

## Turned Upside Down

We are walking really fast, but my stupid shoelace is untied again. Mom and dad stop walking, and mom looks upset as she sees the pink lace sprawled out on the asphalt. Usually, she gives me a smile when she helps me with my shoes. However, today is different. She looks worried about something. I see dad taking a look at his watch. That's what he does when he's in a hurry to do something.

"I'm sorry, mom."

"It's alright, sweetheart. We're not mad at you. Mom and dad have some important business today. The bank is just our first stop."

Mom and dad both look really grown up today. Mom's golden hair is tied neatly in a ponytail, and looks even better with her purple dress that seems nicer than what she usually wears. Dad is wearing a brown suit with a tie, but he always dresses like this. His glasses look clean and shiny today, and his hair on his face is short and matches that on top of his head. While mom is performing her magic trick to get my stupid laces to stay tied, dad walks over to me.

"Don't worry, Samantha. Tell you what. After we make our stops, we'll stop and get some ice cream for you. How's that sound?"

Mom and dad know how much I love ice cream, so I feel much happier now. Mom is finished with my lace now, and it looks neat and tidy in a big pink bow. I set Rupert down on the ground when she came over. As I pick him up now, his brown fur is warm from sitting on the parking lot. Rupert is my special friend—my bear. I bring him with me whenever mom and dad take me somewhere. We are walking again towards this huge building. The entire front of this bank is made of glass. The

sun is shining against it, making it almost difficult to look at. These aren't the kinds of stops I would usually make with mom and dad. They were unable to get a babysitter for me on such short notice.

Mom and dad have been fighting quite a lot recently. It scares me when I see them yell at each other like that. This morning, Rupert and I were hiding under their bed during one of these fights. They occasionally looked right at me without knowing I was in my spot. I picked up some of what they were saying. Mom was yelling at dad for having so much trouble with his store. I couldn't tell exactly what she meant, but she said the words "I told you this might happen." I also understood a few words about "losing our home."

Anyway, I have Rupert with me, and there will be ice cream later. His paw that I'm holding is getting wet from my sweaty hand. The dress mom chose for me seems too heavy. It's white with yellow flowers on it. I've only worn this one once before today. As we get to the front door, dad opens the door for us while checking his watch. The inside of the bank is similar to the outside—so clean and shiny. Looking down, my own face stares back at me. The floor is covered with black and white tile. This bank is really big inside, and I can see two levels. To the left is a large gray staircase leading straight up to the next floor. There's a big black railing that looks like it would be a lot of fun to slide down, if no one was watching. To the right, there's a big space that has many wooden desks with men and women sitting at them. They're all dressed up like mom and dad. At the back of the room is a counter that stretches all along the wall. I see a few women sitting behind it.

Mom and dad walk back to the counter and speak to a pretty lady behind it. She doesn't look very old, and she has the prettiest brown hair I've ever seen. It's dark brown like dad's suit. Her skin is pretty and a bit darker than mom's. She stands up and I notice her bright blue dress that reminds me of the sky. The pretty lady smiles at me and greets me.

"Hello, there. How are you?"

I say hello back to her. For some reason, she looks at mom and dad, then back to me. She's still smiling as she grabs a round white container from the counter. As it comes down towards me, I can get a whiff of fruit. Inside, there are suckers wrapped in paper of all colors. The smell is amazing and before I know it, my hand is reaching inside. My fingers find the sucker in the red paper. Tearing it off, I put it in my mouth and feel the sensation of that flavor that I love—cherry. It's very nice of this lady to let me have one of these, and I make sure to thank her for it. My eyes are drawn once more to this tile that shows my face. The air in here is so nice and cool, but something feels dangerous about all the black tile in here. I know what it is. The black tile is lava. My left shoe is partially in its grasp, so I quickly hop over to the closest white tile for safety. Mom has my hand in hers and is pulling me away from the counter, but I'm not going to let myself touch lava again.

