Zeke marries Dr. Seymour, but that's only where the story starts.
Chapter 1

Myron looked at the moderate sized, comfortable home with distaste. It cried out everything that represented the suburban way of life and everything that Myron despised. What made his stomach curdle even more was the pretty little painted sign emblazoned with Mr. and Mrs. Anderson. So Jennifer Seymour had agreed to take his name in the end. The bitch. He took a last drag off of his cigarette and then flicked it on the asphalt, stomping out the ember with his boots.

He knew the good Dr. Anderson was at work and Zeke would be home. The bitch didn't take care of Zeke properly, being out of the house more often than not. Of course, Zeke had done the whole perfect little housewife thing with the first Mrs. Anderson, so he obviously didn't want to go there again. When they'd de-regged out of the army, Zeke had wanted something different alright. He had wanted Myron, but Myron had different plans. He had wanted to pursue his old dreams and live a "normal" life. There had been no perfect reunion or setting up house together. No, Myron had sent Zeke packing. He had told him the only thing he knew for certain would make the other man leave his side.

To this day he remembered those hateful words he'd whispered, "If you love me, you'd get the fuck out of here. When I look at you, I only hear the screams and see the blood. I need to forget and the only way I can do that is to never look at you again."

Zeke had kissed him one last time, told Myron he'd always love him and then had left. He had settled down with Dr. Jen and gotten married. One house complete with a dog and white picket fence, Myron knew Zeke had truly settled. He had settled for a life he didn't want and with a woman he called friend, but didn't love. Myron knew about Zeke's dream of working in the great outdoors and grasping at the half promised dream of being a guide at his friend's business. He had never imagined he'd see Zeke working nine to five at a construction firm as an onsite supervisor.

Myron walked up the drive way and passed Zeke's company truck, noting the hard hat in the front seat. Leave it to Zeke to find a job where he could still wear wife beaters and order men around. He walked up to the door and was about to knock when he pulled his hand back. With a shaking hand he pulled out a pack of cigarettes and quickly lit one. He was about to knock again when, as he had done in Vietnam, Zeke opened the door before Myron entered a building. Zeke had always had a sixth sense.

Zeke didn't miss a beat when he said, "Not allowed to smoke in the house."

Myron coughed and smoke came out of his nose. "Wasn't exactly the reception I was looking for."

"LT…" Zeke said in a hoarse voice.

Myron had run over this scenario a million times in his head. He'd planned what he would say and how Zeke would act. He had imagined every possible reaction, but the hell of living without Zeke had won out over even his worst nightmare.

"I made a mistake," Myron blurted out. "I love you."

"Goddamn it, boy," Zeke answered in a soft and raspy voice. His big hand came up to rest on Myron's unshaven jaw.

"I'm a mess, Zeke," Myron started to babble, his still burning cigarette hanging loosely between his fingers. "I can't do it without you anymore. I was wrong. The screams… the blood, it doesn't stop. I
"Come inside," Zeke instructed, his hand now moving to Myron's shoulder and directing him inside. Zeke couldn't stop touching Myron, even as they stood in the doorway looking at each other. He took Myron's cigarette and flicked it into a nearby flowerbed.

"I need you…" Myron repeated desperately. He started to move closer to Zeke until he had backed them against the flowered wallpaper. It was like breathing when he leaned over and brought his lips to Zeke's.

Zeke didn't stop him. In fact, Zeke's arms moved down to encircle his waist. He crushed Myron against his body and engulfed his mouth in a frantic kiss. It was only when one of his hands naturally wandered down to grope Myron's ass that he pulled away panting heavily. He couldn't speak. There were no words that described the relief at having Myron back in his arms.

"I love you," Myron said, kissing Zeke's slightly open mouth again. During the war he'd never said it and now he couldn't say it enough. It sounded right and the look in Zeke's eyes was worth the vulnerability. "I love you."

"Got that the first time," Zeke answered quietly.

"A-and?" Myron asked in a shaky voice.

"I'll die lovin' ya," Zeke growled and pulled Myron in for another kiss. There was a tiny part of his brain that whispered he was a married man now and shouldn't be doing this. But that part of his brain was obviously damaged and was ruthlessly crushed. When they finished kissing, Zeke pulled Myron's head onto his shoulder, running his hand over the still spiky head. "Glad ya didn't grow an afro after all."

