

“Hate Speech”

By Dave McClain

A man with a grudge on his mind and hate in his heart is a dangerous man indeed... whether he has a plan or not.

Men and women walked slowly in a circle as if they were engaged in some sort of social experiment. “Support Local 676” said some of the signs they were carrying. The signs were professionally printed in a bright green and white. The other signs said things like “On Strike” or simply “Unfair”. A few of the signs were obviously hand-made and displayed slightly less positive messages. “Cheaters Never Win”. “Lying Liars Always Lie”. “Bullsh*t!!!”

A few men gathered around a folding table that was set up near the picket line. Alexander, a slim and quiet man, in his mid-20s, stood silently listening to the others talk as they all stood next to their signs, which were leaning against the table, as the wooden stakes on which they were mounted rested on the ground. The men were munching on fresh doughnuts and drinking coffee that was strong but necessary. Joe, an athletic-looking man wearing a backpack, zipped his backpack closed over the handle of what looked like a knife as he approached the table.

“Rumor is he’s coming out to talk to us this morning”, said a stout man known as Frankie.

“Yeah, I heard that too,” replied Joe.

“Why would he even bother? Who gives a shit what he has to say?” continued Frankie.

“I’d be perfectly fine never hearing that motherfucker utter another word out of his lying fat mouth,” said Joe, coldly.

Frankie kept talking. “Two months on this picket line and our union reps say he hasn’t given an inch. All he’s done is cry poverty!”

Joe became more animated. “Poverty?!? Yeah, right! That asshole says he has to renegotiate our contracts, while he lives in the nicest house in this whole fucking city.”

Frankie shifts his weight and looks toward Alexander. “What do you think, kid? You barely started working here before this strike started.

Alexander look surprised at the question. “What do I think?”

“Yeah, what do you think?” repeated Frankie. “What do you think about the way they’re doin’ us?”

“Well, it’s not good, but at least I have a job,” offered Alexander.

“Yeah, you have a job... if you wanna call it that,” responded Frankie. “But what happens when the strike fund runs out and you have to go back to that job with no more health insurance and a cut in pay?”

“Can they really do that?” asked Alexander, as his eye began to twitch. “ALL that?”

“Can and will!” said Frankie.

“But my wife just found out she’s pregnant. This is the first job I found that pays more than minimum wage! And I had been unemployed for most of the last a year before this place!”

“Welcome to the real world, kid,” said Frankie.

“Well, somebody should do something,” said Alexander.

“Somebody should. Somebody will,” said Joe.

“Yeah, when?” responded Frankie.

“Today,” snarled Joe.

“Here he comes,” remarked Alexander.

A tall man in a tailored suit had exited a gleaming office building across the street from the picket line, crossed at the light and walked towards the sea of signs. The men and women lowered their signs and silently migrated toward the sidewalk in front of the vacant lot where they had been making their circles. The men at the folding table got to the sidewalk first.

Alexander ended up near the front of the crowd of disgruntled workers, standing between Joe and Frankie. As the tall man got closer, Alexander heard a zipper and looked over to see Joe take a butcher knife out of his backpack and lower it to his side. Alexander got a shocked look on his face, but that look quickly faded into a vindictive smile. He turned his head back towards the tall man who had taken up a position right in front of him.

“Ladies and gentleman,” the tall man started. “This strike has not been easy for any of us.”

The crowd grumbled their disapproval at the man’s opening statement. Joe tightened his grip on the handle of his knife.

“But there is now an agreement which I have put to your union leadership. An agreement they have accepted in principle.”

The crowd quieted down, many listening intently.

“Your health insurance will remain in place and your pay will only be frozen for the next year, instead of the proposed cuts.”

Some of the strikers looked at each other and nodded. Joe raised his knife slightly.

“Unfortunately, to pay for these concessions of mine, we will have to cut our work force.”

The mumbling resumed.

“All new hires who have been with the company for less than six months will be laid off, effective immediately.”

Joe slowly began to slide his knife back into his backpack. Alexander looked at Joe and, with a shout of “NO!” grabbed the knife from Joe and lunged at the tall man in front of him. With a quick and forceful thrust, Alexander plunged the knife straight into the center of the man’s chest. The man fell backwards to the ground and Alexander landed on top of him.

“Take that you rich motherfucker!” snarled Alexander as he watched the man’s eyes roll back.

“What the fuck, kid?” shouted Frankie.

Alexander looked up slowly from the tall man’s body and turned his head toward Frankie and Joe.

“Somebody had to do something, right Joe? Right?”

The crowd looked on in stunned silence, except for Joe, who slowly turned and walked away.
