

## Delivery

By Todd Robinson

"I got Northern Lights, Grape Ape, Kryptonite, Silk, White Rhino, White Widow, Emerald Gold, Bubble Gum and Double Bubble," Jamie said to the skinny doe-eyed girl leaning on the doorjamb of her apartment.

She bit her lip nodding, mulling over her options. "Don't you have any more of that Kush I got last week?"

"Was Kush in that long list I just recited?"

The girl blinked, confused by the question. "I don't remember."

Jamie gritted his teeth. "It wasn't." Goddamn potheads. Their short-term memory was more often than not blown to the four winds anyhow. Hell, his own wasn't much better. Even though his patience was getting shorter with the girl, Jamie appreciated the reprieve from the chill fall rain outside. But Christ, time was money here.

"Oh. I liked that one. Real mellow smoke." The girl nodded into her statement, like a pecking bird.

"Might have some next week."

"Got any G-13?"

Despite the fact that Jamie hadn't included the pharmaceutical grade strain in his list, he always carried two packets, in case. He just

didn't think that this girl, answering the door in her beat up Berkeley sweatshirt, had the scratch to buy the stuff. It was the premier, top of the line weed ever produced. Thank you Uncle Sam. "Yeah. It's a hundred-fifty."

"Whoa."

He knew it. He'd delivered to this girl four times in the last month and had never sold her anything better than Kryptonite or Kush. None too expensive. She acted like he was one of the Fenway hustlers who sold teenagers baggies cut with oregano. He only sold weed rated from really good up to G-13, but the girl obviously had no idea what the hell she was talking about. "Try the Silk. The high is pretty close."

"To the G-13?" Her eyes widened in hope.

"No, to Kush. Nothing is close to G-13. If there was, you couldn't afford it."

"Screw you, I can afford it." The girl bobbed her head in an attitude more appropriate for a guest on Ricki Lake than college student. From bird to trailer trash in one neck swivel.

Jamie was tired of the exchange. He wanted to make the sale and get out of Dodge. He didn't need to get into an argument with the twit about her budget. "Listen, you buying today, or not?"

"Give me the Silk."

"Fifty." Jamie reached into his pocket and drew out the small bag. The girl handed him a rolled up mess of singles and fives. She held her hand out impatiently.

"Wait," Jamie ordered as he unfolded the bills and counted. The girl sighed with annoyance. Jamie was ready to chuck the money in her face and walk, if Hugh wouldn't chew him out for blowing a sale. Fifty even. Thank God, Jamie thought as he slapped the bud into her hand. She made no effort to close the door gently.

Bitch.

Jamie waited at Model Bar for his next call, sipping a Heineken. Most days, he didn't mind riding his bike. Some guys had bought themselves scooters or dirt bikes to motor around in. Jamie still liked riding his bicycle. It was slower than anything motored, but not by much. On his bike, he could still choose which traffic laws to obey, which lights to run, any route he wanted. The guys on motors had to be double careful not to catch the cop's attention. That was one thing Jamie was good at. On the street, he was the Flash, the Invisible Man and Keyser Soze all rolled into one. You think he's there and poof... Gone.

Except in the rain. And it was cold. Summer rain wasn't so bad. Could even be refreshing. But this crap was for the birds. Like ducks,

specifically. So he sat there like a wet dog, alone in an empty bar. The snooty bartender was arguing on her phone with somebody.

Then his cell phone rang.

"Yeah"

"22 Cabot Street. Roxbury."

"Dammit, Hugh. Don't be sending me to Roxbury in this weather." Jamie thought, don't send me to Roxbury at all, but didn't say it. The day could have been sunshine and kittens. Roxbury was still a hell run.

"Bring the G-13."

"What? Aw, hell no. Have you looked outside?"

"Apartment 2-E." Click. Hugh didn't argue, much less with his employees. You made the delivery, or you returned to the base, handed over your stash, and never returned.

It was most likely the rain that kept Roxbury safe. On decent days, every corner had a crew on it. They weren't necessarily Crips or Bloods, but those guys were out there too, mostly dealing themselves. Sometimes looking for the next sucker to jack. All of them dangerous. Only they tended to deal exclusively on the high end of the drug spectrum. They peddled crack, horse, coke. Ecstasy was blowing up big time in the suburbs, but designer drugs stayed with the designer

people, living in their designer homes and clothes.

