
FIRST BLOOD

*D*ecember 3, 1999
4:30 a.m.

The night has worn on, my nerves and emotions wanting to claw their way out of my body.

Waiting.

Like being chained to railroad tracks—alone, in the dark, and unable to speak.

Or scream.

Waiting to feel the first faint vibrating rumble of the locomotive.

Then hear the shriek of metal wheels.

Louder and louder.

Then the hit.

The cuts may be quick but the waiting is the hell.

Vivian is now in with Edmond and I'm at the nursing station. We changed positions at 4:00. My last two sweltering hours with Safra are especially grueling—my head is coming apart in a sweating stream of seared consciousness.

The stress is eating me up.

Is someone going to come in here and start shooting? Am I going to hear the dead-echo pop, pop, pop of a silencer?

I had no gun. That wasn't a part of my job; it was the massive security force who had tools like that. And they were everywhere around us, right?

And it sure wasn't a part of the "deal" for me to lie in ambush for whomever or whatever might appear that night.

Not with my family at risk.

If I die, at least they will be safe.

I got myself into this shit with that fucking camera! I'm over here in Monte Carlo, so far from home, and now I'm fucked.

This damned heat is nauseating!

You're a real man if you sacrifice yourself—what kind of a man would you be if you didn't? If you saved yourself and let your family be killed?

I can't warn Safra—but after all, they said no one would get hurt.

But...just like I realized on that initial entry into La Leopolda... this kind of money is big business. And this big business may not always be on the up-and-up. Supermoney has a way of doing that—it just might produce some enemies along the way. Yeah, no kidding!

Is all of this because of some shit he and he alone did?

Maybe those guys he was hassling with from the Russian mob?

My family is not going to take the fall because this billionaire has stepped on his dick. That's his problem, not mine. I'll do what I can to help Safra or anybody, but I'm not going to give up the lives of my family.

Sure, I was being paid an enormous salary, but I hadn't signed up to be Safra's bodyguard. Others had *that* job. But it wouldn't be long before I'd discover they weren't even working that night.

At least not at Le Belle Époque.

The nursing station was about nine feet by twelve feet. It had originally been a maid's chamber with a small shower and toilet. When the room was reconfigured, a refrigerator was installed where the shower had been.

That caused a long-running problem.

If you know anything about plumbing—which apparently whoever reworked this room did not—you know that if the sanitary loop in either a toilet or a drain system is left without circulating water for a long period, it needs a non-evaporating liquid, like oil, added to the standing water in the system. Otherwise, the water evaporates and sewer gases come in.

And it stinks!

Which it did!

The all-important and busy nursing station in this zillion-dollar home smelled like a delta swamp outhouse.

I kept trying to explain to the flat's maintenance people that make the place not reek, all they had to do was slide the fridge out, put some water into the remaining shower plumbing, and add some olive oil to it. But they just didn't understand that.

And here's where this all relates: Lily Safra demanded that scented candles (from Slatkin & Co.!) be kept lit almost all the time. So now we're back to the rich and famous with these expensive fifty-dollar-a-pop wax-and-wick wonders that would kill a moose fart at a hundred feet.

One was lit as I sat at the desk in the nursing station.

This desk in this room had the valance-protected French doors behind it—the valance that was now opened.

The valance was simply a roll-up metal shutter. Beyond the valance and the French doors was a balcony. Just below *that* was the nearby deck of Hôtel Hermitage.

We could easily see it when we went out onto the landing for a breather before Lily's nightly closing of the valance. But we always felt safe, even with the deck's elbow-close quarters, because who was going to breach the Hermitage's security *and* the Mossad guard forces of La Belle Époque?

And if this were to be an *inside* job of some sort, certainly no one could work their way up the labyrinth of elevators and security within La Belle Époque itself to get up to that landing.

However, what I didn't know were some of the details concerning the architecture of the Hermitage.

It would be a long time before *that* enlightening came my way.

Just past 4:30.

I'm sitting at this desk.

Staring.

More thinking.

More of that seared stream of consciousness.

It's a badly unsettled mix. I'm a strong Type A, I've been up and awake for thirty-six-plus hours, I'm stressed and gnawed-through with that horrible feeling of wired-exhaustion, and *I'm sitting at this desk...*

What I routinely did on most nights was to walk down the hall to the full gym. I'd grab a 10 kg barbell (about 20 lbs) and I'd do curls with it just to keep myself awake.

That's exactly what I did on this night, too. Although it wasn't to keep me awake as much as to do something, *anything*, to cut this damned stress even a little.

I set the barbell down on the floor, right next to the desk.

And that open valance behind it.