Mom asks me what I'm doing, and I tell her my secret. She smiles at me. Mom and dad meet a large man in a black suit over at one of the desks. He has a big belly and a round reddish face that shakes a little bit when he laughs and greets them. His belly also jiggles when he laughs. His big belly reminds me of the green trampoline our neighbors have, and I wonder how high I could jump off him. This sucker tastes

so good, and makes me think about the ice cream that I'll get later. My favorite is vanilla with chocolate fudge and sprinkles on top—lots of sprinkles of all colors. I ask the large man why his belly is so big. He laughs and makes it jiggle even more. I don't quite understand why he laughs at this question. He exchanges some paper with mom and dad, and mom frowns at me.

“Sam, it's not nice to talk about the man's stomach like that.”

I think she might be right about that, and I feel bad that I said it. I apologize to the large man, and he doesn't say anything. He just laughs even harder. He seems like a very friendly man, even if he doesn't say much to me. When they are done, they shake hands. He extends a big hand to me so I shake it. It's a warm and clammy hand that reminds me of the air outside. I bet he's been walking in the lava to get that warm. Mom and dad take me away from the desks and we now walk towards the front door. I see dad check his watch again. We're just about to the front door and I'm almost clear of the last lava. Suddenly, mom and dad stop moving. Dad pushes me behind him quickly. I look up at mom and dad and see that they both look really scared. They were happy a minute ago.

Four men are running in through the front door. These men look like they are covered in the lava. They are dressed all in black. They wear black suits like some of the grown ups in the bank. However, their faces look very different—I can't see them. They all have black masks covering everything except their mouths and eyes. As soon as they are through the door, one of them turns and locks it. The other three keep running. Long brown and black guns are pointed out in front of their faces. I turn to look at other people in the bank, and see that everybody is as scared as mom

and dad. The large man and other people are standing behind the desks. Each person has their hands up in the air and is speaking really fast. Everybody is looking at these masked men.

Some customers are standing in the middle of the floor. Most of them have their hands up as well, and a lot of arms are shaking. The one masked man is finished locking the front door, and joins the other three that are moving about and pointing their guns at each person. The only thing that looks different about these four men is that each has a different colored tie. Each man was yelling as he pointed his gun at people. The man with the red tie walks up to a man standing behind the counter. His gun is only a couple inches from his face. The man behind the counter slowly reaches and removes a necklace he is wearing. I can tell that it has some large keys on it. He must be an important man. He places them on the counter, and red man picks them up and looks at them closely. He grabs the important man with both hands and pulls him forcefully over the counter.

I look at the other three men and notice the color of their ties—black, green, and pink. The pretty lady that gave me the sucker is screaming and backing up away from red man. He stops pointing at the important man and points it at her now. She stops moving immediately, and comes out from behind the counter to the center of the room. Green, pink, and black man are slowly rounding up customers and workers. Green man comes up to us and shoves mom and points towards one of the walls. Dad moves to stand between mom and green man, but he doesn't seem to like this at all. He takes the end of his gun resting against his shoulder, and hits dad hard

in the stomach. Dad's glasses fall off and fall in the lava beside him as he is hunched over in pain. Green man steps on his glasses and completely smashes them.

Red man is pushing the pretty lady in the back with his gun, pointing her past the desks to the right wall. Green man has moved away from us and is slowly walking towards customers and bank employees closest to the front door. He begins to herd them towards the walls. Pink man is covering the left portion of the floor and is grouping people towards the left wall. His behavior stands out compared to red and green man, as he isn't yelling or pointing his gun in their faces. He doesn't seem to be nearly as angry as they are, and the customers by him don't seem as scared as a result of this. The man with the black tie isn't involved in rounding up customers and workers. He has a huge black bag strung over his left shoulder. His black gun is slung over his right shoulder. He's smoking a cigarette, and the only thing I've seen him do is lock the door when the men came in. He hasn't appeared to say a word to anyone, and is off by himself.

