

## Mr Perfect

Let me tell you about a guy I grew up alongside. His name is Gary and he is the bane of my existence. We were born on the same day, lived on the same street. We went to the same schools, were always placed in the same classes. You'd think we'd be pretty similar given all these facts, right?

Wrong.

For as long as I can remember - as far back as fucking kindergarten - there was a divide between us. A fundamental difference that I can't describe. An impenetrable barrier that separated us - our capabilities and potential.

Gary was always the best at everything. Top of every class, highest grades, popular, athletic. You name it, he had it.

Me? I'm just normal. Maybe a little above average in some things. But, when you're constantly being compared to someone who is perfect at everything they do, no-one cares about the kid that's just 'above average'.

When we got to middle-school, everyone flocked around Gary, guys and girls alike. They all loved him, wanted to be his friend.

In high-school, he was head-jock and prom king, top of the social ladder. Loved by students and teachers alike. The person everyone knew would go places.

You'd think, what with him being a jock, that he'd be some kind of asshole. A bully. But no. He was that one 'virtuous' prick that stood up for the kids being bullied, who would put himself between a gang of bullies and their victim.

You have no idea how much that pissed me off. How much it still does.

I wanted so badly for someone to knock Gary off his high horse, beat him bloody. But it never happened. No-one ever got into a real fight with him.

The girl I had a crush on throughout high-school, my unrequited love, was the girl who Gary chose to date. Of all the stupid bitches throwing themselves at him, he had to pick the one girl who I wanted to be with.

At times, it felt like the only thing that kept me going was the stupid saying everybody hears about jocks. That the best part of their life is high-school and it's all downhill for them after. I hoped and prayed that was the case. I wished it were true.

Fast forward ten years, and Gary is a multi-millionaire. And that girl I had liked, the one he'd chosen to date? His wife.

And me? I worked for the fucker. A low-income job at one of Gary's firms. The prick passed by me one day, smiled at me with those perfect white teeth. He didn't even recognise me, I could tell that much from his eyes.

Some people are just blessed.

I hate him for that. For how easy he has it. For how perfect his life is. Why him? What made him so special? Why did everything go his way and not mine?

It's bullshit. Fucking bullshit.

And so, when a one-in-a-million opportunity presented itself to change things, I couldn't resist.

At first, I thought it was spam. A weird email from a very weird address, offering to sell a machine right out of a science fiction TV show. Who'd believe that, right?

I certainly hadn't.

But, even though I knew it was likely crap, I couldn't bring myself to delete the email. The tiny wisp of hope it offered was too much and, after leaving it a week in my inbox, I clicked on the link inside - gave my credit card details.

Worst case scenario, I call up the credit card company and block a payment, request a replacement card.

Imagine my surprise, then, when a few weeks later, I get a delivery.

A big delivery.

We're talking several large wooden crates.

Building the machine required me emptying out the entirety of my garage. A weekend spent coated in oil and grease, wrench in hand and detailed instructions to follow. By the time it was done, I had no idea if the thing would even work.

I mean, even if it was legit - which it almost certainly wasn't - I could have fucked up the building process a hundred different ways and never realised. Worse, there was no way to test the contraption. Either it worked or it didn't, and the only way to find out was to actually use it.

"I'm here to see Gary," I told the girl.

Her eyes widened, glanced at the screen. She moved the mouse, clicked, searched through the boss' schedule. From the looks of her, she was barely out of high-school. All tits and ass. A sexy secretary. If Gary wasn't fucking her in secret, I'd be surprised.

"There aren't any appointments I can see here, mister...?"

"I don't have an appointment," I told the girl, eyes flicking to take in her cleavage for an instant. "Gary's an old friend. We grew up together. I'd like to talk to him about a business proposal I have."

"Sir," the girl began, trying to sound stern. "Unless you have an appointment-"

"Buzz Gary, tell him a school friend is here. I'm not going anywhere until I see him."

It took a few minutes of raised voices, a big scene, but eventually the man came out of his office and graced us mere mortals with his presence.

When I told him my name, he looked confused. When I told him I grew up on the same street as him, that we'd gone to the same schools, all of it, his eyes widened in recognition.

"Ah!" Gary grinned. "Yes, I remember now."

He waved away the security officers his whore secretary had called, gestured into his office.

Once we were both seated inside, he tilted his head towards me.

"So," he said with that infuriatingly perfect smile. "What did you want to talk with me about?"

"A business proposition," I told him, feeling suddenly nervous. "I'm an inventor and I've built something that's going to change the world. I'd like to show you and, if you like it, I'd like you to bring this invention to market."

Gary leaned back in his chair, eyes locked on me.

"What, if I might ask, is your invention?"