Jamie was aware of his place. Yeah, he was a scumbag drug dealer, but he was positive nobody ever O.D.ed on what he sold. Gateway drug, my ass. Jamie smoked weed regularly since he was old enough to roll and he never felt the urge to upgrade his drugs.

Yeah, Jamie knew his place. Knew the game, and he didn't like rolling his dice in Roxbury. Jamie got jumped once on the lip of Roxbury. That night, some gangbangers recognized him from return trips and mugged him. Only they weren't content with a simple robbery. Jamie spent three weeks hospitalized, a month before he could get on a bike again. Hugh, not offering any health plan, was decent enough to cover Jamie's hospital costs. The lost merchandise and money came out of Jamie's pocket, though.

When Hugh visited him, his condolences were, "Watch your back next time."

Jamie didn't respond. One, his back wouldn't have mattered. They'd swarmed him from all sides. Two, his jaw was wired.

22 Cabot wasn't a bad building for the hood. Like a skybox in Hell.

The inside was another matter. The checkered floor looked like it hadn't been washed in years and Lord, the smell.

A part of it was cooking odors. There was a pleasant air of spice underneath the rest of it. What remained on top made Hugh's stomach churn. Wet decay mixed with a plain old dirty smell.

Jamie pinched his nose walking up the stairwell. Somebody was yelling in Russian. Another had their television turned way loud. Alex Trebek said, "Montecello."

Who the hell would be living in this dump and buying G-13? Maybe somebody called and they were going to rob him again, knowing he was going to be carrying the best stuff.

He had no choice. Make the delivery or be out of a job. He wished for a weapon. Some of the other guys carried. Jamie didn't want to take the getting searched. He didn't need weapons possession added to the charges he would already be carrying in his backpack. Besides, he knew his capabilities. Jamie wasn't a brawler, but he could run, given the right reasons. And once he was on his bike, he was gone.

2-E. Jamie knocked. He heard rustling inside and a deadbolt click. The door opened a crack and a small Hispanic woman peeked out. "Can I help you?" she asked softly. Her voice was tinged with an accent. What Jamie could see was pretty as hell. The eye in the crack was a deep brown, long lashes...

For a second, Jamie forgot what he was there for. "Uh, yeah.

Delivery?"

"You bring pizza?" She peeked a little further and looked at Jamie's empty hands.

"Uh..." This had never happened before. Somebody screw up the apartment numbers? "No, I..."

"Jen! Who you talkin' to?" A male voice yelled behind her.

"Is a delivery," she replied.

Jen fell away from the door, pulled roughly back. "The fuck you doin' answering the door?"

Aw no... He knew the voice. Trezza.

Trezza swung the door wide. He was shirtless, muscles twitching at Jamie. He'd grown a gut, but he was still huge. And all things equal, he was most likely still sociopathic, too. Through the door, Hugh could see the apartment. Considering the building, the neighborhood and all, the apartment was nice.

"S'up?" said Trezza. "You one of Hugh's boys?"

"Yeah," Jamie lied. Thank God for small favors. Trezza didn't recognize him. Not that there was any beef, but Jamie preferred anonymity where Pete Trezza was concerned. Jamie delivered to Trezza a couple times, years ago. He would've been happy to never have again. The guy was a friggin' nightmare.

"What you got?"

"I got Northern Lights..."

Trezza grabbed him and pushed him hard into the wall. "I'm talkin' G-13, bitch. You think I can't afford the good shit? Save the skunk for the sororities, bitch."

Jamie's legs went weak, remembering what Trezza had done to Ike. "Yeah. I got two packets." He tried to keep the fear out of his voice, but heard it trembling anyway. Self-loathing flooded through Jamie. His nerves told him to run. His pride said fight back. The brain won. Fighting back would be suicide, at least more hospital time. Jamie wasn't eager for either.

Trezza smiled. "You scared, Pee-Wee?" Jamie didn't respond. Trezza knew that he was. "You should be. You know what happened to the last guy tried to rip me off."

Jamie nodded.

Trezza let him go. "Damn, only got two? I got my boys coming over. Two packets ain't gonna do it."

"I only got two."

"What's the next best?"

"Depends. Kryptonite and Silk are both..."

"Gimme it all." Trezza waved his hand and pulled a wad of hundreds from his pocket.

