



WAKE UP CALL

Every day I beat my own previous record for Number Of Consecutive Days I've Stayed Alive. It's the morning after my Vegas trip and something is buzzing under my leg, but I'm too tired to see what it is. The buzzing goes away. Eventually everything goes away. This is my attitude at the moment.

I wake up on top of the covers of my bed, exhausted, still in my clothes, smelling like Vegas while spooning a pizza delivery menu. I wake up praying my wallet is sitting on my nightstand. MTV is on the television and I remember being so tired just three hours ago that I found Kelly Osbourne attractive.

I step out and look up at the ceiling because for a second I swear I see a camera. Looking up, I lose my balance and fall flat on my face. I don't see a camera, but I hear Reggie's words. The camera is always rolling.

I get back on my feet and walk to the bathroom where I wash my face and look in the mirror. My eyes are beyond bloodshot. Something is buzzing in my apartment. I look around and everything is blurry. Under the covers of my bed is where the noise is coming from. I pull back the covers and realize it's my phone.

Rasheed wants to know if I'm coming over and I'm just about to tell him No when I look over at my wall and see the poster from the movie Pulp Fiction. This is what I have to do. I ask him what we are doing and he begins to get annoyed with me. I tell him I'll be there in twenty minutes.

I quickly wash my face again, hoping this will cure all. It doesn't. I may have fallen asleep for a minute while washing my face, at this point it's too hard to tell. I put on a T-shirt, jeans, and a light sweatshirt. Maybe it's ignorance, but as tired as I am I'm a little excited. This is all despite not being in control. This is Reggie's world that has been temporarily loaned out to Rasheed.

I put on a pair of black shoes that are kind of like boots, I'm not even sure. And then I head for the door. On my way to the door, I fall again, flat on my face. I'm an extra one hundred fifty pounds and a hooker away from reenacting the last fifteen minutes of Chris Farley's E True Hollywood Story.

When I finally open the door, there's a note taped to the outside that reads Go To Hell. I guess I did order pizza.

ROAD TRIP

When I get to Rasheed's neighborhood, it's too early for anyone to be awake, but I'm still a little scared. There are more shattered bottles of Old English on the side of the road than concrete. The streets are loaded with older model Thunderbirds. My Dad used to always tell me that you can tell a bad neighborhood by the number of Thunderbirds. 'If over half the cars are Thunderbirds then get the hell out of there.'

Ladies and gentlemen, we are way over half.

I find Rasheed's house, which is a run down duplex, and he's waiting out front with two others. I get out of my Corolla, which is the nicest car in the neighborhood, and walk to the porch where they are waiting.

Rasheed introduces me to Victory and Samuel and doesn't say anything else. I still have no idea what we are doing. A dog sees me from across the yard and runs at me. I freeze and the bulldog jumps on me and growls.

'Yo Crackhead, leave him alone. Go find Junkie and play with her' says Rasheed as he hands me a bag that's heavy and awkward.

'What's this?' I ask.

'Shotguns' says Rasheed and then busts out laughing. 'It's nothing. A little surprise' he says.

We're standing in front of Rasheed's garage with four bags when he asks the question 'Rusted Impalla or white Van?'

'Impalla' says Samuel.

Victory adds, 'Yeah, Rasheed. I don't want to be seen in some white van.'

Rasheed can see I'm looking at the white van.

'I'm no child molester' he says as everyone is staring at me.

There's a minute pause and then everyone breaks out in laughter. I let out some nervous laughter myself. I swear Rasheed is trying to give me a seizure before six a.m.

I'm fighting to keep Crackhead off my leg as we load the Impalla with heavy awkward bags. There's a lot of laughter and a lot of inside jokes. I'm on the outside.

Learn the way Rasheed acts, the way he talks, the way he moves. What's your motivation?

Reggie.

'How's Reggie' asks Rasheed, who can probably sense I'm ready to bail on him.

'Okay' I say. 'We were in Vegas last night. Still recovering' I say while rolling my eyes a little.

'Yeah, that's rough. I didn't get any sleep last night. Nerves' says Rasheed.