Green man comes back to us a few seconds later and moves us towards the right wall. We are all told to sit against it. Dad is still in a lot of pain, and mom is helping support him as we get pushed towards the white wall. Green and red man are rounding up people on the ground floor, and black and pink man are running up the staircase to the second floor. Black man still has that black bag behind his back. We sit down and lean against the wall next to the pretty lady that gave me the sucker. The tile is cold to sit on—the white tile. A few workers come running down the stairs followed by pink man. There's something scary about these four men, dressed entirely in black except for the ties. All I can see are their mouths and eyes. I

can't really tell what any of them look like, though. I'm sitting between mom and dad, watching dad's chest as he breathes. His breathing is hard now. He takes deep breaths and winces when he breathes in.

I've still got Rupert with me, and I hold him tight and close my eyes. I find the spot on his neck that isn't as smooth. Bastion, our golden retriever, has a habit of grabbing him by the neck when we play together. I keep my eyes closed and picture myself at home playing with him. Mom and dad are telling me that I need to eat before my food gets cold. Bastion and I run through the blue carpet of our living room. The carpet is warm compared to this tile that I have grown to hate at this place. I don't just hate the lava anymore. When I open my eyes again, pink man is kneeling down right in front of me. Mom and dad sit completely still now, and pink man is holding one finger up to his mouth. He is telling me to be quiet. Now, I finally noticed the warm feeling on my face from the tears. I must be making a lot of noise. Pink man's other hand comes around from behind his back. He opens it in front of me and I see four suckers in his palm.

I look to mom after taking a quick peak at the wrappers in his palm.

"Go ahead and take one."

There's a red wrapper mixed with a blue one and two green ones. While I try to make my decision, he points at Rupert as if he is curious about him. I tell him his name, nothing more. I take what I remember is a cherry sucker and thank him, and pink man smiles at me as he stands and walks toward green and red man in the center of the room. Mom has her arm around me now and pulls me closer.

“It’s going to be alright, Samantha. Just try to keep quiet, okay? Mommy and daddy are right here with you. And you’ve got Rupert.”

In the center of the room, red man is yelling at pink man. He takes the remaining suckers from his hand and throws them onto the ground. Red man is scary, and he is always yelling at someone. To my left, I see green man down at the end of this wall. A small cardboard box is held against his side, and he is holding a much smaller gun in his right hand. It is a gray colored pistol and he points it at each person as he moves down the line. Watches, purses, cell phones, money, rings, bracelets, and necklaces are being put into the box. Every now and then, a man or woman takes too long and green man points his gun closer to their face. I see black man for the first time in a while now. He is upstairs and looks down from the railing. This man is unusual, and doesn’t really seem to be a part of this group. He’s always off by himself, and hasn’t been doing anything with customers or employees. It’s like he has his own business that he is seeing to, while the other three are watching us.

Green man is getting closer to us now. Pink man walks over to him and puts a hand on his shoulder. He says something to him, because after he leaves, green man continues down the line. However, only phones go into his box. Green man gets to us and says a few words while looking right at us.

“Phones in here. Right now.”

Mom and dad put their phones in his box and he leaves us alone. I don’t like green man either. Him and red man scare me. They’re both bad men. I can’t quite understand black man yet. Pink man is the nice one, and I haven’t seen him do anything mean to anyone yet. Red man is standing in the middle of the room talking



on a cell phone. Who could he be talking to? While speaking, he was looking out the front door into the parking lot. He's moving his arms a lot as he's yelling at the phone. His big gun is pointing at a customer and then moves back towards his body. He is suddenly done talking, and starts walking over to the left wall across from us. There's a woman in a gray suit and skirt. He grabs her long blonde hair and begins to drag her towards the door.

Red man puts his arm around her neck to keep her from getting away. She is still trying to break free. He talks on the phone again, and they both look like they see something outside. Red man is getting angrier now, and the end of his gun is pointed at the right side of her head. He stops again and tosses the phone on the ground. It lands on the lava. Dad pulls me to his side and pushes my head into his chest. I feel a pop in my ears that hurts really bad. I do my best to squirm away from his grip, so I can look back to where red man and the woman were standing. She was now lying on her back. Red man was dragging her towards the back of the room by holding both of her arms. A trail of red follows her body. The red seems to lose its color in the lava. Pink and green man are very excited talking to red man now. My only thought is that they might not have expected what red man just did. Red man is back on his phone talking to someone outside.