Yes, I knew it was open.

That "pop-pop-pop" *could* be on its way.

But we were surrounded by all this security. And I *was* told no one would get hurt...

I never sat for long anyway—with my back to anything. Tonight or otherwise. I was always moving around.

Going to the bathroom.

Waiting for the every-two-hour position change.

Making a snack at the refrigerator.

Working the coffee machine.

Doing what I could do to keep myself *up*.

But now—*on this night*—it was almost the end of the shift.

This is almost over, I thought.

I really thought I had made it.

Everything was fine.

No.

And just like the spilt-second kidnapping, this was so quick. Call it a sucker-punch, call it an ambush, call it a crying fucking shame that we all don't have 360-degree rotating eyes, call it what you want—but I was now on the floor from a rapid-slam blow to the back of my head.

I'm more than dazed—but I am *trained*. Survival kicks in. *So this is how it's going to go down?* Here is the lie they told me, dealt in a hard hand. Here is the first blood—mine.

I'm on the floor with this guy standing over me. I grab the 10 kg barbell. *Action is faster than re-action*. So I take action. I come up with the weight like Titan's hammer to the right side of his fucking head. I do some serious damage.

Now I see that there are two guys—two masked men.

The one I hit goes right to his knees. I hit him solid and put him into another time zone. All bets are off now. I was told that nobody was getting hurt. *I've been hurt*. Fuck you! This is it. Now we're taking this to a very bad *next level*.

Later I would read in the media that the fight "raged" for half an hour. This "fight" happened in a snap of the fingers.

The standing guy pulls out a knife as I fall back from whacking the other guy, the weight still in my hand. I'm on the carpet. The guy I hit is in bad shape. He's struggling with a smashed skull and writhing and thrashing like a run-down animal. Instinct and motor-reflex kick in. He grabs hold of my leg and is pulling me toward him. And *he* has a knife. I had loose-fitting pants on and he's ripping at them and they start to come up my leg in his death grip.

That becomes important.

Along with the stupid half-hour battle-royal portrayal, it later became a hot topic in the trial that I was cut on my thigh but wasn't cut

through my pants. Maybe that was because half my pants were now up around my ass!

This guy's got my leg and I'm twisting and turning. I get sliced again. He's trying to get up and now I'm stabbed *again*—right in the gut; I'm not sure by which guy.

I'm losing blood and my head is pounding.

I lose consciousness. But not for long—not even a couple minutes.

This knife is hanging out of me and I'm *really* bleeding now. I look around and nobody is there.

I don't know where they've gone.

They may have gone in to get Safra.

My blood is everywhere, but I know that if I pull out the knife I'm going to bleed to death because it's stuck in a bad area. I'm holding onto the knife, my guts, my blood, and my life.

I reel over to the switch that controls the signal light that goes from the nurses' station to Safra's room to allow the nurses to communicate with each other silently without disturbing Mr. Safra.

I signal Vivian that I need her.

She comes.

"My God, Ted, you're bleeding!" she screams.

I tell her two men came in—*broke* in.

I tell her to get Edmond and take him into the bathroom—which was equipped as a safe room—and close and lock the door!

I give her my cell phone.

"Call for help! I'm going to try and get downstairs and find someone!" (We really had no training for an emergency like this. *Oh, Ted, if there's an emergency call 911 in Monte Carlo.* No. There was none of that shit here.)

I'm bleeding and trying to talk, and I've been whacked in the head and sliced on the side. My leg's ripped open, I'm holding a knife in the middle of my stomach, and Vivian says the last thing I ever heard from her: "Ted, everything is going to be okay!"

Then Safra tells me, "Set off the alarm!"

Yeah, okay, okay, the alarm...

The alarm?

I'm dizzy, and I'm coming back past the nursing station. *The alarm?* These guys have already managed to bypass Safra's maze of barriers to get in here. *The alarm?* Then it dawns on me what he *must* mean: the smoke alarm! That alarm is hooked into a central alarm in the building. If I go down and I pass out, *somebody* is going to have to respond to that fucking smoke alarm!

I look around and see a small little metal trash can—*une poubelle*. It has some banana peels in it, along with some paper and some alcohol from cleaning up stuff.

Nearby, there on the desk, burns that fifty-buck scented candle.

With some tissue paper, I make this little "smoke signal"—*puff, puff*, the alarm goes off immediately. It was right in the middle of the room. There was no intent here to *start a fire*. There was no way that little wastebasket smudge pot *could* start (or as the Monegasque refer to it, *communicate*) a fire.

It was a tiny smoldering "smoke signal" in the dead-center middle of a room!