When Jamie went to his pack, he saw around Trezza's legs. Jen

sat on the couch. She and Jamie locked eyes for a moment. Well, locked eye was more appropriate. Her left eye, the one that Jamie couldn't see in the crack was swollen shut. The biggest part of her was her stomach. She was really, really pregnant.

"What?" The sharpness of Trezza's tone snapped Jamie back. Again, he had no response. Trezza's gaze hardened as he looked back and realized. A backhand clipped Jamie across the face, lightly, but enough to humiliate him. "Mind your own."

Jamie noticed tracks in the crook of Trezza's elbow.

"I can't believe you sent me there." Jamie was pissed. Hugh knew Trezza's history. Not only was Trezza one of the biggest heroin dealers in Boston, but a year ago he beat down another delivery guy. Jamie was pissed not only that they were still delivering to the prick, but that Hugh sent *him*.

Adding to that aggravation was Jamie's difficulty finding Hugh's new place. Hugh kept his operation mobile, since four armed guys hit his place in Brighton. It was righteous paranoia, but he'd forgotten to tell Jamie where he moved to. Jamie had to ride an extra hour in the rain while he tried to connect with Hugh to bitch at him.

"Trezza's a customer." Hugh didn't look from his scale, carefully weighing out the packets.

"Ike..."

"Ike ripped him off. Conversely, he was ripping me off."

Ike made himself some extra cash by selling fake G-13. Trezza knew the difference and took it out on Ike. That was over a year ago. Ike was still eating through straws. "He threatened me."

"How much did he buy?" That was going to be the checkmate. Louder than words, the money would trump any argument. "Six hundred," Jamie mumbled.

"How much?" Hugh asked again, holding his hand against his ear for emphasis.

"Six hundred," Jamie yelled.

"'Nuff said." Hugh pinched off a small portion of pot from an enormous bag and placed it on the scale.

Jamie tried once more. "Looked like he's hitting his own goods."

"Don't care."

Jamie rode for as long as he could, trying to push his emotions out through the pedals. The anger just moved through his body as he shot through traffic. It was getting dark before Jamie headed home to Southie. He let himself in through the basement door, rather than track moisture over his mother's rugs. The last thing he needed was a hissy fit from his mother about not being able to have nice things.

Nice things being the ten-dollar Oriental rug runner purchased twenty years ago from K-Mart.

“Jamie? That you?” His mother called down the stairwell.

Jamie peeled off the wet clothes that stuck to him like Saran Wrap.

“No, Ma. It’s a psycho, here to steal your Hummels.”

“Don’t be a smart-ass.” When his mother was aggravated, her Southie accent deepened. Jamie could tell she was in a state when she called him ‘smaht-ass.’

“What now, Ma?”

“Your dinner’s almost cold.”

“Yell at me when it’s cold, then.” It was Thursday. Shepherd’s pie night in the McGowan house. It wasn’t very good when it was hot. Jamie’s mother suffered from the culinary challenges that faced generations of Boston’s Irish.

Jamie heard her mutter another ‘smaht-ass’ as she shuffled off. At least living in the basement afforded him some privacy. His mother’s bad hip left her paranoid about tumbling down the stairs.

Jamie’s mood didn’t leave him room for appetite anyway. Instead, he rolled himself a small joint that would help his attitude and give him enough munchies to eat the cold shepherd’s pie.

For a few weeks, he suffered mild paranoia when his phone

rang. His gut clenched between answering and getting the address. He dreaded having to go back to Trezza's. After some time passed, so did his worries.

Four months later, Jamie was at the Model, like always, waiting on the next delivery. The phone chimed on the bar. His stomach flip-flopped and he almost knocked over his Heineken.

"22 Cabot Street. Roxbury."

"Aw, hell no, Hugh..." Jamie didn't want to whine, but he heard his voice squeak anyway.

"22 Cabot Street. Roxbury."

"C'mon, can't you...? Jamie cut the complaint short. Somewhere irrational, he hoped that it was another apartment. There was more than one in that shithole,

"Apartment 2-E." The phone disconnected.

The old anger and fear washed over him when he walked out the door. Jamie threw his phone down onto the concrete. The plastic shattered and Jamie felt a small release. At least Hugh would have to buy him a new phone. That'll teach the prick to send him to Trezza's again.

