

10 O'CLOCK

by Keren Green

Deep breaths. Seriously, breathe... Tom balances his gun on one leg as he rubs the sweat off his hand onto the other. Dude, pull yourself together. You've got this.

Rick rolls over, pulling his pillow deeper under his head. Tom studies the tattoo sleeve on Rick's arm, women, guns, and money. Tom pulls up his own sleeve and glances at his bare forearm, wondering. He has never considered a tattoo before, maybe it was time he did.

"Hey."

Tom looks back to Rick, now awake and lighting a cigarette.

"Hey," Tom says back.

"What the fuck time is it?" Rick asks.

Tom glances at his watch, "It's 9:47 am."

Rick puts his head back against the backboard of the bed and takes a long, deep drag. He closes his eyes, in ecstasy, then exhales. "So...", he says.

Tom nods, smiling as he watches Rick's every move with utter fascination. "So."

A slight grin crosses over Rick's face as he turns to Tom. "So, you wanna tell me what the hell you're doing here at 9:47 am?"

Tom's hand shakes as he wipes his chin. Don't fuck this up, man. Don't fuck it up, he tells

himself. He looks up at Rick, like a dog who knows he's in trouble. "I'm early," he says, hearing his own voice crack. "I wasn't supposed to be here until ten. But, so... I'm early."

Rick raises his brow, intrigued. "Yeah, what for? What's going on at ten?"

"Well, Rick, you're my mark," Tom says as he points his gun at Rick.

Rick laughs, that same genuine, contagious laugh that always makes Tom laugh along with him. "Are you shitting me?" he says before taking another drag.

"Nah man, I'm serious. The boss is real peeved at you," Tom says with a laugh.

Rick's smile vanishes as he takes that in. He exhales as he studies Tom. "Look, you can't even hold a gun right." Rick swings his legs over the side of the bed and takes a step toward Tom. "Give me that." He snatches the gun from Tom's hand.

Rick aims the gun at Tom's forehead, directly between his eyes. "You hold it like this. See, strong and steady. That way people know you're not fucking around. Plus, you have less chance of shooting off your own goddamn foot." He flips the gun around and hands it back to Tom.

Tom takes the gun, in awe, staring at it like it's a magic wand handed to him by Merlin, himself. Tom aims the gun at Rick, exactly as he showed him.

"Better. Practice, you'll get it," Rick said. "Why you anyway? You're not a hitter, you're a fucking driver for Christ's sake."

"Well, I've been promoted."

A huge smile crosses Rick's face. "Promoted? No, shit? Since when?"

"Since this morning," Tom beams.

"Dude, that's awesome. Congratulations."

"Thanks."

The two of them stand opposite of one another, smiling and nodding, taking it all in. After a

moment, Rick's color changes. His eyes narrow and his smile vanishes. "What the fuck are you doing here while I'm sleeping? You're just sitting there, watching me sleep? You're supposed to be in and out, quick. BAM-BAM, no fucking around. What the fuck are you doing?"

Tom's nerves sweep back over him. He closes his eyes and takes a couple deep breaths, desperately trying to center himself. He looks at Rick, his eyes burning, knowing he fucked up. "Well, Boss said make it ten. He was very particular about the time. Ten AM he said. Three times he said it."

"So what are you doing here now?"

"I'm early! I was nervous. I didn't want to screw this up. It means a lot to me. It's important!" Tom exclaims. He shakes his head, disappointed in himself as he paces the room.

"Yeah, it's kind of fucking important to me, too. I can't believe he marked me. That fat son of a bitch. I've been like a son to him." Rick lights another cigarette from the stub of the still burning one in his hand.

"I half dropped when I got your address. What the hell did you do to piss him off?"

Rick stares at Tom, almost half-guilty. He takes another drag and can't help but grin a little as he says, "I took Michelle."

"Where'd you take her?"

"I didn't take her anywhere. I took her."

Tom stares at him for a second, confused. Then it hits. "Ah! Oh... you fucked Michelle! Are you out of your fucking mind? What is she like seventeen?"

"Nah, man. She's eighteen."

"She is?"

"Yeah, she had a birthday last night."

Tom drops back down into the chair, stunned. "I didn't know it was her birthday. I guess I should send her something, huh? Something nice. What do you think?"

Rick takes a swig from the half-drunk beer bottle on the table. "Flowers?"

"No, not flowers. Flowers die. I want to get her something that will last a while."

"Get her a plant."

Tom shakes his head, unbelievable. "See, now you have no idea what I'm talking about, do you? I want to get her something nice. A gesture... something nice."

Rick crosses to the mini-fridge and pulls out a slice of cold pizza. He takes a bite and talks with his mouthful. "Get her a bracelet or something."

Tom's eyes grow wide. He smiles and nods. "Now, that's not a bad idea." He pulls out his phone. "No fuck man, you and Michelle. That girl is growing into one hot lady."

"No man, she's grown. She's smart, tough... a lot like the fat guy only prettier. Hey, what time you got?"

Tom looks at the time on his phone. "It's 9:52."

Rick nods toward the bathroom door, "Mind if I take a piss?"

"Nah, we got time."

Rick disappears into the bathroom as Tom pulls up Amazon on his phone and types 'bracelets' into the search bar. Rick's phone rings from across the room.

Rick calls out from the bathroom, "Hey, grab that for me."

Tom slips his phone into his suit pocket and crosses to the side table to grab Rick's. He answers. "Rick's phone, this is Tom." Tom listens, then. "Oh, hey. Yeah, he's right here."

The toilet flushes and Rick exits the bathroom.

Tom holds out the phone for him, "It's the fat guy."

Rick grabs the phone, "Hey..."

Tom fiddles with his gun, trying to busy himself as Rick talks.

"Yeah, she said that, did she? Well, see... What'd I tell you? It wasn't my idea. Yeah... we've been shooting the shit. Well, he's early."

Tom's ears perk up. He stares at Rick who holds up his finger - wait a sec - as he listens and laughs.

"Yeah, yup... got it." Rick hangs up and paces the room like a peacock showing off his tail feathers.

"What's up?" Tom asks.

"Michelle told him she seduced me."

Tom's mouth drops open. "She did? Fuck. Shit like that never happens to me."

"I know."

"So, what? Is the hit off?"

"Oh, I don't know. He didn't say."

"So, what then?"

Rick pulls a gun out from underneath his pillow. "You're my mark."

"What?"

"He marked you, Tom," Rick says with a shrug.

"Christ! Why? What for?"

"Don't know. He said something about assholes who couldn't organize a piss up in a brewery. With that accent and his fucking sayings who the hell knows what he's talking about."

Tom stares down Rick's barrel, devastated. "Shit!"

"Yeah."

Then it hits Tom, Wait a minute... He aims his gun at Rick, just like he showed him. "So, you're still my mark?"

The two of them stare at each other in a standoff. "I told you, I don't know nothing about that." Then after a moment, "What time you got?"

Tom glances at his watch, "9:57. Why?"

"He told me to wait until ten."