Myron gave a pitiful sounding snort and buried his face against Zeke's neck. Leave it to Zeke make him laugh at a moment like this. He hadn't laughed or smiled in a long time. Hell, Myron was sure the last time he hadn't felt heartsick had been with Zeke by his side.

"They all hate us," Myron whispered. "I don't know if I'm wearing a big `I'm a baby-killer' sign or something, but they all know without having to ask."

Zeke didn't need clarification. He knew exactly what Myron was talking about. Men who had been through hell and barely lived to talk about it were different. They didn't have the eyes of regular young men and ex-soldiers even walked differently. Zeke had always thought Myron looked as cute as hell stalking around with his gun belt hanging lopsidedly off his hips, but even as cute as Zeke thought he was, Myron was undeniably a dangerous man.

"Don't listen to nothin' they say," Zeke whispered back to him. "We both know what you are."

"What's that?"

"A good man," Zeke answered. Zeke was now rubbing his face against the side of Myron's and nuzzling behind his ear.

"Does she know?" Myron suddenly blurted out. "About us."

"This ain't about her," Zeke replied.

"It is," Myron denied. "You're married to her."
"Myron…" Zeke said in the tone that had always gotten his attention and now was no exception. "Shut up."

Myron's mouth dropped open just enough that Zeke found it completely endearing. He had missed Myron beyond words. It was past the point of heartache to where a part of his soul had been ripped away. Zeke wasn't one for flowery language, but Myron really was his soul mate.

"I don't think I can leave you again, Zeke," Myron started to beg, his hand clutching into a fist in Zeke's shirt. "I can't do it."

"Shush now," Zeke said, rubbing the back of Myron's tense neck. "Told ya ta shut up, didn't I? Always talked too much for your own good. Don't know what we're gonna do, but letting ya go ain't an option."

"I need you," Myron repeated the phrase he had said more in this simple conversation than he had his entire life, even to his mother. "I love you."

"I know… I know…" Zeke repeated back to Myron. "How about we get outta here?"

"Where?" Myron asked stupidly.

"Where ya stayin'?"

"At a motel," Myron said distractedly. "When I got into town, I put down enough money for a month."

"How long ya been here?"

"A little over two weeks," Myron admitted. "I might have been following you…"

"Might?" Zeke asked with a soft smile. He didn't doubt that if Myron didn't want to be seen he wouldn't be.

"I needed to see you," Myron answered in a shaky voice. "See if you were happy. I thought you were, that you were happy, but I couldn't w-walk away without touching you at least once. I'm s-sorry, I…"

"Shush now," Zeke repeated again for the second time in only minutes. "Let's go to your place."

"Can we take my car?" Myron asked. He didn't want to go in Zeke's work truck, just because he knew that *she* had been in it. "It's a piece of crap, but it's all I can afford right now."

Zeke nodded and managed to get Myron out the door. He made sure to lock up behind from sheer habit. All he wanted to do right now was be alone with Myron. When they got outside, they had almost made it across the lawn when his neighbour stopped them.

"Mr. Anderson, ah, it's good to see you!" the older woman called out and came across to his lawn. "I just wanted to thank you for mowing my grass the other day."

Zeke put a strained smile on his face and noted how Myron moved behind him. "It was no problem, Mrs. Smart. Really. I'm sorry to be rude, but I was just on my way out with someone."

"Who do you have behind you?" Mrs. Smart demanded, squinting her eyes. She was the neighbourhood gossip and prided herself that she knew everything that went on in her block.

Zeke stood staunchly in front of Myron and blocked her view. "He's my friend. Now we really have
to be going now, Mrs. Smart."

"Alright," she said, noticing the fidgeting young man standing behind Zeke. She knew Zeke was a veteran and remembered how strangely her own husband had acted when he got back from World War Two. "I'll tell your wife you've gone out then."

"Don't bother," Zeke said immediately. "I left her a note. Good-bye, Mrs. Smart."

With that he turned and hustled Myron to the car, reaching into his pocket and plucking out the car keys. He didn't have to ask which pocket Myron kept his keys in, he remembered. For his part, Myron didn't say a word and walked over to the passenger's side.

