

# **We Are 100**

by

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## Prologue

*Boom*

Evan stared into the mirror.

It had taken some time, but he actually looked like a janitor now.

As soon as that thought flashed through his head, he chuckled and glanced at the laminate on his chest: “Custodial Services.” Everything was so politically correct these days, even “Janitor” was an outdated term.

But he didn’t mind.

Whatever made people happy. If no one was getting hurt, then what harm was there in spicing up a title?

The smile faded as a new thought entered his mind. He never thought he’d be pushing a mop, especially not at his age, but no matter. It’s not like the position, or the work, defined him.

This was all part of the plan: get in, go unnoticed, make your move. “Sleeper cell,” so to speak.

At first, he had been nervous. Especially when applying for the job. What did it look like to have a full-blown university professor, one with tenure and only a few years away from retirement looking to unclog toilets and empty waste bins?

He worried they’d look into his past; he thought they’d uncover what he was up to immediately.

But they hadn’t.

Human resources bought his story, because it was 90% true, and only 10% “enhancement.”

Sure, “lie” might be a more appropriate word, but whatever. Maybe “enhancement” was the politically correct term for “lie.”

When asked why he was downgrading so heavily, he responded, “Well, I lost my wife two years ago. I turned to booze, which lost me my job, and now I just want to do something physical. Something away from the prying eyes of others, people always wondering how I’m doing, how I’m dealing with everything...”

Evan drifted off for effect, then, after a pause, finished with a heartfelt, “I just want something low-key to keep me busy.”

The brown-haired woman with kind eyes was sympathetic, and hired him.

There are outright lies, such as the part about him being a drunk and losing his job, and then there are lies of omission.

Did he really want to just do *nothing*? To stay quiet and keep busy? Oh, God no. He wanted revenge—to do something to get back at those responsible for the loss of his wife.

His wife.

He had been at her side when she passed. Assisted suicide. The medication keeping her alive became too expensive, and she wanted to go out on her terms. She wanted to leave before deteriorating to the point she’d be unable to express herself.

Now, two years and three weeks after standing over her casket, Evan Francart would “express himself” in a way Madonna hadn’t envisioned when she wrote her song.

To that end, he checked the gun sitting in front of him. Evan didn’t want to fire it, but knew he might have to in order to prove a point: *Hey, I’m serious.*

When he first held it, the handgun was heavier than he expected.

In the movies, people were always throwing guns around, treating them like batons... He figured they were at least somewhat light.

After his first week at a shooting range, he realized how silly those action movies were. Holding the gun sideways was dumb beyond words, and the way actors shoot randomly and hit their target every time? Nothing in real life is so easy as it appears on the silver screen.

Also, guns in movies never seemed to have any kick to them. That’s what surprised Evan the most, even more than the noise. He’d been expecting the loud bang, but the first time he fired it the recoil blew his hands back and he almost hit himself in the head. After that, he held on tightly, with slightly bent elbows to absorb the kickback.

One year of meticulous training later, and Evan felt as comfortable holding (and shooting) the gun as he did driving a car, or brushing his teeth. The action was now routine.

Anyway, the gun was backup. Evan hoped he wouldn't need to use it, but somewhere in the pit of his stomach knew he probably wasn't going to get off so easy.

Evan closed his locker and made his way over to the custodial carts. He'd never worked the day shift before.

Day services were kept on hand in case a bathroom needed to be restocked, or someone spilled something, but for the most part the day shift was kept out of sight. The real cleaning took place at night. Once the sun went down, the kings of the boardrooms went home and the peasants came out to remove all messes under cover of darkness.

Even in a high-end office like this, he was surprised by the disregard for cleanliness. Evan found gum dropped and smushed into the carpet and piss stained bathroom floors; the male executives were toddlers, spraying wherever they pleased. The 1% were animals. Or, if not animals, maybe their wealth allowed them to act without care. They knew someone like Evan would tidy up after them.

When he'd started, Evan was an oddity, a lone white face among a sea of Latino workers. Immigration issues flared every election cycle, but the sad fact of the matter was that people who arrived without papers usually did the work no one else wanted. Or, in the least, the work white people didn't want.

(Those toilets don't unclog themselves now, do they?)

