

Angels Don't Wear Armani

Terry DeMarco

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FOR ROSE

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PROLOGUE

Abraham Noonan. What a great name for a used car salesman. Am I right? You can just imagine the commercial.

“Head on down to Noonan’s Used Cars where you’ll always save money, money, money! Just come on in and ask for Honest Abe Noonan. Yep, Honest Abe, that’s me! It’s a name you can trust. No doubt about it, I’ll give you the best deal on the planet, sure as my name is Honest Abe Noonan!”

The commercial ends with dollar signs flying in all directions and images of shiny new cars that you will never actually see on Honest Abe’s lot.

I suppose Abraham would be a good name for a used car salesman. My mother thought Abraham was also a good name to give me. I’m not sure if the reference was biblical or presidential. Maybe she

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thought of it when someone handed her change for a ten. Anyway, that's my name, Abraham Noonan. I'm not a used car salesman and I don't go by the nickname Abe. My "friends" at school gave me a much different name. I was kind of chubby in grade school, so I got the nickname Ham. That was short for Ham and Eggs Noonan. Kids can be so creative.

As I got older, I got leaner and stronger and the "and Eggs" got dropped from my name. I got used to being called Ham, so I stuck with it. Or rather it stuck with me. So, no, I'm not Honest Abe, the used car salesman; I'm Ham Noonan the investment manager. And what I do best is make money. I could sell a drowning man a glass of water. And then I would walk away counting his money as I let him drown. I really didn't care about the people I cheated. If they were stupid enough to trust me with their money, then I was going to take it. And I took quite a lot of it, millions in fact. And if they cried foul, I had lawyers that could tie them up until the rest of their money ran out. I was a successful business man. I was actually pretty proud of myself. That is until something happened I wasn't at all prepared for. I died.

It's amazing how dying can change a person's perspective. Well, not so much the dying part, that

can be pretty gruesome. Although, I don't really remember what it felt like to actually die, I do remember the events leading up to it. Some folks are lucky. They just fall asleep and poof, they're gone. It's very peaceful. My death, however, was more like a thrill ride gone wrong. In the chaos of the moments leading up to my death, I felt the terror of knowing I was about to die. I saw my life flash before my eyes. And as I watched the years fly by my last thought was "Holy crap, I'm going to Hell!" And then I was gone.

Now, I know what you're thinking. This guy is nuts. He's ready for the loony bin. But hear me out. I swear, everything I'm about to tell you is the absolute truth. I'm not crazy and I'm not a ghost. At least I don't think I'm a ghost. That part is still a little fuzzy. Anyway, be a little patient and I'll tell you my story. Then, if you still think I'm crazy you can turn me in to the nearest psycho ward. That is of course unless I just dematerialize before your eyes.

Nah, I'm just kidding about the dematerialize thing. At least I think I'm kidding. Like I said, I'm still a little fuzzy about that.

CHAPTER ONE

*"Dying is not the end of everything. We think it is.
But what happens on earth is only the beginning."
- Mitch Albom*

You might think the day a person dies is the end. For me, it was more like a beginning. The day started out like any other day. The alarm rang at 6:00 AM. At 6:01 I was in the shower. I don't like to waste time. I immediately started going through my morning routine. First, I showered and brushed and flossed my teeth. Then I flipped the switch on my shaving cream warmer. What can I say; I like warm lather on my face when I shave.

A mild scent of lavender wafted up from the device as I dipped my antique, gold plated shave cream brush into the steaming lather and slowly swished it around. I took the brush and slathered the cream all across my face. As always, no whisker would

escape my blade. I suppose I should have used a straight razor to complete the whole nostalgic effect, but hey, you can slit your throat with one of those things. So I took my Zafiro Iridium razor with its sapphire blade out of its velvet lined box. I waved it through the stream of water from my faucet and proceeded to remove the cream and the whiskers with a few deft strokes. I carefully trimmed my sideburns so they were both exactly aligned at 2 centimeters below the tops of my earlobes.