'Yeah. Nerves' I say. And then Victory tells us she was out until two drinking Margaritas with some guy named Roy whom she met at a Laundromat yesterday.

'Now I got the tequila sweats' she says as she puts a bag into the back of the car.

'I got a cure' says Samuel. 'After we finish loading, I'll go grab my bag. I always have it just in case of rough hangovers.' Samuel throws the last bag in the back and begins walking to his car, a light green Thunderbird.

'What you got?' asks Victory.

'I got my own IV's' says Samuel.

'You can bring your redneck ass right back here. I'm not sticking no needle in my arm. You crazy.' Victory is shaking her head back and forth while she says this so hard that for a second I get dizzy.

'Suit yourself' says Samuel. 'You sounded like you wanted a cure for a hangover.'

'No thanks, Dr. Feelgood' says Victory and then everyone laughs again for some reason. Maybe I'm so tired I'm missing the jokes.

I'm standing next to the car, listening to all of this. Samuel walks up to me.

'Do you know what Romans call IV's?' asks Samuel.

Is he talking to me? No one else is around, so he must be. 'What?' I barely get out.

'Fours' says Samuel and then laughs so hard he almost falls over. I'm staring straight ahead while everyone is laughing.

'You need to loosen up' says Rasheed as he pats me on the shoulder then says 'Bad, Crackhead.'

I look down and Crackhead is pissing on my shoes.

'Are those shoes or boots?' asks Victory.

'Get in' says Rasheed to us.

'Where are we going?' I ask.

'To get breakfast' says Rasheed, as if that has been the plan all along.

Everyone laughs all the way to the restaurant. Everyone except me that is.

PANCAKES AND BEER

It's official: life has been put on hold for now. Like Reggie said: every day is a performance.

Samuel orders eggs and three sides of sausage. Victory orders half a grapefruit. And then I order blueberry pancakes and a pot of coffee. Rasheed orders a Bloody Mary. My pot of coffee arrives and so does Samuel's drink. We all stare at it for a minute until Samuel explains.

'It's called a Dive Down. A Corona beer with a shot of Bacardi Limon. It's fantastic' says Samuel, who takes a big drink and then says 'Tasty.'

I drink my coffee for the next few minutes, until Samuel begins complaining about his girlfriend and how he wants to break up with her.

'I was going to break up with her before Christmas, but I wasn't sure how long I had' says Samuel.

'Shit. Two weeks' says Rasheed.

Samuel looks my way.

'Yeah, two weeks sounds good' I say.

'No way, honey. No man breakin' off shit after St. Nick's day' says Victory.

'Wow, that's almost three weeks' states Samuel.

'Damn right, it's three weeks you asshole' says Victory and then starts laughing.

'What about Easter?' asks Samuel.

'You ever hear of Lent you stupid idiot?' says Victory, who is now snapping her fingers and popping her head back and forth.

We eat. I smother my pancakes with syrup which causes Rasheed to make a funny disgusted face. Samuel asks Rasheed a question about First American on Jackson Avenue.

'I know a shortcut' says Victory.

'Whatever. It's cool' says Rasheed.

I'm processing all this information. I'm a little slow this morning. Actually, I'm a little slow any morning at this time.

'First American. That's a bank, isn't it?'

'Of course it is. That's where they keep all the money' says Rasheed and then everyone at the table laughs.

There's a long pause. Everyone is waiting for me to ask the next question. It is what I'm told to do.

'You're not, you know, robbing it today, are you?' I ask. I know this sounds horrible, but I have to know.

'Easy' says Rasheed and he puts up his hand to make sure I don't do anything rash. What would I do? You're the bank robber, remember? 'We're just going to look at the bank today' he says as he's looking at Victory and then looks over at Samuel. Rasheed puts his hand back up and then repeats 'No one is robbing a bank today.'

I don't say anything for what seems about an hour. No one does. Everyone continues to sip their drinks and coffee, occasionally looking at their watch. The definition of killing time. At one point, Samuel disappears to the bathroom and doesn't come back for about half an hour.