"I'm staying at the Palomino Motel," Myron said. He took a fresh cigarette from his jacket pocket, lighting it with a shaky hand. The car was littered with old fast food containers, pop cans and the ashtray overflowed with cigarette butts.

"I know where it is," Zeke said, driving the rest of the way in silence.

When they got there, Myron got out of the car and walked over to a room in the rundown motel. "It was cheap," was all the explanation he gave. What he didn't say was that more importantly it was close to Zeke.

"It's better than a lot of places I've stayed," Zeke assured Myron, even as he was let into the dingy room that reeked of smoke and stale air.

"So this is it, then?" Myron suddenly said and laughed nervously.

"What?" Zeke asked, sitting on the bed because the rickety chair didn't look like it would hold his weight.

"This is when we fuck and then you go back to your wife."

"Myron…"

"Or is this when you tell me it was all a big mistake?"

"Myron…"

"Or when you tell me you're happily married, or better yet, that Mrs. Anderson is pregnant and…" Myron was puffing away on his cigarette during this entire rant.

"Myron!" Zeke shouted, stopping Myron from pacing the small room.

"What?" Myron asked in a small voice. He looked like he expected his heart to be ripped out still beating from his chest.

"None of that is gonna happen," Zeke told him. The boy had only gotten more nervous since he got home and obviously needed someone to take care of him.

"No?"

"No."

"Then what is going to happen?" Myron asked. He was smoking with one hand and the other was wrapped around his waist.
"Don't rightly know, do I?" Zeke answered. "But I do know that now I got ya, I'm never lettin' ya go again."

"Oh," Myron's mouth dropped open a little bit.

Zeke looked around the room and saw a stack of empty pizza boxes. "Ya haven't been eatin' properly, have ya?"

"Umm, not really all that hungry that often." It was the truth. Myron didn't eat that often anymore and had dropped some of his already spare weight.

"Uh huh," Zeke said doubtfully and got off the bed to stand in front of Myron. He put his hands on Myron's waist, moving them under Myron's shirt. He noted Myron's shiver and smiled just before he made a tsking sound. "That's the first thing that'll change. You're gonna start eatin' right."

"Really, Zeke, I don't…"

"Shush now," Zeke cut him off. He had a feeling that he would be using that phrase a lot with Myron. In the field, there had been rank to separate them, now there was nothing. "I know what's best." Zeke took the burning cigarette butt out of Myron's hand and stubbed it out after Myron nodded. "You're gonna cut back on them, too."

"But, I…"

Zeke shut Myron up by kissing him again. Myron all but melted against Zeke, all protests forgotten. When Zeke pulled away, he pushed Myron's head onto his shoulder. "We've gotten through worse," Zeke said roughly. "We're both alive and we're together again."

"Am I really alive?" Myron asked. "Doesn't feel like it sometimes." What he didn't say was that he didn't feel alive without Zeke. He was like a shadow passing through a world of bright and frightening colours. Life was a blur lived between cigarettes, too many drinks and remembered nightmares.

Zeke started to run his hands through Myron's too long hair. He knew it was the style nowadays, but he doubted it was a fashion statement, rather Myron just forgetting to get his hair cut. "You're alive, Myron," Zeke told him. "You'll just need me ta remind you of that." Zeke tugged at Myron's hair a little, hoping to distract him and make him smile, even a little. "Ya startin' ta grow that afro?"

Myron gave Zeke a choked off snort and rewarded him with a half smile. "No, I'm not growing an afro."

"Good," Zeke answered simply.

He stood there holding Myron for several minutes in silence, finally managing to pull him down to the dirty, small bed. The silence continued as Zeke lay on the bed on his back, with Myron lying across Zeke's chest. In that moment, Zeke realized he was more at peace in these last few minutes than all the time he had been with either of his wives.

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Myron woke up with his face pressed against Zeke's chest. He absolutely refused to open his eyes, instead opting to huff and tried to burrow in farther. He felt Zeke's fingers caress through his hair.

"I'm not awake," he mumbled the denial.
"Of course not, Myron," Zeke responded with a soft chuckle.