I splashed on some Old Spice after shave and winced a little at the familiar sting as the lotion hit my face. I took a minute to breathe in the fragrance and I smiled as an old pleasant memory popped in my head. Then I ran a comb through my thick black hair. I frowned when I saw that single gray hair just above my left earlobe.

“No, sir,” I said, “your kind is not welcome here.”

I plucked it out and tossed it unceremoniously into the trash. I looked in the mirror and turned my head from side to side. I even pulled out my lighted magnification mirror so I could examine the back of my head. I was not going to allow any gray hairs to invade my headspace. I wasn't ready for the “distinguished” look. Not yet anyway.

When I was satisfied that no more gray hairs were hiding among black ones, I cleaned up the sink and rinsed off my shaving tools. I wiped them dry

and carefully placed them back where they belonged. I looked in the mirror; gave myself a wink and a nod; and I was ready to start another day of making money. As I walked to the closet, I snatched my cell phone from my dresser. I stopped and turned to face the gold framed full length mirror that was the door to my closet. Staring back at me was a man in his thirties dressed only in his underwear. He was nicely tanned and reasonably fit for a guy that spent more time running numbers than running on a treadmill. I could see a tiny bit of paunch around the middle, but that's the price you pay for using your club membership to network with investors more than you use it to actually exercise.

I pressed and held the button on my smart phone.

“Hermione,” I said, “please open my closet door.”

I know, I know, everyone else has Siri or Alexa. But I am not everyone else. Besides I love Harry Potter.

“What's the password?” she asked in that perky, young British accent.

I love this part.

“I solemnly swear that I am up to no good,” I said with an grin.

At that, the mirror backed away from me and slid silently into the recess behind the wall. I walked into my closet, which is arguably several times bigger than

most people's bedrooms. I stroked my chin as I surveyed the wall of designer suits. I walked from one end of the line of suits to the other, gingerly running my hand across each one. I knew which suit I was going to wear; I just like the feel of all that expensive material.

I pressed the button on my cell phone and again I summoned my virtual assistant.

"Hermione," I said.

"Yes sir, how may I help you?" was the response.

"Show me the Armani collection."

"Yes, sir, as you wish."

I'm also a big Princess Bride fan.

I heard the slightest whir of an electric motor come to life as my suits paraded on their conveyor driven rod to the left, disappearing through an all but hidden opening in the wall. More suits appeared from a similar opening on the right. It was like my own little harem of suits dancing before me; each one hoping it would be the one I would pick to spend the day with.

The dance halted abruptly as the collection of Armani suits swayed gently on their hangers. I reached up and picked a saucy little dark gray single breasted number and turned my back on the others. I could almost feel their disappointment. I selected a light blue shirt, a striped tie, designer socks, and imported Italian shoes. I dressed quickly and stepped out of my closet.

I turned to face the doorway, summoned my assistant and said, “Hermione, please close my closet door.”

“Password, please,” she said.

Again, that grin appeared on my face when I said, “Mischief managed!”

The full length mirror slid out from behind the wall and quietly slipped back into place. Anyone walking through the bedroom could stare at that mirror and never know there was a fortune in designer clothing right behind it. Not that anyone besides the maid service would ever walk through my bedroom. No sir, I’d been down that whole relationship road before. It was painful. I was better off alone. So, that’s how I stayed... alone. Oh, I had clients and business partners and casual acquaintances to keep me company. Most of them didn’t like me anymore than I liked them. But it was human contact and I guess everyone needs that from time to time.

I took the stairs 2 at a time and headed toward the kitchen. Some say breakfast is the most important meal of the day. I say it’s a waste of time. All I need is a good strong cup of coffee and I’m ready for the day. As I neared the kitchen it occurred to me that I didn’t smell the coffee brewing. I knew I set it up the night before so that the coffee would be done at exactly 6:20AM. It was now 6:17. I was ahead of schedule, but I still should have smelled the coffee.

“Just great,” I said as I looked at the empty

coffee pot. It was plugged in; I knew that for a fact. I wouldn't make a stupid mistake like that. I checked to find that the cord was indeed plugged in, but the circuit breaker in the outlet had popped sometime during the night. If I started the coffee now I'd be way off schedule, so I decided there would be no coffee for me this morning.

