

—TRAPPED LIGHT MEDIUM

by Sunil Sadanand

In twenty minutes, a middle-aged man wearing a blue suit and a black overcoat is going to walk into this office and kill everyone. His name is John Newcomb and he's mad because accounting screwed him on his last check. They were fifteen dollars short. He has a sawed off, twelve-gauge Mossberg tucked beneath his coat. He's on his way right now. He's taking the bus. I got in by making an appointment with the manager at G&J Mercantile. In a couple of seconds, I'm going to go into the bathroom and wait out the storm.

When he's finished killing all the people in the office, he's going to put the barrel of the shotgun into his own mouth and blow his brains all over the receptionist's desk. But she won't notice because she's one of the first people this gentleman is going to kill.

"Excuse me."

"Yes?"

"Is it going to be very long before I can meet with Mr. Howard?"

"Well, he's kind of busy right now, but he said that he'll definitely meet with you."

"Any idea how long?"

"I really can't say, sir... maybe twenty minutes?"

In twenty minutes you'll be a stain on the carpet, sweetheart but--

"All right, well, is there a restroom I could use here?"

"Straight down the hall, first door on your left."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome."

I go into the lavatory, lock the door, sit on the toilet and wait. I check the film in my camera. Fuji Velvia for sharp saturated slides.

I put my ear to the door and listen. The hectic office sounds go on for a while, and then fifteen minutes later chaos erupts.

"Mr. Newcomb," says the voice of the receptionist. "Can I help you with something... I didn't know you were... Oh... Oh, my god!"

Boom

The explosion is like a thunderclap. People scream. I hear the sounds of glass shattering and desks overturned. A man screams for help. There's the sound of plaster breaking apart as the scattered shells rip through the walls.

Boom, boom, boom

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Newcomb shoves cartridges into his weapon and blasts away like some possessed robot. The madness goes on for about ten minutes. I hear a woman sobbing before she is cut off by an explosion. I hear the sounds of boots crunching down on broken glass. Some people are moaning and making pathetic gurgling noises.

Silence

There is one more thunderous blast and then a thump--the sound of Newcomb's broken body crumpling to the floor.

I wait even though I shouldn't. I have about two minutes before the cops arrive. My hands are shaking and my palms are clammy.

The camera almost slips from my grip.

I open the door.

Carnage

Blood everywhere--staining the walls, all over the desks, all over the carpets. Papers, phones, staplers, and desks are broken and in pieces, strewn about the floor. Bodies are everywhere. Some of them still twitch. There's a guy draped over a busted copier, which keeps bleeping and spewing out paper.

Another guy is slumped across the desk with the phone still clutched in his hand. Newcomb blew off the top part of his head.

Click, click

The phosphorescent flash of the camera briefly illuminates the office. The receptionist doesn't have a face anymore. Only a few bloody strands of sinew attach her head to her neck.

Click

Now Newcomb. Another nasty head shot, mouth opened into a perpetual scream. Little pieces of teeth and skull sit in a sticky pool of crimson amidst empty shotgun shells and a pile of paper clips. That's going to be a good one.

"Shit."

Sirens

A few more pictures, and then I'm gone, out the back door.

* * *

We're in a coffee shop in DC. Trendy, white, teenage hipsters sip unpronounceable variations of the mocha blend. Hair and clothes fashionably unkempt, they lounge on the sofas talking about politics and MTV, often using both words in the same sentence.

Meredith carelessly runs a hand through her dark hair and chews on the end of her glasses.

"I'll give you three hundred for the whole lot of them," she says.

"Why so much?"

"Clerks going postal isn't that uncommon nowadays, and some of these pictures are simply too graphic for our publication."

"That's what you always say," I reply, "and then in the next issue, I find every one of those pictures in there."

"Three hundred," she says. "Take it, or leave it."

"Don't have much of a choice, do I?"