Pink and green man are moving along the walls looking at customers. Pink man is along the far wall, and green man is moving through our line. Green man slowly walks past us, but stops and returns to me. He gestures towards red man and he comes over to him. Green man points directly at me, and mom tries to put her arms across my body to protect me from them. Green man shoves her away to the

side, while red man takes a closer look. Dad tries to stand up but red man kicks him hard in the chest. Dad hits his back against the wall and is in a lot of pain again. Red man looks right at me and I see one corner of his mouth begin to curl up in a smile.

“She’s perfect.”

I look at mom and see her crying now. Makeup is running down her cheeks. Red man picks me up off the cold floor while green man points his gun at mom and dad. Rupert is dropped on the floor as I’m startled. I try to reach for him, and for mom and dad. They are both reaching out to me, and green man hits mom in the face with his gun. Rupert is resting against dad’s leg. As red man carries me away, I can still see mom and dad. Green man is forcing them both to their feet. He is taking them somewhere. They’re walking towards the counter that has some offices behind it. Soon, they disappear into one of the back rooms. Still in his arms, red man carries me to the front of the bank. I see that this is the same place where he killed that woman. We step over her river of lava that flows away back to where mom and dad are being taken.

I wriggle myself free from his grasp to where I can see ahead of us. The sun is shining through all of the glass making up the front of the bank. Visibility to the parking lot is tough, but I see a shape appear on the sidewalk. He is holding a cell phone. Is this the person that red man was talking to? The man outside is wearing blue with some kind of black vest. His hair is going away, and what he still has is gray. On the black vest are the letters POLICE in white. This policeman is on his phone, and I notice red man answering his own phone. I close my eyes and all I can think about is wondering what green man was going to do with mom and dad. Once

again, I try to make it back home. I run to dad's office to say goodnight to him, among the sea of papers piled on and around his desk. He looks worried as he scribbles away, but stops when he sees me. Then, I run to my bed so mom can tuck Rupert and I in for the night.

Opening my eyes, I can get a glimpse of black man upstairs. He takes something large that looks like it's made of metal out of the black bag he brought with them. All I know is that it looks like some kind of powerful tool, but I can't tell exactly what it is. Down below, pink man is running towards me. I'm not paying attention to red man's talk with the policeman, but at the very least, he is still very upset. Pink man is right behind us and he suddenly has his hands around me. I'm pulled forcefully away from red man, who immediately drops his phone. He startled him. Pink man begins to slowly back away with me in his hands. Red man turns around and turns his anger towards his own friend. His shiny gray pistol that he's been holding is pointed towards him now. Aren't these men friends? I've been crying for a while, but I could make out something that pink man yelled.

"Not what I signed up—"

A big flash comes out the end of red man's pistol. My ears feel that sharp pain again. I'm suddenly crashing down onto the lava. My left knee throbs as it lands hard on the tile, with nothing to brace my fall. I can feel the thud from pink man's body falling down as well. I crawl over to him and see that his black mask is now wet all over his face. Like with the lava, the blood loses its color. His eyes stare at me, but they are dead now. Red man walks over to us, looks at me with a nasty smile, and crosses his own throat with one of his fingers. I'm scared now that pink man is gone.

He was the only one of these men that went out of his way to treat people with any type of kindness. Red man is back on his phone again, pointing and shouting at the policeman outside. I'm standing up and walking back to where my parents and I were sitting at the wall, and red man isn't trying to stop me. Every one of the customers and workers are looking at me, and I wish they'd stop. I don't like so many people watching me. Mom and dad are still gone, and Rupert is not where I left him. The pretty lady is holding him, and she holds him out to me when she sees me approaching.