Then Rasheed speaks up 'This is it. You want to leave? Leave. Otherwise, you go with us. You learn what we do and then you never see us again.' Rasheed says this while he is looking at me with a non-committed face. 'This is what Reggie told me you wanted. If not, that's fine. Leave' he says as he looks around the table. How well do Rasheed and Reggie know each other? How did they meet?

The more Rasheed talks the more confused I get. The more confused Victory and Samuel look. Are they also an actor and actress looking for a role? Is this what Rasheed does? Does he work for Reggie?

Reggie.

Hate isn't a strong enough word.

'You've come this far' says Rasheed, who is looking over my shoulder as if he's reading this off a cue card. I look back and see nothing.

As Rasheed speaks, I look across the restaurant and think I see an angry camera man watching me.

'What are you looking at?' asks Victory.

'I thought I saw an angry camera man over there' I tell the table.

'Well of course he's angry. Have you ever seen a happy camera man?' says Victory, like I'm the biggest fool at the table. Then they all laugh.

THE HEIST

After breakfast, Samuel calls shotgun and then rubs it in when Victory and myself get in the backseat. George Michael is playing on the radio of the Impala.

'Shit, what is this?' says Rasheed, who proceeds to put in one of his CDs.

As soon as the KISS Greatest Hits start, we all look at Rasheed in shock.

'Hey, so I like a little rock sometimes. Damn, always has to be something' says Rasheed while adjusting his rear view mirror. Looking out the window, I see a billboard with a giant head that looks like me with the caption Have You Seen Me? but Rasheed is driving fast so I don't get a really good look at it. Rasheed is continuing to adjust his mirror, so I look back and swear the van following us has a camera anchored to the top. But then the van pulls off and I feel dumb for thinking this.

I look over at Victory and notice that she has a piece of grape fruit on her cheek. I wipe it off her while Samuel is watching us from the shotgun position.

'How did you get grape fruit on yourself? Breakfast isn't supposed to be messy' says Samuel, who then turns back around and adds 'Now Italian, that can be messy.'

Pause.

Samuel continues 'Chinese can be messy.'

Pause.

Samuel continues 'But breakfast? No. Not messy.' Rasheed almost drives off the road while listening to Samuel.

'Shut up you imbecile!' says Rasheed.

'I'm just saying, you know? That shit is messy' says Samuel.

'Don't worry about him, Sheed. He doesn't know any better' says Victory.

Rasheed looks over at Samuel. 'Tacos' he smiles. 'Tacos are messy. Yeah' says Rasheed, who is digging for something under his front seat and pulls up a plastic bag and passes it to Samuel.

Samuel opens the bag and pulls out several tied off nylon masks. He hands one back to Victory who passes it over to me. I'm holding the mask. Samuel passes another mask back to Victory and then removes two for Rasheed and himself.

'What are these for?' I say innocently, knowing damn well what these were for. I've seen the movies.

'There come times in your life when you have to make a decision' says Rasheed. 'I'm not saying you want to do this with us, but let's face it man, you've come this far.'

What does that even mean?

Reggie.

'No thanks, Rasheed, I appreciate everything, whatever it is you've told me... but... uh...' I stumble for the right words and then I just spit out 'I'm staying in the car.'

'No problem man' says Rasheed.

Victory puts her hand on my leg and smiles, looks at the mask I'm still holding, and says 'We used to wear hockey masks, but that whole Friday the 13th series is just too creepy. I told Rasheed it's either me or the masks, you decide.'

'There was nothing wrong with the masks. I like Friday the 13th' says Samuel.

Rasheed looks at Samuel while squinting his eyes 'Damn, Sam. sometimes.' He lets the word Sometimes hang while still looking at him, says the word Sometimes again and then turns his eyes back to the road.

'Yeah' says Victory. 'What is it you like, anyway?'

Victory has her head leaning over the front seat talking loudly into Samuel's ear. 'It's a stupid movie.' Samuel is about to jump in, but Victory won't let him. 'They're all stupid movies.'

'C'mon, everyone likes a good horror movie' says Samuel, who looks back at me. I'm staring at nothing. I may be going through shock.