Myron moved his head enough to crack an eye open. "You called me Myron."

"That's your name," Zeke answered, his smile growing wider.

"You always used to call me LT." Myron wondered if Zeke wanted to forget the past… if he wanted to forget the man Myron had been. It was frightening to think Zeke could put that behind him when Myron couldn't overlook it.

"Suppose I did," Zeke said. "And suppose I will again, but I'm still gonna call ya Myron. That's your name."

Myron made a face at Zeke's simple yet compelling logic. If someone wanted to analyze Zeke, they might say he was telling Myron that he was both the man he had been and the man he was now.

"Never liked the name Myron," he complained with a huff. "Makes me sound like a nerd."

"You are a nerd," Zeke teased gently. When Myron scowled at him, Zeke smiled right back at him. He loved that scowl on Myron's face. Anything was better than that hollow look in the boy's eyes.

"You're asking for it," Myron complained and smacked Zeke on the arm.

They started to wrestle around on the bed, each vying for dominance. They ended up panting heavily with Zeke pinning Myron to the bed. "What am I askin' for?" he growled, his voice devoid of any humour.

"You… now," Myron breathed heavily.

It took only a fraction of a second for Zeke to lower his lips to Myron's. All of his desperation and hope poured into the kiss. Now he knew that whatever promises of fidelity he'd made to Jennifer had been a lie. He had promised his heart to a wounded young man back in Vietnam. Now that young man was in his arms, needing him in a way Myron had never let slip out before.

Hands tore at clothes, ripping off buttons in the frantic motions to reach bare skin. Myron scratched his fingernails down Zeke's back, trying to draw him impossibly closer. Zeke didn't look at the stained sheets as he pushed Myron's legs back once they were freed from pants and boxers. He also didn't question the open jar of Vaseline on the bedside table.

"Tell me ya want this," Zeke demanded, scooping enough Vaseline onto his fingers to slide his way home when needed.

"I fucking want it!" Myron nearly screamed. Now that it was so close, he wanted Zeke to shut up and hurry before he changed his mind. He had no time for patience or the blackness that haunted him. Now he only had time for Zeke.

"I know ya do," Zeke answered. He started with one slick finger, followed quickly by two. It had been long enough that Myron should have been tight, but he took the digits easily. "Have ya let another man touch ya this way?"

"No… n-no," Myron denied. "I would do it to myself…"

"Who would ya think about?" Zeke demanded, twisting the fingers.

"You, only you," Myron nearly wailed. "Always you."
"Good," Zeke grunted, pulling his fingers out and slicking up his cock.

There was nothing beautiful about this. It was pure, raw need between them now. There were too many emotional wounds that had to heal first before they could have anything tender, but that didn't make it any less special. There had been no time during the war for tender and perhaps they could learn it.

Myron pulled back his own legs as Zeke entered him. The bigger man flattened his hands on the bed by Myron's shoulders and started to rock into him. He leaned over and licked the sweat off of Myron's cheek after a few minutes. Even after all this time, he remembered how to read Myron and knew the perfect time to reach down and stroke his lover.

Myron came first, crying out so loudly that he was heard through the thin walls three rooms down. Zeke came with several heavy pants and all but collapsed onto Myron. He kept kissing Myron's chest, running his hands over the boy's body out of old habit. He used to use their rushed encounters to check Myron for injuries. All he found was that Myron was far too thin, but still in shape. The damn boy probably spent all his time walking up and down the streets, smoking, if Zeke knew him.

"You can't leave me now," Myron said in a broken voice.

Zeke rolled onto his side and pulled Myron into his arms. "Won't ever leave ya," he promised.

"What about the current Mrs. Anderson?" Myron asked with more than a hint of aggression. He didn't call her Jennifer. He didn't want to sympathize with her.

"She never had my heart," Zeke told him. "I lied when I said `til death do us part."

"Because you already made that promise to me?"

"No," Zeke said intently. "You're worth more than that. Wouldn't let death take ya away from me, here or there."

"We're sounding like some sort of bad dime store romance novel," Myron started to laugh after a moment. But his laughter came with tears and Zeke wiped them away.

"This is the '70s," Zeke told him. "When was the last time ya saw a dime store? And how we mean it is romantic."