I cradle Rupert against my chest while my tears drop onto his brown fur, turning it into dark spots. I can't stop myself from crying because I have no idea what is happening to mom and dad. I haven't seen them, or green man, since he took them to the back. The pretty lady pulls me close to her, and I continue my crying into her blue dress. All I want is to be back home with my parents. I can't shake the feeling that somehow this is my fault. The day began with not being able to find a babysitter to watch me. Mom and dad never planned on taking me with them to do these errands. If I weren't here, maybe mom and dad would've been out of the bank before these men showed up. They might be at the meeting with the money man if not for me. This only makes my crying worse, but I close my eyes to try and sleep.

The next thing I know I'm awake and it is completely dark outside. Through the glass, I see flashing red and blue lights that give the tile a weird look. The pretty lady has her head leaning back against the wall. She sleeps peacefully. Her blue dress feels very soft and expensive. For the first time, I notice a ring on her left finger that also looks expensive. It's shiny and has a square diamond sticking out.

When I look to my right, I'm scared again to see empty floor where mom and dad should be. Green man is back, though. He is sitting at one of the desks, reclining in an office chair. He seems to be staring right at me. I watch him for a few seconds, and he won't stop looking at me. What did you do with my parents? I don't want to see him anymore, so I look towards the front door. Red man is talking with black man. Actually, red man is doing all the talking. Sometimes, black man nods or shakes his head a little bit—or fiddles with his cigarette. This man never seems to say anything. I don't understand him, but I know that he scares me. Like green man and red man, I don't like him.

Green man is now up and walking over towards me. His walk has a purpose to it, and when he gets close to me, I try to talk to him.

“What did you do with my mom and dad?”

He ignores me and it makes sense now. He wasn't looking at me. His eyes are on the pretty lady. He pushes me away to the side, and this wakes her up. She sees me on the ground and reaches to help me up. However, green man has grabbed her arm and is pulling her up. He's going to take her somewhere. With one of his hands on her back, he moves her towards the stairs. She is pleading with him, but it isn't working. Red man is pacing back and forth in front of the entrance, still talking on his phone. Now that the pretty lady has been taken away, I'm left to think about mom and dad. It's nighttime and they are still nowhere to be seen. Green man refuses to tell me what he did with them. All I had with me was Rupert.

I think about the last night we really spent together. Four nights ago, dad put aside his work to watch a movie as a family. I picture the wonderful taste of the

popcorn, and how Bastion kept trying to stick his head in the bowl. He sat on my lap as we all piled onto our couch. We watched *Cars*, which is one of my favorite movies. It was one of those great nights where mom and dad were getting along so well. These nights were harder to come by recently, and I would usually watch movies alone while they talked or argued in the next room.

Before I know it, the pretty lady is coming down the stairs. She's in a hurry, but green man isn't following her. He's upstairs talking to black man by the railing. Once more, black man isn't doing any of the talking. He sees me watching him, and makes a pistol with his fingers pointed directly my way. The pretty lady has hurried over to the wall and sits down beside me. Something is different about her now. Her hands are shaking and I can see a large red spot under her right eye.

"Did he hit you?"

"I'm okay."

Her answer seems a bit strange to me, but it makes me hate green man even more. The pretty lady looks as scared as I am, and she takes my hand in hers. She tries to smile, but her eyes show me that she is too sad. Green man eventually comes downstairs and begins to patrol along each wall. He carefully looks at the customers, and stops suddenly when he gets to my position. He says something to me. I don't know what he says because my eyes are locked on his wrist—dad's watch. I would know that watch anywhere.

"I hate you."

All this does is make him laugh. No one tells me what happened to my parents. Either they don't know or they're keeping the truth from me. This whole

mess still feels like it's my fault. When I see mom and dad, I'll tell them both how sorry I am. Maybe that will keep them from getting mad at each other. The red and blue lights from the parking lot continue to light up the inside of the bank. I wonder how many policemen are out there. I just saw the one earlier, the one that has been talking to red man on the phone. I haven't seen red man seem as angry since he killed that woman earlier, along with pink man. He's been pacing back and forth for a while now, and out of the corner of my eye I see black man upstairs carrying a large black bag. He drops it over the railing and it lands downstairs. Green man stops patrolling and runs over to check it out. He gives a quick thumbs up to red man, while black man disappears into one of the rooms again.