'Oh, yeah. A Good Horror Movie.' Victory is now bouncing side to side around in the backseat as she says this. 'The guy who can never start his car? The guy who falls numerous times while trying to run away? And the girl who shows up late with all the lights on in a deserted cabin and decides this is a perfect time to take a shower? Stupid, Samuel. Just plain stupid.'

Samuel looks back and is about to open his mouth, but Victory isn't finished.

'And another thing, why didn't anyone just walk away from him? I mean the guy could barely walk himself, but no, oh no, everyone's starting cars, tripping, and falling on the flat ground. Stupid.'

Samuel is speechless. We all are.

'So you don't use hockey masks anymore?' I say and Samuel looks back like he wants to punch me. Good times.

We arrive a block from the bank. Rasheed parks the car and I'm in one the greatest all time conundrums of my life: Safety versus Stardom.

I weigh my options. Not for as long as you would think. I feel like I don't really have a choice. The way I see it I'm one more week of unemployment from being homeless anyway. So I grab a pair of nylons.

Samuel is on his cell phone talking to someone in a soft voice and Victory whispers to me that it's his priest. 'He always calls his priest before a job' says Victory. Suddenly I'm light headed. Before we get out of the car, I'm about to put my nylon mask on when Rasheed looks back at me and yells 'Yo, white. We don't need those today.' Everyone laughs together. Out of nervous tension I join in with the laughter.

I'm so relieved. I check to make sure I didn't pee my pants. They're dry. Nothing is clear. Maybe they really are just casing the joint. Opening a checking account. Cashing an Aunt's Christmas card check.

We walk into the bank, which only has a couple customers, all talking to tellers. Samuel hangs out by the door while Victory goes off to the doors on the far side. Once again, I'm getting nervous, which for some stupid reason causes me to look up and locate every camera in the bank. At one point I believe I smile. More leftover nervous tension. Rasheed and I walk up to a teller.

The teller's name is Boris Cheeks and you have to wonder how many times a day he considers changing it. Rasheed reaches into his pants and pulls out a piece of paper that he hands to Boris. While Boris reads the note, a bead of sweat forms on his forehead. The story of Boris's life would be played by Al Gore, before the beard. Boris looks at Rasheed and slowly nods. Boris motions for another man to come over. This man's name is James Keen. James looks like a devout family man, meaning he has no personality whatsoever. He looks the note over and walks stiffly to a temporary safe located within view from the teller window, the whole time keeping his hands on his sides. Watching James is painful. He's so wooden you just stand there waiting to see him burst into flames. A wild time for this staff must entail tearing it up at Brooks Brothers. James and Boris are so plain that it hasn't occurred to me that I'm robbing a Federal bank. My next move kills me. I look back around at the cameras. When I pull my head back down to a normal level, James is handing Rasheed a bag while Rasheed stares at me like most people stare at Samuel.

I'm in a daze, thinking about bank robbery movies. The Getaway, Heat, and Point Break come to mind. All involving gun play. Is there going to be gun play? Am I going to get shot? Shouldn't I be wearing a mask?

Back to the bank scene.

We walk out of the bank with a bag of money and run to the Impala. The whole scene is surreal. As we approach the car, Samuel calls shotgun.

THE GETAWAY

As we turn onto Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, Rasheed turns on the radio and to no surprise Detroit Rock City by KISS is playing. Rasheed is going down the MLK when we pass a billboard that, like before, has a face similar to mine with the caption Have You Seen Me? Before I can take a second look, we are past the billboard.

Samuel asks Rasheed a question I can't hear and then Rasheed says 'Gerald's place.'

'Oh'says Samuel and then looks back at me. 'Gerald's house was on MTV Cribs.' Samuel seems awfully proud that he knows this tidbit of information. 'That show is awesome' says Samuel.

'Yeah, you'd say that' says Victory.

'Damn, Victory. I mean, c'mon. You've got Tommy Lee with his own Starbucks in his place. That's pretty cool' says Samuel.

'You're an idiot' is all Victory says.

'Don't forget about the urinal at Wallace's place' says Rasheed. I guess Rasheed can say only Wallace since they share the same first name.