For a moment, Evan felt a tinge of sadness. He knew his actions would destroy a few jobs, and therefore put families in need of the paycheck back on their heels. But it was all for the greater good. He absolutely believed that.

He had to.

Evan made sure the cart was in order, then pushed it over to the service elevator. His wait was short.

*Not much taking place on the loading dock,* he figured.

Once inside, Evan hovered his finger over the button before pushing. 14th floor. This wasn't a New York skyscraper, but it was decent enough for the Midwest.

The 14th floor housed the boardroom of Glenback Pharmaceuticals. If he was right—and, checking his watch, he believed he was—the big dogs would be about five minutes into their meeting.

The elevator moved at a decent pace and deposited Evan straightaway. Civilians used the passenger elevators, and no one working had been in need of moving from floor-to-floor. Evan's lucky day, he supposed.

Pushing the cart into the main hallway, Evan closed his eyes and said a silent prayer. If anyone asked what he was doing up there, he would say there was a mess in the men's restroom. Sink overflowed. Pipe burst. Something.

But no one noticed him. People went about their business, typing away on keyboards, taking phone calls, and shuffling paperwork. In a way, wearing a janitor's uniform was like wearing Harry Potter's cloak of invisibility. If you weren't wearing a suit and tie, you were "less than," and therefore not worth looking at. Maybe that wasn't the case on some of the lower floors, Evan mused, but it definitely was up in the penthouse.

Evan generally pushed his cart down deserted hallways at night; having to navigate people in a hurry was challenging, but not horribly so. When he arrived at the boardroom door, Evan took a deep breath. He could still back out now, if he really wanted.

Instead, Evan turned the handle. Though he was quiet as he entered, all heads turned to greet him.

"Excuse me, we're in the middle of a meeting here," someone said, but Evan wasn't sure who. His concentration was elsewhere.

After parking his cart, when he turned to face the group of six men and three women, the gun was level in his hand.

"Evacuate the building," Evan stated, his voice monotone.

This was the moment he dreaded, the reaction. Would they comply? Would one of them act like a hero and jump him? Was one of them armed?

Evan's eyes slowly scanned the room, trying to absorb as much detail as necessary. The fact no one was moving was reassuring.

"You're Janice," Evan said to the woman sitting just off from the others. The fact she wasn't actually at the table was the giveaway. "Leave."

Janice looked to her boss, the CEO, Michael Dexter.

"He's not in charge," Evan explained. "I am. Go."

Janice stood, nervously.

“Evacuate the building. You have ten minutes.”

Janice took one last look around the room, almost apologetically. Even though it was too soon to know exactly what was happening, she knew she was being spared. A mix of thankful and regret stirred in her, but if anything it was a 90/10 split toward thankful.

Evan watched Janice exit.

This was it. Two years since his wife had passed. One year of mourning, one year of planning. Oh, and three weeks of putting everything together. Can't forget those three weeks.

The silence was palpable, but Evan actually enjoyed it. The less he had to explain, the better. When it was finally broken, Evan sighed, but only slightly.

“Is Janice in on this?”

Evan recognized the man who had spoken as Sean Patrick Moore, the CFO. The question wasn't completely absurd; the release of one person near-immediately must have looked odd, but the timing seemed out of place. Didn't they want to know who he was, or what his demands were?

Evan chose his words carefully.

“No one is ‘in on’ this. I am acting alone today. Janice is a secretary, and therefore not directly involved in your criminal actions.”

Evan figured that would get them curious, and awaited follow up inquiries. After a short pause, CEO Michael Dexter stepped up to the plate.

“Who are you, and what do you want?”

If Evan was disappointed by the unoriginal response, he didn't show it. Cliché was to be expected; the idea someone could be inventive in such a situation was a challenge most people cannot rise to.

“My name is Evan Francart,” Evan explained flatly. “And I want to make a statement.”

As he finished his sentence, the fire alarm went off.

Evan couldn't help but smile wryly as he thought, *Clever girl, that Janice. Fastest way to get people out of a building? Tell them it's on fire.*

Evan glanced out the window. Fourteen stories down, he could see people beginning to trickle out the front doors.