On the bright side, I was running early so I shouldn't have any problem making it to the airport on time. I unplugged the coffee maker and reset the circuit breaker. It was time to go. I set the burglar alarm and locked up the house. I jogged to the garage as I pressed the button on my remote to raise the heavy wooden door. I took just a second to admire my sweet vintage 1960 Mercedes-Benz 300SL Roadster. They just don't make them like that anymore. I made a mental note to take her out for a ride as soon as I got back from Florida. I hopped in my BMW, fired her up and headed out down the driveway as the garage door slowly descended behind me.

It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining and the road ahead was clear. That was pretty unusual, come to think of it. I'm used to being stuck in traffic on the way to the airport. Leaving the house without coffee turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It got me out just early enough to beat the traffic. It was a good thing, too. Amanda, my administrative assistant, had managed to get me a ticket at the last minute. She

warned me that the airline might have overbooked and I'd have to go on standby. Going on standby would not have been the end of the world. My meeting was in Tampa the next morning, but there was this sweet little ocean side restaurant in the Florida Keys where I was looking forward to having dinner. They have the best clam chowder I've ever tasted. And the key lime pie... wow, my mouth was watering just thinking about it. When I was finished with the last crumb of my key lime pie, I would go to one of their umbrella covered tables on the beach. I'd take a big breath of the fresh salty air and listen to the gulls calling dibs on the fish they spotted just below the surface of the water. A beautiful woman in a sarong would bring me my whiskey sour. I didn't drink much, but I always had a whiskey sour before a big deal. It was kind of a personal tradition. I'd thank her with a hundred dollar tip and then I would sit there sipping my drink and listening to the ocean slap against the shore. It would be wonderful.

I woke up from my daydream just in time to notice the cars ahead of me in my lane were stopped, but the lane next to me was moving along just fine. I quickly swung my BMW out of my lane and zoomed ahead. Suddenly, from behind me came the unmistakable crunch of vehicles once again testing the theory that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. It never ends well. I was just glad I was in front of the accident for a change,

instead of stuck behind it. I tapped my steering wheel in time with the music from the stereo as I sped down the interstate. When I got to the airport, I headed for the short term parking lot. I know the long term parking lot costs less money, but you might have noticed I'm a bit extravagant. After all, I'll be back in town in a few days. What could it cost me? A hundred dollars? Two hundred dollars? That was nothing compared to what I could... excuse me, what I would make on this deal. You gotta have confidence if you want to make it in this world. Besides, there's always a lot of activity in the short term lot, so no one will mess with my car.

I found a parking spot so close to the door that I felt like I should have a handicap placard hanging from my rearview mirror. I jumped out of my car, pressed the remote and heard the familiar chirp, chirp telling me the alarm was set and the doors were locked.

I didn't have any luggage. Anything I would need a computer for, I could do from my phone. I have a long-standing agreement with the hotel where I stay. I tell them when I will be there and they make sure they have a change of clothes for me in my size, laundered, pressed and ready to wear. I get a new outfit and they get to charge an exorbitant price. It's a win-win situation. Anything I leave behind, they ship back to me.

I strolled into the terminal and glanced at the

monitor displaying departure times. I was so surprised, my jaw actually dropped open. My flight was leaving in 10 minutes! And I still had to make it to the gate! I made a mental note to dock Amanda's pay for giving me the wrong flight time. I know it could not have been me who made the mistake. I don't make mistakes.

I power walked through the terminal and flashed my frequent flyer credentials at the attendant directing traffic to the various security checkpoints. He pushed open the gate to let me through to the premier check-in line. I gave him a little two fingered salute and my winning smile as I headed to the fastest security check point in the airport.

Even so, I barely made it to the gate in time. The flight was over booked and the airline attendants were making deals like auctioneers at a flea market. When I pushed my way to the desk, there was one unclaimed seat. I snapped it up fast. I was so satisfied with myself, I actually laughed out loud. All the other passengers had boarded. I was about to join them when I heard someone shouting. I turned my head in time to see a man running wildly through the airport.

"Wait!" he yelled, waving his arms wildly. "Stop! Please!"