Jamie rode as fast as he could to the address and ran up the stairs. The whole ride across town, Jamie convinced himself that it was better this way. Facing his fears, and all. Hell, who was he

kidding. He was scared shitless.

He smelled it from the other end of the hallway. At first, Jamie thought it must have been coming from somewhere else. The smell of diapers and pizza (that was all he could relate it to) was definitely coming from apartment 2-E. A quick edit of slasher films projected through Jamie's imagination.

The door opened wide this time. Jamie couldn't see anyone inside. Then he looked down. A kid, no older than five, stood there, smiling. His Spongebob pajamas looked like they hadn't been washed in weeks. Jamie remembered Jen and her eye. The kid looked just like her, but the nose was Trezza's. Trezza had the type of nose that had obviously taken a few pops here or there. So had the kid's. Jamie tried not to think too hard on it. It only brought back hardcore memories of his own father and his eager willingness to lash out. Jamie had scars on the back of his legs. Staring at the baby's disfigured nose made the old marks burn as if the leather had just whipped across. He smoldered with an anger he'd thought long dead when the kid took Jamie's fingers and led him inside.

"Is your Daddy home?" Jamie felt like an asshole even asking. For Christ's sake, he was there to sell Daddy drugs. In the months since Jamie had been there, the apartment had gone to hell. The kid pulled Jamie to the coffee table and opened a Cohiba box. For a

second, Jamie thought the kid was offering him a cigar. He wasn't. Inside was an unopened hypodermic, matches, spoon and a packet of heroin. Jesus, the kid was offering him a hit. He'd probably seen Trezza do it so many times that he'd adopted the gesture.

"Uh, no thanks," Jamie said through numb lips. *From watching you Dad. I learned it from watching you.* Jamie remembered the old anti-drug campaign and would have laughed if he wasn't so horrified.

A toilet flushed and out walked Trezza. He stopped, wide-eyed when he saw Jamie. He charged him like an enraged bull. Trezza looked like hell. He'd dropped at least thirty pounds, which only meant that he outweighed Jamie by about fifty. He grabbed Jamie and drove him into the wall, knocking his wind out.

*"The fuck you doing in my house? The fuck you doing with my box?"* he screamed. Trezza's eyes were wild, darting all over Jamie.

"Nothing," Jamie wheezed, his lungs spasming.

*"Who the fuck are you?"* Trezza reached into his back pocket and pulled a gravity knife. He pressed the tip to Jamie's throat.

*"Answer me!"* Again, Trezza failed to recognize Jamie. This time, Jamie wished he did.

"De-delivery," Jamie said hoarsely. *Don't let me pee. Please don't let me pee.*

"Asshole." Trezza bashed Jamie on the nose. Blood gushed

from Jamie's nostrils as he crumpled to the floor. "Don't ever let me see you in my house again." He turned to the kid. "And what the fuck are you doing?"

The kid was crying, pleading to Trezza in panicked Spanish. Jamie didn't understand anything the kid was saying except for "Papi"

Trezza slapped the kid, brutally. The kid wailed, terrified and hurt.

"Quit it!" Trezza hit him again, harder. The kid balled up, his cries drawn into whimpers.

Trezza rifled Jamie's bag, looking at the packets. Taking what he wanted, he threw the backpack at Jamie, lifted him by the shirt and tossed him out the door. Peeling off some bills he tossed the cash at Jamie's feet and slammed the door. Jamie then heard more yelling in Spanish. Trezza's voice, harsh and abusive. Jen's pleading. Jamie heard flesh smacking and more sobbing. Then an infant's weak cries joined the din. Jamie half-crawled, half-fell down the stairs as he fought to escape as fast as he could manage.

"Jamie, please... What's wrong?" Jamie's mother hovered at the top of the stairs. She heard Jamie when he came in. Probably because when he did, he lost control and threw his bike across the room. It landed on with a crash that could probably be heard

downtown, much less upstairs. His mother started crying when she heard the tears in Jamie's voice.

*"Leave me alone, Ma!"* Jamie couldn't stop crying. His nose wouldn't stop bleeding. It wouldn't stop. None of it would stop.

"Please, Jamie," she sobbed. "I can't help you. I can't come down there."

"Just go away, please." Jamie curled up on the musty carpet. Everything hurt.

Then his mother said, "I miss your Dad, too."

