

I am now sitting in my SUV in the driveway contemplating whether or not I should head over to her mother's house at this time of night. Turning on the ignition, my mind is made up, and I drive off towards my destination. Thoughts of what to say if she answers the door cross my mind. The rational side of me wants to engage her in a civilized conversation and work something out that is best for the children. The other part of me, the part that worries me, wants to hit her over the head with a shovel!

Mama Pearl's block is especially dark tonight. There are no lights on in anybody's house, making it that much darker when I turn my headlights off and slowly creep up her block. Just when I think I am the only one stupid enough to be out, another car rolls up and parks right smack in front of Mama Pearl's house. Just my luck!

"I knew it!" I say under my breath. "That bitch is cheatin' on me after all!"

Janelle gets out first, followed by none other than the guy that gave me this diminishing welt on my forehead – JOE BANGER! He is profilin' in a spankin' new 2004 Escalade, something Downtown Records probably gave him as part of his signing bonus. My first reaction is to get out and start swinging, but instead do the sensible thing: I wait it out.

Entering her mother's house, Janelle and her accomplice momentarily leave my sight. I contemplate flattening his tires, but quickly realize I would be taking the punk way out. After all, only jealous women run around messing with another man's car or keying it up. My motive for sitting in my car waiting to see what happens next is still unclear. Before I have a chance to formulate a plan, Joe Banger exits the house and gets into his ride. Janelle is standing at the front door waiting for him to pull off.

"It's time for some action!"

I stay at least a half block behind Joe Banger to avoid any unnecessary attention to myself. Every now and then, I put on my turn signal to make like I don't know where I am going. Turning onto a block with a dead end sign, I quickly realize my time to strike back is now. The roads are deserted, and with the exception of a couple lighted gas stations on either side of me, my immediate surroundings are completely barren. Before making my move, I take a deep breath. I haven't had an all out brawl since middle school, and I know my skills are probably rusty. Although Joe Banger is about my size, my best chance at retaliation is to catch him off guard, especially if he is packing a weapon. Hunched over and apparently looking for something in the back seat of his ride, my luck couldn't get any better.

"Remember me?!"

I daze him momentarily as he turns around. With a swift barrage of left hooks and uppercuts, I got him bent over like a bitch about to get back shots in the ass.

"You thought you and your faggot ass boys could walk up into my spot and punk me, huh?"

"Yo, man, your wife put me up to it! She paid me a thousand bucks to walk up into y'all house that night!"

Joe Banger's plea for redemption is futile. No wonder Janelle was in such a hurry to run over to the bank and withdraw my money. If what Joe Banger said is even partially true, she is going to have to reap the consequences after I am done with him.

Joe's mouth is busted wide open, and I think I cracked a few ribs because he looks like he is having problems breathing. My adrenalin rush is at an all-time high, whereas Joe Banger is moments from passing out on the side of the road.

"I ain't got no beef wit' you, but the money called my name! You can take the money back, man! Let me go, and you and I can call it even!"

Joe's pleas for forgiveness fuel my indifference. After all, not only did he disrespect me in my own crib, but he is probably bangin' my wife, too! My standing in the community is important to me, and I can't be placed behind bars again. I can still feel those handcuffs tightening around my wrist.

"Where's the money, Joe? And my gun?"

"They're both in the back seat of my truck...in a blue duffel bag."

"Tell me the truth, man...you bangin' my wife?"

"Nah man, nothing like that! She came to me with some money and I took the bait! Nothing more...nothing less!"

Pausing briefly to get my emotions under control, I grab Joe's bag from out of his truck.

"Go 'head and take it!" Joe Banger declares. "I ain't even gonna say nothin', man! You and I are considered even!"

"Nah man...you and I can never be even, muthafucka!" I say with an unexpected rage in my voice that surprises even me.

What happens next is incomprehensible and totally out of my character. Checking the contents of the duffel bag, I grab the one thousand cash and my .380 pistol. My gun is cold to the touch, just like my feelings for Joe Banger and Janelle. It hasn't occurred to me that I should find out his connection with my wife, but right now, I am reacting by pure emotion and logic has undoubtedly taken a back seat. An old song from rapper Nas called "I Gave You Power," in which he raps from the perspective of his gun's point of view, enters my mind. Probably sensing my hesitation, Joe Banger does his best at reverse psychology.

"You ain't gonna shoot me, man! You ain't even built for that!" Joe Banger heckles.

Either this fool is brave or not the brightest guy in the world. I guess he has never had a gun waved in his direction before, because he doesn't even flinch when he makes his ill-timed remark. Either way, he is playing games with the wrong man. Something no one should ever do when you have involved yourself with a man and his family.

"What did you say to me, you faggot ass bitch?"

"I said you won this battle. Now go on back home before you do something you'll regret later! Trust me, you don't want none of me! I can have you killed without even blinking an eye!"

My response is immediate. I aim my gun right at Joe Banger's face until I can see the white of his eyes. He is still not showing any fear.

"Let's be honest, Preston. When was the last time you banged your wife? I was tryin' to do you a favor by telling you that I wasn't hittin' your wife on the regular. To tell you the truth, every time I ran up in her, I had her cummin' in like sixty seconds!"

Joe Banger knows the rules of the game, and one thing a man never does to another man is talk about his sexual indiscretions with his woman. This time, Joe Banger's mouth wasn't going to get him out of this predicament.

Closing my eyes and tightening my grip on the trigger handle of my .380 pistol, a shot is fired, followed by another. The sound of my gun causes me to lose my hearing for several seconds. I haven't used my gun in years. I used to go to the shooting range and practice with it, but the smell of gunpowder is unmistakable. My heart races and my hands shake suddenly as I realize what I have just done.

As I quickly enter my ride, lights begin to come on in people's houses. In other nearby homes, blinds are rolled up and a few people's curtains are pulled back.

"Ain't nobody seen anything," I say quietly to myself, hoping to convince myself that my identity will remain a mystery.

The drive home, although less than a few minutes, feels like over an hour. Pulling up to my driveway, I run into my house for a change of clothing and to get rid of the gun. After wisely reconsidering keeping the gun at my own house, I jump back into my ride and head over to Skip's house – after all...the perfect alibi!