

STASH

Let's get the names out of the way:

Douchebag
El Douche
Douchey-Douche
Son of Douche
Douche Junior
The Douche Prince

These were the ones he remembered.

There were more, although he'd blocked most of them out of his memory. His gym teacher in the sixth grade, Mr. Blundy, called him Lil Douche, which, at the time, was as humiliating as any of the others, but over the years had kind of grown on him. Lil Douche has a certain hip-hoppy ring to it. Like an opening act for P-Diddy or Ol' Dirty Bastard. Or maybe the Massengil Summer Reggae Festival. All of which would be great, were he not the whitest dude you'll ever meet. A man without roots, without an identity.

A product of state orphanages, Guy Fox was adopted as a toddler and grew up in Caucasian Land (actually Grand Rapids, Michigan). He was weaned listening to the New Christy Minstrels and eating Bologna sandwiches slathered in mayonnaise. He went to an expensive Episcopalian prep school where the only black student was a light skinned Cuban boy named Pierre LaFontant whose blackest act was wearing a Sears Dashiki and playing Harry Belafonte's "Banana Boat Song" after lights-out. By the time Guy had made it to the University of Michigan, he was a full fledged honky motherfucker, from his Ivy League

haircut down to his Izod chinos and top-siders. He looked like an ad for Eddie Bauer's "Young Republican Resort Wear."

Maybe that was why he eventually came up with the Porno Pal System. Maybe it was all about rebellion. Or maybe he wanted to do something "black." Something earthy and dangerous and subversive and cool.

Chances are, though, it was simply a way to thumb his lily white nose at his adopted dad.

"Where are you?" Guy snapped at his cell, gripping the phone tightly with one hand as he steered the car with the other. He was on the outer drive, skimming over parched pavement, heading north, preparing to clean up another mess in a home on the north shore of Chicago.

It was a gray September day, the sky low and skudded with dark clouds. To Guy's right stretched the endless mercurial waters of Lake Michigan, and to his left the canyons of cloistered condos known as Lincoln Park. Guy had both the air conditioning and a Korn CD blasting, and the cumulative din was making it hard to hear his partner.

"I'm almost there," the voice crackled. It belonged to Bobby Dutchik. Guy's Pal Friday since high school, Bobby made up for his room temperature IQ with a certain kind of sweetness that Guy had yet to encounter in any other straight, white, middle-class, horny males.

"Well don't do anything until I get there," Guy instructed, glancing at his watch. "It's not even 2:00 o'clock yet."

"Didn't the contract say the funeral was like from 1:00 to 4:00?"

"2:00 to 4:00," Guy corrected him.

"Sorry."

"Don't sweat it, I'll be there in a nanosecond. Just sit in your car, do some crossword puzzles."

Bobby assured Guy that he would do just that, and Guy disconnected the cell.

It took Guy a little over twenty minutes to find the address. Working off the contract, as well as the attached map, he located the huge Queen Anne at the end of a tree-shrouded street near the lake. Way upper class neighborhood. Cobblestones, mansions, security systems up the ying yang.

Guy parked his car a half a block away and strolled over to the client's wrought iron gate with his official-looking blue uniform shirt buttoned to the collar, and his official-looking clipboard tucked under his arm. It was standard work attire. Never failed to blend in. Guy was just some dude showing up to install a satellite dish or change a furnace filter. Rich people are used to this kind of crapola. On top of that, Guy Fox's physique had become about as non-threatening as a physique can be. Soft, pale, a little paunchy around the middle, he looked like an accountant or an actuary who'd been staring at so many spread sheets, his own sheets had started to spread.

"Hey, G, you made it!" Bobby Dutchik called out as Guy approached the entrance gate. Bobby was leaning against the wrought iron fence in his own fake blue uniform, whistling absently, a tall, rangy man, his buggy eyes magnified by Coke bottle glasses.

"All set?" Guy said as he looked for the key pad that was supposed to be a few inches to the left of the gate's lock. Bobby said sure, everything was copacetic, as Guy consulted the contract for the proper code.

They opened the gate, strolled up the gorgeous herringbone brick sidewalk, and entered the house through the front door using the key that had been enclosed with the contract packet.