Myron was running his fingers possessively over Zeke's chest. "This last while... when I was all alone... I thought about what if there wasn't any war. I thought about meeting you when I wasn't so fucked up."

Zeke ran his thumb just over Myron's eyebrow. "We wouldn't have met if it wasn't for that damn war. I'd be willing to relive it all, just ta make sure I met ya."

"We survived hell," Myron whispered, his voice cracking a little.

"Yeah, we sure did," Zeke insisted. "Together."

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After they woke up, they lay on the bed and watched the flickering television in silence. Zeke was sitting with his back against the headboard and Myron was lying between Zeke's outstretched legs.

"You can't just leave her," Myron said. He had to close his eyes to say it and tried to fight the taste of
bile already rising in his mouth.

"Why not?" Zeke asked.

"You have a job to think about and she'll butcher you in the divorce," Myron reasoned.

Zeke chuckled deeply and tightened his grip on Myron. "Ya think I care what other people think?" Zeke asked. "I don't give a fuck. As far as a divorce, she's a doctor and has all the money. I'd pack up and leave everything without a thought."

"Without saying goodbye?" Myron asked. He didn't know where they would go or what they would do, but his soul desperately needed to believe that Zeke would abandon everything for him.

"I'd hafta say goodbye," Zeke told him. A plan was already forming in his mind. He could get a job with his construction background anywhere they went. He was a foreman with a construction company here that Jennifer's cousin owned, but Zeke Anderson never had problems pushing a wheelbarrow or using a hammer in his life. They needed to go somewhere new that would allow Myron to recuperate. The boy was in no condition to work right now, but it wouldn't take too much to put a roof over their heads and food in their belly and still make sure neither of them was too busy.

"What are you thinking about?" Myron asked. "I can tell you're planning something just by looking at you." All it took was one look at Zeke's eyes.

"Just thinkin' about how ta get outta here," Zeke told him. "Did I ever tell ya about this dream I had of bein' a fishing guide?"

"Yeah," Myron said uncertainly. "I can see you liking the outdoors, but, Zeke… fish?"

Zeke chuckled again and kissed Myron's head out of sheer amusement. "God, boy, I missed ya," Zeke murmured into his hair. "That part was a dream, but you'd be surprised at the privacy people can get at isolated lakes and how cheap cabins can be. It would be quiet."

"I don't like the noise of the city anymore," Myron admitted. He had been a city boy born and raised, but now almost every noise made him jumpy.

"I know," Zeke echoed. "I bet I could open a little shop or somethin'. Fix stuff and work construction when it's in season."

"What would I do?" Myron asked uncertainly.

"Whatever ya wanted ta do, except try 'n' build anything. Leave that ta me. You'll find somethin'. You're young 'n' smart."

"So where do we go?" Myron was already set on planning out the details like he would in the bush. "I don't have that much money left…"

"Money don't matter," Zeke insisted. "I jus' plan ta take my tools, truck 'n' clothes. I got a few thousand dollars that are all my own. That'll give us a start."

"A start…" Myron repeated back slowly.

"Yeah, LT, a start. Shit don't matter as long as I got you," Zeke said, turning Myron's head and kissed him softly. "Nothin' matters, but you."

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Jennifer came home from a late night round to find Zeke's battered old truck parked in the driveway and bags piled in the bed. Calmly she put her keys into her purse and walked into the house. She found her husband sitting on the couch with the familiar figure of his former lieutenant stretched out next to him. Myron had his head on Zeke's lap and was snoring softly. The boy looked as if the only place he would be able to sleep was touching Zeke, if those dark bags under his eyes were any indication. Now he looked like a boy who had seen too many horrors. Jennifer worked with them every day at the VA hospital and tried to squash the sympathy she felt.

"So he's come back for you." Jennifer stated a fact, not a question.

"Yeah," Zeke answered, softly stroking Myron's hair. He had wanted to leave Myron behind in the motel, but Myron was too damn paranoid to let Zeke out of his sight. They had stayed up all night with Myron pacing around the living room. Finally Zeke had caught Myron when he stumbled and guided him down to where he now slept.

