face. She didn't move.

Raymond grabbed an empty Coke bottle from the kitchen counter and stuffed a piece of newspaper into it with just a little bit hanging out at the top. He walked onto the porch and took out his lighter. He lit it, watched the paper burn into the bottle. He then threw it in the middle of the wooden floor. The glass broke and the fire ignited the gas-soaked floor and walls in an instant of intense heat and flame.

Harold walked away from the screams coming from EZ and Harold and headed across the street to the abandoned drug store, sat on the cement bench that was on the side of the building and watched that yellow house burn and burn. Each second he didn't hear a siren was better than the last.

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