Where was airport security when you needed them? I once saw them detain a little old lady for trying to "smuggle" a fingernail clipper inside a big flowered purse. Here you have a guy running half

crazed through the airport with his shirt tail flapping and screaming at the top of his lungs and nobody says a thing. I gave a little humph, shook my head and turned toward the gate.

“Mr. Noonan! Wait!”

That caught my attention. I turned again and stared as he skidded to a stop in front of me. He stood there, bent over with his hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath. He was about my age with pale skin and scraggly brown hair. He was no athlete, but he was reasonably fit and a few inches shorter than me. He wore Khaki pants and a white button down shirt that came half untucked as he ran. He also had on a light blue jacket which was not long enough to hide the tail of his shirt. His shoes were well-worn brown leather; not really running shoes.

“Who are you? And how do you know my name?” I demanded.

“That’s not important,” he said between gasps.

Oh sure... That’s not important. Isn’t that what the evil conspirator says just before he hands you an envelope with one picture of a stranger and another picture of your family and tells you that you have to kill the person in picture one or the people in picture two will die a horrible death?

“The hell it’s not important,” I said. “It’s important to me. Now, who are you and how do you know my name? I’ve never seen you before.”

“Mr. Noonan, please,” he said, regaining his

composure as well as catching his breath. "Please understand I need to get on that plane."

Oh, so that was it. He wanted my seat. You know, you meet all kinds at the airport.

"Well, all you need to do to get on the plane is to have a ticket. Oh wait, I got the last one," I said waving my boarding pass in front of him. "Sorry, pal, you snooze you lose."

"It's a matter of life and death."

"It's always a matter of life and death," I snapped. "What's the matter, you gotta get home to Mama? Well, Mama can wait. Go on stand-by like everybody else."

"I can't take another plane. I have to be on this one."

"Oh, I get it. You got a little something going on with one of the stewardesses?"

"No, it's nothing like that. I'm supposed to be on this plane. You are supposed to be on the next one."

"Well, if you were supposed to be on this plane, then you should have gotten here sooner."

"I would have, but..." he trailed off.

"But what?" I asked.

"I got stuck in traffic," he said in a kind of annoyed whisper.

"And that's my fault?" I asked, eyebrows raised and my hand to my chest.

He said nothing, but he gave me such a look. It

was like he'd seen me stealing children to work in the salt mines. Not that I would ever, you know, steal children, but that's what it felt like. It gave me a chill and I felt a little shiver.

"Look," I said undaunted, "I have an important meeting to get to. I'm sorry you got caught in a traffic jam, but I have to get on this plane." I turned away from him again.

"Your meeting isn't until tomorrow."

I turned back and stared at him.

"What did you say?"

"Your meeting with Mr. Tacamorra isn't until tomorrow. You can catch the next plane and still have time to eat dinner and have your whiskey sour at that restaurant in the Keys you love so much."

This was really starting to get creepy.

"How...?" Then it hit me. "Amanda put you up to this didn't she?"

"No, she..."

"Of course she did. How else would you know my name and my agenda?"

"Mr. Noonan..."

Amanda played practical jokes before and they were always hilarious. But that was because they were on somebody else. I thought she had more sense than to play a joke on me.

"You tell Amanda that I'm not going to dock her salary. I'm going to fire her just as soon as I get back. Let her stew on that for a couple of days."

“Mr. Noonan, you’re making a big mistake.”

“No, you’re making a mistake if you think you can trick me out of my ticket. I’m getting on that plane.”

“Somebody needs to get on the plane,” said the attendant impatiently. “We need to take off.”

“See? We need to take off,” I said getting in the stranger’s face. “Goodbye, Mr. Whatever-Your-Name-Is. Give my regards to Amanda.”

Without another word, I handed the attendant my boarding pass. He scanned it and handed it back to me. Then I walked through the narrow passageway and on to the plane. I felt the stranger’s eyes on me the whole way. But I didn’t care. After all, I won that deal just like I won all the others in my career. I did wonder how he knew about the whiskey sour. I didn’t think I ever told anyone about that.

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To Be Continued...