It's strange: When there's a death in a family, an empty home somehow seems to be more silent than your average empty home. Guy never mentioned this observation to Bobby – Guy wasn't even sure Bobby would get it – but Guy noticed it every time he entered a client's domicile. This house was no different. The front foyer was huge, with a soaring vaulted ceiling and sky lights, and as quiet as a Pharaoh's tomb. The rest of the house was straight out of Architectural Digest. Expensive furniture, meticulous decor. Lush greenery everywhere. Guy couldn't remember what the client's job had been: Heart surgeon? CEO? Something like that. It wasn't important.

They put on their surgical gloves and went about their business with minimal conversation or fuss. Guy kept the floor plan handy, and Bobby carried the canvas tent bag. (Over the years, they had learned through trial and error that plastic garbage bags are woefully ill-suited for this work; pornography can be heavy,

and have sharp edges.)

On the second floor, at the end of the hall, as notated in the contract, they found the client's home office. The air smelled faintly of stale smoke and aftershave in there, and there was something vaguely poignant about the clutter. This was another thing Guy had noticed over the years: Old, white, rich, married men always have home offices, or rumpus rooms, or dens, or whatever, where they go to be alone. Maybe this was the secret to a happy marriage. A husband having a masculine place in which to retire after dinner each night, a place of dark leather upholstery and English fox hunt wallpaper within which a man can smoke a cigar and drink a Scotch and think deep thoughts about sports or cars.

This office was a prime example: The decedent's big oak desk was front row center, surrounded by golf trinkets, bowling trophies, model trains and framed prints of Norman Rockwell paintings. Behind the sofa, under a false floorboard, Guy found a cardboard file box full of *Hustlers*, *Barely Legals*, *Screws*, *Beaver Hunts*, *Naughty Nymphs*, *School Girl Pussys*, and *Awesome Asian Asses*. He carefully transferred the well-thumbed magazines to the canvas bag, and moved on.

The whole removal session took less than a half an hour. In the basement powder room, behind a cadenza brimming with photos of grandchildren, Guy removed a peach crate filled with dozens of videotapes, mostly fetish stuff, *Oriental Ass Reamers 17* and *Buttman Goes to College* Volumes 1 through 23. In the attic, nestled in the bottom of a moth-ball redolent trunk, underneath long forgotten sleeping bags and musty hunting gear, Bobby found vintage magazines and paperbacks with titles such as *The Big Suck-Off* and *Mona Takes a Pony Ride*. By the time they were done, the canvas bag was filled to the straining point. Bobby guessed it weighed at least a hundred and fifty pounds. Which was about right for a man who had lived a full life well into his seventies. A couple pounds of porno for every year. That was just about the norm, Guy had noticed: a magazine a month.

They made their final sweep, and everything looked good. They left the house just as they had found it.

On his way out the front door, Guy felt a wave of satisfaction rise through him. The day had turned mild, the sun burning off

the clouds, and now the sky was high and blue over the north shore as he walked back to his car. But best of all: Guy had completed another job without incident. He had removed a deceased man's pornography promptly and professionally, before his wife or mother or daughter or granddaughter had a chance to stumble upon it and suffer mixed emotions about their dearly departed. Guy had discreetly cleansed a man's home, leaving behind nothing but Norman Rockwell, grinning grandchildren, and mothball perfumed trunks. And for the survivors, Guy had insured a period of simple, focused, undiluted, healing grief.

Grief without embarrassment.

"You going back to the office?" Bobby asked, tossing the canvas bag into his trunk. Bobby was supposed to stop at the dump incinerator on his way back to the shop, destroying all the smut – which Guy referred to in his company literature as 'retrieval materials' – in order to insure that no evidence would survive. But Guy was painfully aware that Bobby often stopped off at his apartment first to cherry pick whatever goodies might be of interest to him. He thought he was pulling a fast one on Guy, but Guy didn't care. Since becoming impotent a couple of years ago, Guy Fox couldn't begrudge a man his vices.

"Yeah, we got a customer coming in at 3:00 for a prospectus," Guy replied, glancing at his watch. "Then we got the Douche King coming over tonight for dinner."

Bobby cringed. "Ouch."

"Yeah, well... anyway... good job today, Bobby. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Seeya, Guy."

Guy walked the rest of the way to his car marveling at how fast a good mood can evaporate when his dad's name is invoked.

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Guy's dad was indeed "The Douche King."

In fact, no less an authority than Fortune Magazine dubbed the elder Fox exactly that in a cover story in the late eighties.

When Guy was adopted in 1961—a former ward of the Department of Children and Family Services who would turn out to be his parents' only child—his father was in senior management