I'm glad that things seem a bit more peaceful, and many customers are sleeping or trying to stay calm. I don't stop worrying, but am thinking a bit more clearly now. Each time someone has been killed, it's been done in front of the policemen. Mom and dad were taken in the back. It gives me a lot more hope that they might be okay. There are only a few lights on in the bank, and most of the light comes from outside. The pretty lady is awake and seems to be talking to no one in particular, while she holds her own hand. I see her mouth moving, but she's looking down at the ground with her eyes closed. I try not to interrupt her as I feel it must be important to her. Far away, green man is finishing up his round of the entire floor. He walks back to the center of the room and begins to talk to red man. Occasionally, one of them points to someone. My heartbeat quickens as I remember them pointing at customers earlier, and how it resulted in someone getting killed.

I was supposed to be the last one killed, but pink man stopped it. He lost his own life in saving mine. As much as I don't understand black man, and hate green and red man, it makes me sad that pink man is gone. I follow the fingers pointing at people, and see the reaction of the large man from earlier as it seems to find him. He's the same man that my parents met with, and I made the bad comment towards him. Red man walks over to him and forces him to start walking towards the front door. Everything seemed to be going better. These men seemed happier and everything inside the bank had calmed down. Why would they kill the large man? Were they choosing whom to kill, or was it bad luck? I didn't know who that first woman was, then I was going to be next, and now the large man that had the sweaty hands was up next.

The large man gets close enough to the front door that he is completely in the dark, except for the blue and red lights that alternate over his body. Talking on the phones picks up again, and the anger is coming back. Red man's pistol is pointed against the right side of the large man's head, and his face is so much redder than usual. It looks as though it is on fire, made worse by the policeman's lights coming through the glass. Why is this continuing? The police have been here for a while. The talk with red man isn't stopping people from dying. I don't want to see this man die. All of the sudden, the few lights in the bank go out. At the same time, the red and blue light disappears too, along with the parking lot lights.

It is so dark in here now. My eyes try to adjust to the surroundings, and I can see a couple dark shapes running around. Everything looks like the lava, covered in shades of black. This scares me greatly, as I can't figure out what this means. I know



that something big is happening. Two shapes that I think are red and green man are tipping over the desks. The desks are taller when tipped on their sides, but why are they doing that? My focus is on the front of the bank. My eyes are adjusting to the darkness. I don't know where black man is, but red and green man are looking at the front entrance. Finally, their guns are pointing at something that isn't one of the customers or employees. The commotion from the lights going out and the desks being moved wakes up any customers that had been trying to sleep. Many of them are talking to one another now, and I wish I understood what everyone else seems to know. I ask the pretty lady about the situation, and see that the large man was saved from his death. He has moved back to the far wall once again.

Everyone is still now, as if every single person in the bank is afraid to move. Red and green man have their guns pointed at the front door and don't move a muscle. They look like statues. Black man appears finally and places his big tool on the upper floor. His own gun is resting on the upper railing, also directed at the door. He must've completed his job up there, or something else is going on. Some of the people are holding onto each other. A few others talk to no one like the pretty lady was earlier, with their hands clasped together. A few men and women close to me seem to be crying.

I can see that the pretty lady is breathing very fast, as if she is more scared now than she has been through this entire day and night. She jumps and bumps into my side, as one of the glass windows up high at the front of the bank shatters. Glass breaks into tiny pieces and rains down onto the lava inside the entrance. Red and green man both start to shoot at the parking lot. I cover my ears, feeling that

annoying pain in them again. The entire first floor lights up from the flashes coming out of their guns at a fast pace. Their shooting is breaking every bit of glass at the front. Black man is not firing upstairs. His gun has dropped down below, and his body is slouched and leans over the railing. That first glass that broke was at least thirty or forty feet high. Someone from outside shot in and must have killed black man instantly. Red and green man both stop shooting after a few seconds, and are doing something with their guns. Something long and black fell out of the bottom of each gun, and they're reaching to put it back in. They are cowering behind the desks as they are working with the guns.