If I really wanted to *communicate a fire*, I could have done it up right. With the curtains and the abundance of *fuel* in that place, I could have worked something that would've made the burning of Atlanta look like Cub Scouts cooking s'mores.

I put that *poubelle* in the open center of the room—right underneath the alarm trigger—and it worked.

4:49 a.m.—Belle Époque monitoring station detects a fire alarm from the Safras' apartment.

(Eventually, in spite of all the hurdles set up by the Monegasque "justice" system and its authorities, an accurate timeline of the events and even some of the dialog between the police and firemen *would* be compiled and included within the official Prosecutor's Report.)

But I'm bleeding out. I'm thinking I may not make it all the way downstairs. But I know somebody *has* to come for that alarm.

They did.

Not only were the *sapeurs-pompiers*—the firefighters of Monaco—alerted, but another, completely separate fire department was also notified when that alarm started going off. Within minutes of my triggering the alarm, eighty-six policemen and fifty-six firemen showed up.

Of course, eighty-six policemen and fifty-six firemen *showing up* is a very different thing than eighty-six policemen and fifty-six firemen *responding*.

But I had no concept of that right now...

Just before 5:00 a.m.—Edmond makes the first call on Maher's phone. He calls Lily and tells her of "aggressors" in the house that have "injured Ted" and that she should "close herself in and call police." Lily first calls the Safra's head of security, Samuel Cohen, who is at La Leopolda. Cohen has already been notified by the Monaco police as to what is going on at La Belle Époque and is already en route.

I'm fading.

I still have no idea where the masked men went; or just how severely I hurt that one guy. Are they going for Lily? I need to go downstairs. I'm going to get the cavalry one way or another—I may not make it, but the cavalry *will* come!

I'm getting dizzier. I realize that I could jump the railings in back and head to the Hermitage; but if I pass out and fall and wind up somewhere in the dark shrubbery, nobody's going to see me until the sun comes up.

By then I'll be long dead.

I opt for going down a little fire escape to a level where the Israeli bodyguard *should* be.

And no, he isn't there.

Great...

Now I need to hit the elevator that will get me down to the *other* elevator that goes to the bank level; and the door will open up and *that* level's armed guard will be there! And the guard will see me bleeding to death! *Yes!*—I know I can make it at least that far.

I'm off the first elevator and onto the one that drops just a single floor to where the bank elevator is. I get to that point and find no one there, either!

Where are all the damn guards?

I realize that—once again—I'm screwed.

I have to go down to the bank level. It's the logical—and *only*—choice. I get in the elevator.

Everything I've done in my military and emergency career has taught me not to panic in *any* bad situation because it will kill you. Even as I'm losing so much blood, my mind is thinking logically like Spock. The endorphins are flowing; a fight for life is going. I'm thinking all these different things—*the alarm...I'm bleeding...they won't find me...but wait, I'm in the elevator...they'll probably find me, at least...maybe even save my life...maybe...*

This is all happening in seconds, not minutes. You're not hearing the theme song to *Jeopardy* here.

I'm at the bank level, the door opens, there *is* a guard! A bank guard—not a Mossad uzi warrior. I speak to him in the best broken French I can choke out. I'm literally flopping on the floor. Blood pouring. I see this guy, eyes wide, start to call someone. These guys—these guards and cops—are everywhere in Monte Carlo. They just *dream* of something like this.

5:00 a.m.—Making the second call on Maher's phone, Vivian Torrente calls head nurse Sonia Casiano Herkrath from Safra's dressing room to ask her to call police. She informs Casiano that Maher is injured. Five more calls are made by Torrente during the next 90 minutes.

All of a sudden, the SWAT team shows up, shielded in bulletproof *everything*. It's like they're protecting the prince or the president. I hear someone yell, "Get down! They're shooting!"

5:12 a.m.—The first police officers arrive in the lobby of the building. Police begin organizing a floor-by-floor search for intruders.

I'm going down fast but I'm still able to think: *Who's shooting?*

I'm on the ground and they have all these guys covering me.

But the truth is that *no one was shooting anything!*

It was a crazy bandwagon of pumped-up panic and it was just beginning.

Around 5:15 a.m.—Edmond calls Lily a second time to make sure she has "closed herself in."

The central alarm is still going off because of the smoke.

Within just a few minutes more, medics are starting an IV on me.

I see the throngs of cops and firemen. I know the alarm worked. I know things will be okay.

Vivian was right.

I am semi-conscious. I feel them wheeling me into the ambulance. I'm in and out. I hear them talking about surgery. I...

5:20 a.m.—Maher is transported to Princess Grace Hospital for treatment of stab wounds.