

# SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE

## Chapter 1

It's surprising how uncomfortable it is, sitting on top of someone. I've been straddling this guy for four and a half minutes now, and my back is starting to ache. That's because I'm leaning slightly forward with my right thumb buried in his posterior cutaneous nerve at the base of his right trapezius muscle. My left hand also has a firm grip on his left thumb which is currently bent at a painful angle and is half-way up the guy's back, close to his shoulder blade. He hasn't tried to move for at least two minutes now, which is comforting, but I wish he would stop cursing. Gratuitous gutter language isn't my thing. The English language is replete with such a vast array of diverse and expressive adjectives that I find it puzzling why people resort to the same few guttural expletives to describe just about everything.

The guy lets loose with another obscenity, which he apparently believes will convince me of the injustice of my current treatment of him.

"No," I respond calmly, "I don't have sex with my mother. You must be confusing me with your brother."

That seems to have gotten under his skin. He arches his back and tries to dislodge me, letting fly with a few more meaningless references to sexual intercourse in general and the female genitals in particular, but I simply dig a little deeper into his nerve and he screams in agony. He submits again, begging for me to ease off, which I do. His face is back on the pavement now, turned slightly to the side, with blood and snot running from his nose and pooling against his cheek.

There are two onlookers now. The latest arrival, an overweight man in dirty tracksuit pants and wearing sandals and socks, is looking into the open door of the shop and seems about to enter.

"Don't go in there. He's dead. It's a crime scene. Stay out here."

As I say it, I hear the sirens at last. It took them long enough. The other onlooker, a teenage girl who witnessed the murder along with me, phoned the cops as soon as it happened and has been standing on the sidewalk chewing gum and recording us ever since. I think I'm going to be featured in her next upload to Tweetify or Instapost or whatever is the latest 'Look At My Life,

Isn't It Amazing!' social media platform. She'll probably write something like 'OMG! WTF! Check this shit out!'

The cops arrive at last; three cars in quick succession. Our fearless law enforcers emerge with guns drawn and immediately save the day by screaming at me to get my hands in the air. There must be some course in basic training that has been scrapped due to budget cuts: '*How to Recognize the Bad Guys*.' I continue to hold down the bad guy, because he'll be up and running like a rabbit if I let him go. The cops have all taken cover behind their cars, at least ten yards away, their guns all levelled at my back. Apparently, my backside is a lethal weapon that could blow them all to kingdom come.

"Put your hands in the air now, or we will shoot!"

The Training Academy has apparently also axed the '*How to Avoid Shooting Innocent People*' course.

"I'll be very happy to raise my arms in the air, if one of you brave officers could come and cuff this guy."

Twenty minutes later, I've managed to avoid getting shot, and the scene is awash with red and blue flashing lights. I'd really like to go home now, but I know how all this works. I'll be lucky to be in bed by dawn. I've already given my statement to an officer who laboriously transcribed my description of events using a pen and notepad. Maybe the police department hasn't heard of smart phones and recording apps.

Although it's nearly midnight, a crowd of about thirty people has gathered on the sidewalk, held back by police tape. Many of them are holding their smartphones out in front, like worshippers at a temple, offering their own cinematic contributions to the gods of social media. Fortunately, the body is out of sight on the floor behind the counter, but the shelves of cigarettes on the wall behind are covered in blood and brain matter. Judging by the width of the splatter pattern, the pistol was probably loaded with 147 grain hollow points.

A forensic team has taken charge of the 7-Eleven store, photographing, measuring and dusting for fingerprints – although I have no idea why they're bothering with fingerprints, as the perpetrator is already safely in custody. A medical examiner and her assistant are standing outside the door, waiting for the forensic team to finish. I'm not sure why they need to be here: it's not as though the cause of death is in any doubt. Two ambulance officers are also waiting

their turn, sitting on the rear bumper of their vehicle smoking cigarettes; a wonderful visual contradiction.

Just as I'm starting to think that I might be able to sneak home, an unmarked police car with blue strobing lights pulls up and two plain clothes officers get out. They speak with one of the uniformed officers for several minutes and he then points them toward me. They walk over to me.