My gaze turns back to the front of the bank. So far, I haven't seen whom they are shooting at, or the person that shot black man on the second floor. A few dark shapes are now coming in all along the front wall. With all of the glass broken, they don't even need to use the door. At the same time, seemingly every light in the bank comes back on at once. The shapes are wearing blue with black helmets, black vests, black guns, and black masks that cover most of the faces. Their guns vibrate as they fire and move towards the bad men. Something is different about the guns they use—my ears don't hurt when they fire. They also don't let out huge flashes of light. One of these men is turned so I can see the back of his vest. On top of the black are white letters spelling out SWAT.

There are a bunch of these SWAT men in here—at least six of them. They quickly move and take cover behind the desks closest to the front door. Red and green man have finished working on their guns and are firing again. My hands firmly rest on my ears, but the pain won't stop as long as they fire. Every other customer in

here is hunkered down and holding their ears too. I'm glad I'm not the only one that is terrified by this shooting. The SWAT men stay behind the desks, and I can see that some of these desks are getting holes in them. Little splinters of wood are flying away. One of the SWAT men closest to me has a green object in his hand. He pulls what looks like some kind of key from it, and tosses it towards red man. Another one follows it towards green man. New sensations hit me hard. It feels like I got hit in the chest, and suddenly, I can't see anything. Less than one second later, that same feeling hits me just as hard. It must be from those things the SWAT men threw. I'm shaking my head trying to see again, and I feel a little dizzy.

The cold wall is still against my back, and my hands are off my ears and reaching for anything that is familiar. Soon, I find the arm that must belong to the pretty lady. I'm glad she's still here. The details of her hand begin to take shape, and I look up to see what's going on. Red man is standing up and looks wobbly on his feet. Green man is firing his gun, but is aiming off to the side of these SWAT men. Red man begins to bring his gun back up to fire at them again, but several of them get him first. He collapses back into an office chair and falls to the ground. Green man must be frustrated or having trouble seeing, because he is aiming his gun all over the place now. His bullets are going every which way. A couple of them strike a customer along my wall. He's been sitting about twenty feet away from me, and grabs his right arm. I can immediately see a large bloody spot on his green shirtsleeve. Before green man can do anymore damage, a few of the SWAT men fire at him until his gun stops firing. Green man's body falls forward and he lands on top of the desk.

Just like that, the firing is over. I don't know exactly how long it lasted. Honestly, it was probably about thirty seconds in total. It felt like they were shooting at one another for hours. Red man's body is facing down, and his back is covered in wet spots. The blood's color is invisible on the dark suits. Green man is lying on his side on top of the desk. His suit is opened, revealing a white dress shirt underneath. Large blotches of blood cover his chest and run down towards the wood. I'm unable to take my eyes off of the dead men. I know that I shouldn't look at it, but I can't convince myself to look away. I'm so glad that they're dead. I hated these men. As far as I could see it, no one they hurt or killed did anything to them. I still don't know where my parents are, or if they're okay.

More policemen come walking into the bank now. They are dressed in blue, but don't have the black masks or vests that these SWAT men have. I can make out their faces. Customers are immediately taken out to the parking lot in groups. When the pretty lady and I get outside, I try to ask the policemen that I pass to please find out where my mom and dad are. There are a bunch of ambulances among the police cars, and stretchers are being taken into the bank. The pretty lady stays by my side, and the cool night air feels refreshing. We both wait to see the stretchers come back out, and I'm going to wait as long as I have to in order to find mom and dad. One by one, the bad men are brought out. I'm glad they are dead, except for the part of me that knew pink man wasn't quite like the others. However, to be one of them with the likes of the others, I guess maybe it's for the best.