'Nothing beats Big Bro, or what's his name?' Samuel can barely get this sentence out.

I look behind us and swear the same van with cameras that I saw before is following us again.

'It's Big Boi' says Victory. 'And I know why you love it so much. Because you ain't never going to have a pole in your house, and if you do there ain't ever gonna be no one stripping for you.'

Victory has once again taken all the air out of Samuel's sail. Victory grabs my leg and giggles. I look behind and no longer see the van.

The cameras are always rolling.

The next song on the radio is Jump by Van Halen. Victory comments that she had a neighbor who committed suicide to this song.

Samuel asks 'How did he do it?'

The song plays on and no one replies to Samuel. Samuel is The Muscle. The Muscle usually isn't the smart one. Samuel plays the role well.

Rasheed looks into his rearview mirror and then the story changes. Off in the distance we hear sirens. I look back. There's no longer a van, but instead a cop car fast approaching. Rasheed quickly pulls off the road and we all duck down. The cop passes and Rasheed drives another block to an Irish Pub.

'Here' he says. 'Let's stay here.'

We walk inside the empty bar and are about to order drinks from the Chinese bartender when we hear the sirens pull into the parking lot. I notice a sign next to a Guinness neon light that says Problems? Beer Here.

Everything comes down to this.

SLAP TALK

Back to the climax. China has been shot and the cops are ready to bust through the door. Victory and I sit back down and I catch myself staring at a clock that has stopped exactly on midnight. Or possibly noon. At this point, it's anyone's guess. Whatever it is, I can't keep my eyes off it.

At this moment, I begin to focus on the reality that I may be going to prison. Will I have a court case? Will I have the blurry circle on my face? Will this be an option? These are the things I'm thinking about.

Here's what I know so far about my newly adopted partners in crime:

Victoria Morales: born in 1973 in San Antonio, Texas. She's the youngest of five children and is a high school drop out. She dropped out of high school her Sophomore year after she didn't make the JV cheerleading squad. Victory has been arrested for shoplifting in 1993, possession of marijuana in 1994, and armed robbery in 1997. She's spent three years in the Arizona State Prison system. She always votes Republican and never pays taxes. I suspect she has links to terrorist explosive experts, but this hasn't been confirmed.

Samuel Antone: born in 1969 in Prairie Hills, Oklahoma. He was raised by his mother and never new his father, who was put to death by the state of Oklahoma for killing his dentist after a root canal. Played high school football and got a scholarship to Oklahoma State. He was permanently kicked off the team after three months when during a practice he beat a teammate into a coma. The teammate was celebrating a touchdown. His record is as follows: four counts of assault from 87-92, assault and battery in 93, and attempted murder in 94. Samuel has done time in Tennessee, New York, and Michigan. He has no tattoos and a baseball bat is his weapon of choice.

Rasheed Dawkins: date and place of birth unknown. Has been arrested for robbery nine separate times. Has done time in Arizona, Tennessee, and New York. Plenty of tattoos and is currently wanted by the F.B.I. for questioning. Rasheed is currently connected to sixty unsolved bank robberies.

My story: I did a commercial for toothpaste, once. Not Colgate. The other one.

Rasheed has bought some time with the cops, who still don't know what the hostage situation is inside. There no longer is a situation. The situation is dead on the floor. It's all part of the story. There's a click behind the empty bar. The click of a camera. We all look over, but there's nothing there.

There's a sign in the bar that reads Every Hour Is Happy Hour. Every hour until now, that is. If only China had read the sign it could have bought him some time.

Victory gets up and shoves her stool over and looks over around the room. For some reason, Samuel gives her a light slap on the ass.

'What the hell you doing?' says Victory.

'Hey, it was a reflex. Sorry' says Samuel, who looks over at me and gives me the 'How was he supposed to know?' face.

'I thought you girls liked that' Samuel says in an arrogant voice I haven't heard yet.

'You mean as in Girls In General? Or Latina Girls?' Victory says as she's stomping her foot, looking at Samuel.

'Two slaps, nice and firm' says Rasheed, looks over at China, who is sprawled out on the floor. 'Ain't that right, China Man? Two slaps.'