"I always knew about the two of you." Who wouldn't have known how much these two loved each other? The way they touched and looked at each other. Jennifer had known the truth when Zeke left her to go back to Myron in Vietnam. She hadn't felt betrayal, but only sad acceptance until the day Zeke came back to her. She loved Zeke and took him back, trying to make him happy, but the ghost of sadness had never left his eyes… until now.

"I'm sorry," Zeke told her. Myron was starting to fuss in his sleep and Zeke calmed him gently.

"No, you're not." Jennifer looked around the house and realized nothing really was missing. This home was hers. Zeke had always let her make the decisions and it reflected her taste, barely looking like he lived here. "Next time I won't take you back."

"There won't be a next time," Zeke said with a hint of a growl in his tone. "This time's for good. Never lettin' him go."

"I still love you." It sounded like a pathetic plea to her, but she had to say it. She didn't want to let him go without him knowing that.

"That don't change how much I love `im," Zeke replied. "We don't got any kids to tie us together."

"That didn't stop you from leaving the last Mrs. Anderson," Jennifer snapped.

Jennifer's sharp tone woke Myron up with a start. "Zeke…" He gasped out, bolting upwards into Zeke's arms.

"I'm here," Zeke comforted him. "I'm here, LT. I'm here."

Myron's eyes immediately snapped to the enemy, otherwise known as Mrs. Jennifer Anderson. "Bitch…" he hissed out.

Zeke held Myron back with strong arms. "Time ta get outta here now, LT. I've said my goodbyes."

"We gotta get out of here," Myron insisted. Jennifer couldn't miss the wild look in Myron's eyes, nor could she ignore how he clung to Zeke.

"We're leavin' now," Zeke insisted, pulling both of them off the couch. "Won't ever come back, I promise."

Jennifer watched them with a strange mixture of anger, pity, sadness and envy. "You deserve each other," she said in a cold tone and turned to walk down the hall without looking back.
As Zeke walked out of the house, he dropped his keys on the hall table and closed the door behind him. He held Myron's hand on the way out to the truck, not caring if the nosey Mrs. Smart next door saw them or not.

"She's right, ya know," Zeke said. His soft scowl turned into a big grin as he turned on the truck. "We do deserve each other."

END.
Don’t Judge A Book By Its Cover

Chapter Summary

Zeke happened to have a soft spot and fondness for nasty tempered, foul mouthed neurotics, even out of uniform.

In one day Zeke went from a comfortable suburban life as construction supervisor and the husband of a doctor to having only the title to his truck and his last cashed out pay cheque in his back pocket. He had left a note on the kitchen counter promising Jennifer he would send her an address to mail the divorce papers to. Zeke felt guilty, but not like he had with his first wife. Jennifer would be able to take care of herself and he really believed would be better off without him in the long run.

They sold Myron’s piece of crap car for gas money and then took off for nowhere in particular. On his way to a gas station cash register, Zeke picked up a book on a whim and tossed it onto the counter. It was something to keep Myron’s keen mind occupied during the oncoming hours of the road. After he paid and got into the truck, he smiled when he saw Myron was still passed out with his face pressed against the passenger’s side window. He reached and with one finger traced along Myron’s cheek, loving Myron’s irritated snuffle in his sleep. Zeke chuckled and put the book on the bench seat, looking forward to Myron’s biting comments as he read.

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A package arrived at the publishing house wrapped in the remnants of a brown paper bag with the logo still plastered on the backside, cut askew and hiding under two layers of hastily applied tape. By the weight of the package and the nearly unintelligible scrawl of the handwritten address, the intern in the mailroom had decreed that the mess should be dumped on Gerry’s desk. The damn intern didn’t have the skill to read the writing, so he had gotten lazy and passed on the problem. The sheer quirkiness of the packaging screamed that it had been sent by one of the firm’s more eccentric authors.

Gerry happened to be the local problem solver and poor editor who had the job of dealing with all of the crazy authors. He tore open the package and instead of the manuscript he expected, he held one of the recent novels they had put out last month. It was a piece of drivel pushed out by a junior editor. Gerry flipped open the cover and saw that the inside was completely covered in notes in the same messy scrawl on the outside of the package. From what Gerry could decipher of the tilted handwriting, it was a scathing insult to the book in hand.