"It's just in here," I told Gary, leading him through my house. Better to go this way than open up the garage from the outside. Last thing I needed was someone spying in on what happened next.

I opened the door, led Mr Perfect into the garage.

When he saw it, his mouth dropped open.

Metal cylinders and rubber wires, terminals covered in leavers and buttons and dials. There were two metal helmets attached to cables, a huge screen between them. Numbers and letters, a random mess of unintelligible symbols constantly shifting and changing on screens dotted randomly across the contraption.

Buzzing and whirring, the electrical sounds of static filled the garage. The machine sounded anything but safe.

Before Gary could do anything more than stare dumbfounded at it, I attacked.

Gary, being who he was, would have easily been able to trample me in an ordinary fight. Even taking him by surprise, I was sure he could kick my ass. As I lunged, his body reacted without hesitation, arms raised to block my attack.

What he wasn't prepared for was the tazer.

Home-made, far more powerful than anything you'd find in stores or online. Enough to half-kill most people.

The garage filled with bright light and, for a moment, I was certain I could see Gary's skeleton flashing white in the blinding light. When his body dropped to the floor, I turned the tazer off, crouched down to check his pulse.

Alive, good.

Unconscious. Even better.

There was no telling how much time I had before the man regained consciousness. Seconds? Minutes? Hours?

If he woke up before I activated the machine, my life was as good as over. Attacking a man as rich and powerful as him with what could be argued was an illegal weapon? I'd never get out of prison for that.

So I rushed, dragged Gary's body over to the machine, placed one of the helmets firmly on his head.

There was so much about this magnificent machine that I didn't understand. So many things it could do, so many functions it possessed that seemed entirely impossible. If I dedicated a lifetime to it, I might learn half of the things it could be used for. But, for all the thing it could supposedly do that I didn't know about, there was one function I did know how to operate.

With the crates of parts, the complex guide to its construction, there had also been a handful of notes explaining this one function. Just enough for me to be able to use it.

I pressed buttons, turned dials, slipped the second metal helmet onto my own head.

With a shaking hand, I reached out, pulled a big red lever.

Instantly, the world went black.

I woke coughing, choking. Air rushed into my lungs, heavy and painful.

Everything was different. I could feel it. Even before I opened my eyes, I knew. My body was strong, my mind clear. It had worked, I was certain. The machine worked.

When my eyes flicked open, I felt an odd sense of vertigo.

I wasn't in the same place I had been. Rather than standing, I was laying on the floor. My head ached, my body ached. Yet I still felt better than I had in years. Healthy and powerful.

I glanced around the garage, saw my own body crumpled on the floor a few paces away from me.

Unconscious, comatose. An empty shell.

Vaguely, I could hear a voice in the back of my mind. It spoke in Gary's voice, confused and terrified.

He was still there, trapped in a small corner of his own brain. Forced to watch as I took over, took control of his life.

That single thought made me crack up.

I laughed, joyful.

I'd won. Finally, after all these years of following in Mr Perfect's shadow, I'd won.

It was a surreal moment.

I had no idea how long I'd been laying there, on the garage floor. From the painful tingling, the echo of the tazer's zap, probably not too long.

Gary complained in the back of my mind, an echo of an echo. I ignored him, stood.

With a smile on my face, I searched the pockets of Gary's suit, pulled out his phone. When I tried to open it, the stupid thing demanded a pin number. How the fuck was I supposed to know what Gary's pin was?

And yet, even as the question crossed my mind, so too did the answer.

Five, four, zero, three.

I tapped the numbers, smiled as the phone opened up to me.

I searched through the contacts until I found her. The girl I gave up on so long ago. With a mad grin, I tapped 'call'.

The ring tone seemed to last forever. Every little beep in my ear was like the slow ticking of a clock. Finally, she answered.

"Hello?" A beautiful voice said through the phone's speakers.

"Go put on your sluttiest outfit," I told her. "I'll be with you soon."

What was left of Gary struggled in my mind. A pathetic attempt at resistance. I continued to ignore it - something surprisingly easy to do. I glanced over at my body one last time, turned to the door and began walking.

I pulled up outside Gary's huge suburban home. Directions to the house had come to me as I drove, like vague memories I couldn't fully recall.

Gary, the echo of the man, had gone silent in my mind.

His body was mine, now. His life belonged to me.

From now on out, I'd be the one winning at everything. I'd be the one blessed by the universe with success and fortune.

I walked to the front door with a strut, strode confidently through Gary's home - knowing instinctively where the master bedroom was. Behind the door was the girl who got away, the most beautiful, amazing girl I'd ever known. My new wife. I pushed the door open, tugged off the tie I was wearing, tossed it and my business suit jacket aside, stepped inside the bedroom.