Michael interrupted his train of thought: “What kind of statement? If this is about money—”

Evan cut him off. “Everything is about money.”

He paused.

“But if you’re worried I’m here to take yours, that’s not the case.”

The flow of employees from the building increased to a nice, steady stream. This was good. Evan knew he would be remembered as a terrorist, and probably a murderer, but they were going to have to give him credit for protecting innocent lives.

Evan glanced at his watch. A few more minutes and the building should be clear.

“You know,” he explained to his captives, “for a company that prides itself on shredding documents in order to keep secrets, you’re pretty sloppy about letting just anyone take those documents to the shredder.”

There was no response, but Evan didn’t expect one. After letting everyone digest those words, he continued.

“That means that no matter how well you protect your secrets from the public, the press, and even your underlings, someone will always know what you’re up to.”

Evan stared hard at Michael.

“Look,” Michael began, “I don’t know what you think we’re ‘*up to,*’ but this meeting...”

Evan finished the sentence for him: “Is about acquiring a small company, taking command of their flagship drug, and raising the price so that you can receive bonuses while people who can no longer afford it, die.”

Evan took one last look out the window. The number of employees exiting the building had slowed to almost nothing.

He decided to give stragglers one more minute.

“My wife was on Chlozopran.”

If every member of the board had been nervous a moment ago, everything that was happening to them finally sunk in. To put it in street parlance, *shit just got real.*

“My wife was on Chlozopran, and after you bought the rights to it, you jacked up the price, and over the course of two years we had to drain our bank accounts and mortgage our house to keep her alive. I’m guessing you’ve figured out how it all ended by now.”

“Look,” Michael Dexter began. His voice sounded almost sympathetic. Almost. “I’m sorry about your wife. Really. What we do here is to *try* and



save lives. If we raise the price on a drug, it's because of overhead. The money we make goes—"

"Into R & D?" Evan interrupted. "Is that what you're going with? You need more money to make better drugs? OK, if there's so much research going on, then why did you get a \$15 million bonus last year? *Bonus*. On top of your already obscene salary. Why did Mr. Moore get five million? The bonuses in this room add up to almost \$50 million. Your salaries are over one hundred million. Company profits last year came in at \$200 million. Why can't that number be twenty million? It's still profit, right? If you're in the black, what's the difference between \$20 million and \$200 million? What's the difference between \$2 million and \$200 million if you're profitable?"

Evan paused again.

"The only difference, as I see it, is the amount of your salary, and bonus. You want more, so you charge more."

Evan waited for a response.

None came.

"You charge more, and people die," he concluded.

Evan reached under a flap on his cart. A button awaited his touch.

It had taken him three weeks to bring all the components to the building. Some parts stayed in his locker until he needed them; others were hidden in the nooks and crannies of the basement, places no soul ever wandered.

After last night's shift, he'd remained at work, diligently putting everything together in the custodial break room. No cameras in there; no one pays attention to the janitors. In the lobby? Sure, were cameras everywhere in the lobby. But the lepers, the untouchables who did the grunt work for the kings? No need to keep an eye on the disposable people who don't exist in your world.

Evan was surprised at how easy it was to assemble. A few wires, a trigger switch, and a firing mechanism. His benefactor had provided such clear instructions that even a child could have pieced it together.

Evan stared directly at Michael Dexter. Under the flap, his finger tapped the button lightly.

"And now you're planning on doing it again. You want to acquire Metsger Pharm, just so you can own the rights to Diaphoneme. Once you own it, you'll raise the price, and kill more people."

He looked around at the others.

“And you’re voting to let it happen.”

Evan thought of his wife one last time.

He didn’t know whether or not there was an afterlife, or if he’d be seeing her in it, but he knew this was the end of his time on this particular mortal coil.

“Well,” Evan sighed, nodding his head thoughtfully. “I hope all your second homes and tropical vacations were worth it.”

Evan pushed the button he had been caressing.

The explosion was so large it set off seismographs at Iowa State, the university thirty-plus miles away in Ames.

Two days later, Karen Jordan, a kindly grandmother living a quarter mile from the Glenback Building in West Des Moines, would find Michael Dexter’s finger on her kitchen floor. It was a present from her golden retriever, Molly, who found it while out “doing her business.”