“Disgusting insult to the English language,” Gerry read and snorted under his breath. Opening and leafing though the book, he saw that the person had torn apart the book, making extensive notes on its poor grammar and lack of coherent plot or character development. Gerry barked with laughter when he read the snide comments in the margins that included gems such as “…don't let this chapter, or your mind, wander. It's far too small to be let out on its own… I don't know what makes you so dumb but it really works… what he is lacking in intelligence and talent, he more than makes up for in stupidity…”

The print on the pages detailing the battle scenes was almost completely marked over with notes detailing extensively why the author was wrong and pointed out inaccuracies. Gerry wasn’t sure what a FNG was, but he knew it must not be anything good because that was scrawled in the...
margins. Underneath all of the insults, Gerry could clearly see the person with the scathing pen and wit knew their grammar, literary history, and had a keen intelligence.

Gerry grabbed his phone and dialled his secretary. “Margaret…” Gerry held the phone shoved against his shoulder as he set down the book and fumbled with the wrapping paper. He had to squint to read the return address. “Yes, remember that package? Yeah, the scary looking one. I want you to get me the telephone number for a M. Goldman at… what? No! I don’t want him arrested, I want to hire him. No, I don’t know what the M. stands for. No, I don’t know if he’s married or not. Either way, I feel sorry for whoever is forced to put up with a crazy son-of-a-bitch like that…”

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Zeke never would have guessed the crappy book he brought Myron to amuse the boy on the road would lead to a job for Myron. With a stolen pen from a roadside motel Myron had scribbled all over that book, muttering threats and insults under his breath. Seeing Myron being a spirited, vicious head case again was so much better than the shaky, unsure head case that had showed up his doorstep. Myron was so disgusted that once they had rented a cheap two bedroom apartment, Myron had wrapped the book up and sent it back to the publishing house. Zeke knew it was crazy, but it had amused Myron and that’s all Zeke really cared about.

Myron hung up three times on Gerry’s secretary and two times on Gerry himself before he believed the job offer was genuine. Picking up and moving to be closer to the publishing house was no big deal. It meant they could rent a house instead of an apartment. Zeke negotiated a cheaper rent in exchange for fixing up the place. He loved the family neighbourhood they ended up in, Myron still hung up on Gerry on a regular basis after growling rants him, but Myron was fast becoming their best freelance editor and Gerry was trying to talk him into writing.

What Myron carried could never be called a briefcase. He felt put upon to carry anything, but bitched and moaned about the papers he hauled around. Zeke had finally spent half a week’s pay on an expensive brown leather satchel, the likes of which were carried by professors at Harvard the saleslady had told him. Now the satchel was worn and soft to the touch. Half of the time it was slung over Zeke’s shoulder because Myron forgot to take it with him. Before buying it, Zeke had made sure there was a separate pocket inside that would fit and protect Myron’s glasses. Myron never wore them in public, but now that he was reading for hours on end, the glasses were used once he started to squint so much he got headaches.

Some days Zeke would come home and to find Myron passed out at the large oak desk that dominated the room that had been intended as a dining room. Papers would be scattered about the desk and glasses askew, but still on Myron’s face. Yesterday that was exactly where Zeke had found Myron and taken off the glasses, slipping them into the pocket of the satchel.

Zeke had no complaints that Myron was wearing the glasses, his hair and clothing rumpled. He wouldn’t complain about that any more than he would complain that Myron shuffled around, muttered to himself and scribbled notes all over manuscripts piled around the house. It was simply part of Myron that made the boy the nasty tempered, foul mouthed neurotic he was. Zeke happened to have a soft spot and fondness for nasty tempered, foul mouthed neurotics, even out of uniform.

After leaving Jennifer and starting a life with Myron, Zeke had never found a regular job. That suited him just fine and he had fallen into working as a handyman, finding odd jobs here and there that paid the bills. There was a little inheritance left from Myron’s old man, but not much. They were getting by and that was better to him than his past middle class lifestyle with Jennifer.