Here we go. Round two.

"Mr. Targett, I'm Detective Abrams and this is Detective Rosario. We'd like to ask you a few questions if you don't mind."

"Can I see your identification, please?"

I like to ask for official ID, not because I don't believe them but simply because it's my right as a citizen.

"What? The unmarked police car not good enough for you?" sneers Rosario.

I just smile and stand my ground.

They pull out their IDs and shove them toward me. Detective Eva Rosario and Senior Detective Elijah Abrams. I nod and thank them.

"Mr. Targett, can you describe again what took place?" asks Abrams.

There's no point in mentioning that I've already given a full statement to the patrol officer, so I go over the facts again. Abrams then starts asking questions.

"Apparently you weren't in the shop at the time of the murder. Do you mind telling us what you were doing in the vicinity at this time of night?"

"I'm working a case for a client."

"You're a P.I.?"

"Yes."

I notice Rosario roll her eyes. Police officers don't tend to like private investigators. It's as if we are an insult to their own vocation, taking up the slack because they can't do their job properly.

"Who is your client?"

"I don't have to answer that question."

I am also aware that the answer would only increase Rosario's scorn because it would highlight the often-petty nature of my cases. I was working for the shop owner who was

convinced that one of his employees was smoking cigarettes inside the store while he was on the late-night shift. I had suggested installing cameras inside the shop but the owner, a Pakistani man, was convinced that the government would be able to hack into them. So, I had been sitting in my car in the parking lot, freezing my cojones off, fifty yards from the shop, when the attempted robbery had taken place.

Abrams seems to accept my refusal to answer, but I can sense Rosario's hackles rising. At about 5'8", she has short-cropped, dark hair, olive complexion and a lean face with harsh features. Dressed all in black, she seems to be going for the Cat-Woman look, and I feel like telling her that she's not pulling it off very well at all. Abrams is a couple of inches shorter, a few decades older and at least forty pounds heavier. His gray trousers and gray cardigan are speckled with food stains and his gaudily striped shirt looks like it was a reject from a church thrift shop. Abrams lets his question about my case pass and moves on.

"So you were conducting surveillance from your car?"

"Yes," I say, pointing to the decrepit Subaru Forester which looks in similar shape to Abrams himself.

Abrams looks back and forth between the car and the sidewalk where I had apprehended the perpetrator, gauging the distance.

"You must have reacted pretty quickly."

I nod. "Uh huh." What can I say? I'm fast when I need to be.

"Then you disarmed the suspect and made a citizen's arrest."

"That's correct."

Rosario speaks up at this point.

"Seems to me you were a little too enthusiastic in your citizen's arrest, Mr. Targett. He's got a badly broken nose. You could be up on assault charges."

So there it is. She can't help herself. An intrinsic need to assert her dominance through threat and intimidation. She's the classic profile of the ego-driven detective. I smile at her in what I hope she recognizes as a condescending manner.

"You might also want to check for fractures of the right ulnar, the right thumb metacarpal, and I'm pretty sure I broke at least one of his ribs, number seven or eight on the left."

Rosario blinks, momentarily nonplussed.

I smile again. "You're welcome, by the way."

“Like I said,” persists Rosario, “possible assault charges.”

“Well, detective, I did consider engaging in a philosophical discussion with the perpetrator regarding the dangers of firearms and the decidedly antisocial nature of blowing someone’s brains out, but as he was bringing his pistol to bear on me I took a wild guess and deduced that he wasn’t in the mood for a chat.”

Abrams glances at Rosario and gives her a look that seems to suggest that she back off. He turns to me and speaks in a more placatory manner.

“You obviously have some training in self-defense.”

“I get by.”

He nods.

“I think that’s all the information we need for now, Mr. Targett. We’ve got your address and personal details, as well as your statement to the patrol officer. We’ll be examining the CCTV footage from outside the store and we’ll be in contact if we have any further questions. We’ll need you to come down to the station tomorrow sometime and sign a statement, if you don’t mind.”

I watch as they walk away, Rosario striding purposefully and Abrams walking with a slight limp, favoring his right leg. I walk back to my car, hoping like hell the cantankerous old beast will start.