Jamie let her think that.

"You get the license number?" Hugh gave him the once-over as Jamie held ice against his swollen nose. Hugh, with his usual style, expressed slightly more sympathy than a brick.

Jamie shook his head. He would have said 'no', but he was trying to avoid any words using the letter N. The sound sent bolts of pain into Jamie's sinuses. "Guy bumped me and jettied." The excuse worked for two reasons since Jamie didn't have to explain the busted phone.

"Doesn't look like you need stitches." Hugh was looking at the cut on the back of Jamie's head. Jamie guessed that he'd suffered it while tumbling down the stairs. He heard Hugh sigh with relief.

Probably less in concern over Jamie than at the decreasing possibility that he'd have to foot another hospital bill. "You sure you don't want to get checked out? You might have internal injuries."

Jamie shook his head carefully, otherwise his nose might start leaking again. "I fell od my head." Jeez, talking was difficult.

Hugh sighed. "Good. I mean..."

Jamie waved off Hugh's apology. "Weh he calls, I wah Drebba's delibbery."

"Huh?"

Jamie repeated himself, as best he could.

Hugh shrugged. "I'm not understanding you."

"Drebba!"

"Terror? What terror?"

Jamie grabbed a notebook off the desk. There was no way to say it without n's. He wrote on the paper: When he calls, I want Trezza's delivery.

Hugh read the note and smiled. "You two kiss and make up?"

Jamie shrugged. "Good tipper."

It was raining again when Jamie went back to Cabot Street. Jamie's sneakers squished wetly on the stairs. The rank smell was worse this time. It had been three months since Trezza broke Jamie's

nose. It healed badly, leaving him a lump on the bridge and unable to smell through his left nostril. The closer he got to 2-E, the more he wished that neither one was operational. Before he got to the door, Jamie opened his backpack and put the baggie in his pocket. He didn't know if the opportunity would arise, but he'd waited three months. Too long to not be ready.

He knocked.

Nothing.

He knocked harder. Jamie's heart picked up the pace. Not from fear, but wanting. Anticipation.

"Get the fuggin' door," came a slurred voice from the other side. Jen opened the door a crack. She wouldn't look into Jamie's eyes.

"Delivery," was all he said, flat-voiced.

Jen opened the door wider and walked back towards the kitchen. No bruises Jamie could see, but she had a pronounced limp that day instead.

"Bout time," said Trezza from the couch. He looked like he'd dropped another thirty pounds. The once intimidating frame looked like somebody had made a Trezza scarecrow and animated it with what was left of his soul.

Jamie fought off the violent rush he felt course through him. For once he had the upper hand. Jamie remained calm.

"Gimme the weed," Trezza snarled.

Jamie walked over and placed the packet onto the table, next to the cigar box.

With difficulty, Trezza drew a significantly smaller wad of sweaty cash from his pocket. Trezza stared at his hand like he wondered how it got there.

"How much?" Trezza drooled onto his lips and wiped it with his forearm. The tracks made a connect-the-dots game, mapping out the veins on his arm. "Fifty for what's there."

"Sheesus. Fifty bucks for pencil shavings," he muttered. Trezza slapped the bills into Jamie's palm.

Jamie needed to buy some time. "Can I use your phone?"

"The hell for?"

"Battery died on my cell. I gotta call Hugh."

"Whatever floats your log."

Jamie picked up the phone and dialed.

"...at the tone, the exact time will..."

"Yeah, Hugh. It's me."

"...beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep..."

Trezza stood and stumbled to the bathroom. Jamie hung up and opened the cigar box. He pulled the baggie from his pocket and compared. There more in Jamie's bag, but he doubted that Trezza

would notice or care. If there was less, Jamie had no doubt that hell would have broken loose on Trezza's family. The color was right. Jamie added cinnamon to the Clorox before bagging it. He placed his bag into the box.

The toilet flushed and Jamie dropped the heroin on the floor. It landed next to a tiny foot in a Spider-Man sock. He bent quickly to pick it up and saw the kid under the coffee table. The boy put a finger to his lips. He didn't want Jamie to give away his hideout. Jamie winked as he palmed the drugs. Then he held his own finger to his lips, smiling. The kid grinned and put his hand over his mouth to stifle the giggles.

Jamie was gone before Trezza made it from the bathroom.