Victory ignores Rasheed.

'Uh... err... uh...' Samuel is stuttering as a news report about Michael Jackson comes over the television. Nothing hushes a room like the sight of Jacko. This saves Samuel. I think Victory was ready to rip him a new asshole. Again. If looks could kill, we would have our second homicide on our hands.

After the commercial passes and soccer resumes, I find myself staring at the clock again. Then Rasheed speaks up. At this point to say we're attentive to Rasheed would be the understatement of the century.

'Alright everyone, gather around the table. Uncle Rasheed has a plan.'

THE PLAN

Rasheed lights a blunt and offers a hit to everyone around the table. I take a small hit because I need to escape mentally from this predicament. Victory also takes a large drag from the blunt and then passes it over to Samuel, who waves it off and says 'I wish I had some Ecstasy.'

'That shit kills' says Rasheed.

'Ah bullshit' replies Samuel. 'Give me one time you've ever heard of someone dying from X.'

'Last fall. That College Football star. He went to a party, did Ecstasy and died on the way home' says Rasheed.

Samuel has a glazed look on his face. 'But didn't he die in a car accident?'

'Yeah.' Rasheed takes a major hit off the blunt. 'Dead on contact.'

'But, he...' Samuel is at a loss for words. 'It was a drunk driver that hit him and killed him.'

Rasheed opens his eyes to Samuel, pauses, and then says 'Right. Like I said. He went to the party, had some Ecstasy, and then died on the way home. There's your example.'

Rasheed is ready to discuss the plan. I can tell, because the blunt has left his hand and is resting in an ashtray in the middle of the table. He's in total control. Rasheed is showing us once again why he is the star.

Victory picks up the blunt, takes a hit, and in a soft tone tells us the story about how she once took Ecstasy, slept with a guy, and got a disease.

'Even the doctor's didn't know what I caught. One asked me if I had sex with an alien in outer space.' Victory looks around the table, stopping at Samuel. 'I didn't have sex in outer space.'

There's a pause at the table.

Rasheed makes himself a Bloody Mary.

'How did they take care of it?' I ask.

'Take care of what? I still have it?' says Victory.

'Oh' I say.

'What, I mean... does it...' Samuel hasn't gotten a complete sentence out in some time now.

'I deal with it' is all Victory says.

There's another pause at the table.

Somebody at the table says I've got a plan. Then somebody says that I'm going to be held as a hostage. In both cases, Rasheed is that somebody.

Just my luck. Where's the black cat being thrown on the table and the chicken blood getting poured over my shoulders?

I'm at my wits end. I've never understood that expression until now. I look over at the clock, grab Victory's cell phone, and call Reggie. Everyone pauses as I dial the phone.

Samuel looks over to Rasheed and lets him know that he's pretty sure I'm dialing the cops. Reggie picks up after two rings.

'Reggie.'

Is how he answers the phone?

'You piece of shit' I say. 'Get me out of this mess!' I scream. Now is not the time to be passive. Show emotion at the right time and you're golden is what they say.

'Who is this?' he asks.

I fill him in on how my day is going and Reggie sounds ecstatic. 'That's great news' he says.

'What are you talking about?!' I'm no longer screaming, but these are definitely exclamation point type sentences.

'You're finally getting it. The experience. The research.'

'You don't understand. I may go to jail because of your stupid ass' I say.

'Hey, listen. I didn't tell you to go rob a bank' says Reggie. 'Now listen, you make it out of there you will know your character. If not, listen...' There's a pause. I think Reggie may be eating chips. 'I didn't want to say anything, but I've got a great script for a prison movie.'

'What?' I'm actually surprised anything comes out of my mouth. I notice the soccer match on television has ended in a tie.

Reggie. 'Yeah, so if you do, you know, go away, think of the research. That is of course if it's just a year or two' says

'Why a year or two?' I ask.

'Well, I can't wait forever, man. You know that. Listen to me.' I can feel some of the Reggie wisdom that has gotten me into this predicament coming on. He's still eating chips. 'I just got a letter today by an organization asking me and everyone else who reads this letter to stop watching Kirsten Dunst movies. Do you know why?'