The bad men are mostly covered up on the stretchers. The next one that comes out has the man that was shot in the arm during the gunfight. Next, the

woman that I saw red man shoot comes out. She was killed so early in this mess, and didn't do anything to deserve that. Two more stretchers are now coming out, and I grab the pretty lady's hand. My mind can't think of anyone else that was hurt and hasn't come out already. My parents aren't accounted for yet. It has to be them. We push past some policemen to the leading stretcher, and I see that it's carrying my mom. I feel the tears coming on when I see her face is looking bruised. Despite that, she brings out a huge smile when she sees me running towards her.

"Sam. Thank god you're alive. Dad and I are going to be fine. A couple of his ribs are broken, but he'll be alright."

I throw my arms around her and don't want to let go of her. I tell her how much I love her, and then I run back to the final stretcher—dad. The pretty lady stays behind and talks to mom. Without his glasses, I have to get close to dad before he recognizes me. The bare spot on his wrist confirms that green man did steal it like I thought when he was showing it off in my face.

"Hi sweetheart. Don't worry about me. I'm in some pain now, but I'm just glad to see you. I was afraid they were going to—"

"I love you, daddy."

Dad was crying too much now, and I think he didn't want to finish his sentence anyway. We both know what he was afraid of, and it wasn't going to do any good now to think about what could've happened. We're all alive. Dad's hurting pretty bad right now, so I place Rupert by his side. Rupert gave me comfort when I tried to find some, and now, he can help out dad. I talk to mom once more before they're both placed into ambulances. Mom tells me that the pretty lady will drive me

and follow them to the hospital. I give the pretty lady a huge hug before we get into her car.

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The next night, my parents and I are watching the local evening news on our couch. Bastion is sitting on my lap, and despite how horrible it all was, I have a new feeling that maybe things will all work out. The newswoman is talking and I see a shot of a bank and recognize it. I ask dad to put words on the screen so that I can read what she's saying, and he selects the closed captioning option. The news is worse than I ever would've thought.

*Last night, the First Northern Bank was held hostage by four gunmen. The identities of the men are being kept secret, but local police have been able to determine that they represent the MNP, the white supremacist group calling themselves the Modern Nazi Party. The MNP is believed to have been formed last year, and has interfered with several human rights protests. First Northern Bank management has been extremely outspoken about the MNP and their white supremacist rallies they've held in previous weeks, no doubt making them a target of the organization. Other reports have come in from other cities in Alabama, as well as Arkansas and Mississippi, where banks were held up.*

*Of the six banks held hostage, police believe that five of them were the victims of the MNP. Each of these believed to have been hit by the MNP have owners or managers that have publicly condemned the group and asked people to stand up against them and their racist views. Today, MNP leader Bill Donaldson came out with the following statement:*

*“Today is a sad day, as we should all pray for the families and friends of those that lost their lives in these bank robberies. We’re all looking for answers, but it’s not fair to try and pin this on the MNP. We have never used violence or force for our own gains, and it is disappointing to fall under these kinds of accusations. Even if any of these criminals were once a part of the MNP, we would never tolerate this kind of horrible action. To have the kind of personality to steal from and take innocent lives means that you would have no place with us.”*

As dad changed the channel, I ask mom about this word that I haven’t heard before—Nazi. I don’t know how to say this word in sign language, as it’s never been taught to me. I spell it out with my fingers and see mom frown at the question. She carefully explains to me that Nazis are people that believe they are better than others because they look different, or they have different beliefs. Many years ago, some of the worst people in history were Nazis.

Dad is carefully watching mom as she gives me what seems like a mild lesson. I know that these Nazis are a lot worse than she lets on, considering what I saw with my own eyes. To do to other banks what happened here, it makes me hate these men more and I’m glad that they are dead. It makes me want to do something to stop them, but I don’t know how. I’ve never seen before that such horrible people exist. I’ll never forget yesterday, and I don’t want others to have to experience that kind of fear, all because some people think they’re better than others.