I say nothing.

'They want everyone to stop watching so that she's forced to start making porn movies.' More crunching on his end. 'Do you know what this means?'

I say nothing. Reggie's question hangs in the air. Rasheed is motioning for me to come over by him.

'It means anything is possible' says Reggie as I shut off the phone.

As directed, Rasheed grabs me, puts a gun to my head, opens the door, and threatens to Fill My Head With Lead if anyone approaches.

The cops aren't believing this for a second. This isn't my best acting performance. Maybe the cops just don't care about my life. As you can see, this could really go either way.

Victory yells 'NT!' over to Rasheed, who hastily shuts the door and looks over at Victory who clarifies 'Nice Try.'

Rasheed had a plan and no one is biting. The story must change. Rasheed pulls a fitted hat (that he calls a Fittie) out of his back pocket, puts it on over the greatest balding afro of all time, and begins handing out guns to all of us.

THE ESCAPE

I was almost a bartender in a remake of an old Western called Texas Showdown. When a fight broke out, I had to pull out a pistol from under the bar and shoot a man named Lucky. This was three years ago and I never got the part, but I still remember the uncomfortable feeling of shooting the gun, even though it was loaded with blanks.

This is the same feeling I have as Rasheed hands me a gun.

'What's wrong?' asks Rasheed, who can see I'm shaking noticeably.

'A little stress I guess' I say.

'Stress? Let me tell you about stress. Stress is being on your knees while someone has the barrel of a shotgun shoved half-way down your throat while your sister is getting raped right in front of you. That's stress.'

Confidence is at an all time low.

I'm still shaking. I'm standing with my eyes open, but I don't feel conscious of anything around me. I wish someone knew what was happening. How will I ever explain this to anyone? Have you seen me? Rasheed thinks we may be able to escape by climbing through a duct in the ceiling and then scaling down the side of the building. Rasheed is helping Victory climb into the duct. Samuel is covering the front door. I'm covering the back door.

'If anyone enters, shoot them.' These are the orders laid out by Rasheed. This is what is supposed to happen.

I can hear someone trying to enter through the back door. The anticipation of the cops breaking through the door is the same as the hot freshman girl who hasn't broken up with her Back Home boyfriend yet. You'll know she'll be available soon. Just a matter of time. This is what I'm thinking about. Just a matter of time.

As the door is knocked down, I pull the trigger. This is the last thing I remember before I faint.

REALITY CHECK

In the distance, as I fall to the floor, I hear fading voices and someone who distinctly sounds like a director who yells 'Cut!'

When I wake up, I'm outside. There are men dressed as cops. There are cameras everywhere. Reggie is there. And he says something about me starring in a Reality Show.

Wesley Snipes is here. He's talking to a blond reporter.

Rasheed, Samuel, and Victory are all pointing and laughing saying things like 'The billboard was a close call. That wasn't supposed to be there' and 'I thought he noticed the camera inside the clock.'

China is alive. He is walking around with a red stained shirt. He approaches me and says 'We got you good.' China looks around at all the cameras and then back at me, saying 'You big star now' then leaves.

Reggie walks up to me with a half smile and says 'Your ratings are through the roof. When you went along with the bank robbery, well, let's just say I couldn't have written a better story.'

'What is going on?' I'm looking around in a daze.

'You're a star now, that's what is going on. Hey consider yourself lucky. I wanted to do a prison reality show where we put you in a maximum security prison for a week and let the inmates have their way with you.'

I'm feeling faint again.

'You're not going to have to worry about work for quite a while' says Reggie.

A man wearing a blue suit with a red tie that looks familiar to me approaches. As he gets closer, I remember. The VP of Marketing for Crest. The man responsible for getting me my commercial.

'You've put us back on top. Having you play the part was a perfect marketing strategy. The Trust Me Guy. People remembered. Pure genius'

A lot of this doesn't make sense to me right now.

I look back over at Reggie. 'So is it over?' I ask.

Reggie looks at me, puts his hands up in the air, and says 'Who knows? Is it ever really over?'

Life is like a show.

The cameras are always rolling.