Zeke’s first stop on American soil had been to visit his daughter, but after a few days he was already getting twitchy with those doe eyes watching him. Katie was too much like her mother and living up
to her white picket fence dreams was impossible, leaving Zeke feeling incredibly guilty. The guilt had lessened in some ways, and grown in others, when Katie had shown him the shoe boxes filled with simple letters Zeke had written her from ‘Nam. He might not have been a physical presence in her life, but he made a point of writing her a letter even if it was a few penned lines talking about the weather. From his rucksack, he had pulled out a crumbled, folded stack of her drawings. Zeke had come to grips with the fact that he wasn’t the best father, but he was a better father than the old man he never had, and he was doing the best he could, with what he could. After four days, Zeke had left her with a kiss on the forehead and promise to keep writing and call more often.

He never told Katie of Jennifer’s promise that she could come to stay for the summers with them or the talk of half-brothers and sisters. He planned to marry Jennifer, but only because Myron had rejected him. Zeke didn’t want to introduce Katie to his new wife because in his gut he knew it wasn’t going to last and he was praying Myron would come to his senses. Now that Zeke was with Myron again, Zeke was planning on taking him down to meet Katie.

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The blade saw cut though the board guided by Zeke’s steady hand. The sun was beating down on his back, making him think of the oppressing heat of Vietnam. His sleeveless shirt was slung over a sawhorse, having been discarded hours ago. With a sixth sense that had always been between them, Zeke didn’t have to turn to know that Myron was there.

The board fell down to the ground with a perfect angle cut and Zeke stood up. “Did you make this one cry?”

Myron was leaning against the side of the brick townhouse, leather satchel resting on his shoulder. He snorted under his breath. “Weak bastard.”

Zeke turned around and smirked. “I’d ask you if you wanted to catch a bite to eat, but I think ya jus’ had a word nerd for lunch.”

The back door opened and a woman flounced out onto the back stoop. Since Myron was standing near the corner, he doubted she could see him since her hungry eyes were plastered on Zeke’s bare chest. A scowl crossed Myron’s face when he took in her floral print dress and goddamn white apron, accentuating her trim waist. Her brunette hair was swept up into a neat beehive that was several years out of fashion for the middle-aged woman. Myron’s scowl deepened when he considered that the ex-Mrs. Anderson and soon-to-be ex Mrs. Dr. Anderson had both been brunettes. The woman was holding a tray with a pitcher of fresh lemonade and plate of cookies.

“I baked chocolate chip cookies!” the housewife announced and beamed at Zeke. She swished down the stairs of the stoop and nearly dropped the tray when her high heels sank into the dirt. “I figure it’s the least I can do for all of your hard work.”

“He doesn’t like chocolate chip cookies,” Myron snapped from his vantage point.

It was a bold-faced lie considering Zeke brought home baked goods every week from the women he did jobs for. Most of the time Myron didn’t mind because they were damned good and he ate most of them anyway. Usually the housewives who hired Zeke were harmless, but this one gave Myron a sinking feeling. Zeke had never given Myron any cause for concern because the housewives Zeke worked for ended up adoring him for the way he played with their kids and his genuine skill. The ladies fed Zeke and tried to set him up with their single friends, sisters, or daughter, not bed him. They were amusing more often than not and Zeke was oblivious to their efforts. But Myron perceived that this one was Zeke’s type and wanted the man for herself.
The woman didn’t seem fazed at all by Myron’s comment. “What man doesn’t like chocolate chip cookies?”

“That man,” Myron said, almost saying, ‘My man.’

She started to argue, “Now, I happen to have it on good authority from…”

“I reckon I will have some of that lemonade,” Zeke cut her off. He pulled his shirt off of the sawhorse and slipped it on. “Thank you, ma’am.”

She set the platter down on Zeke’s makeshift work top, which happened to be a plywood board on two solid sawhorses. Pouring the glass, her eyes and flashy smile were focused on Zeke. “Freshly squeezed.”

Zeke took a quick sip to be polite. “Figure I’m pretty much done here. I have some finishing work to do tomorrow, then that’s it for the bookcases.”

“Oh.” The woman pouted, pushing up her cleavage. “Well, I’m very pleased with your work. I was thinking of redoing my…”

“Afraid that won’t be possible,” Zeke said. “Got another job lined up after this. Building bunk beds for Mrs. Thomson’s twins.”

“I’ll pay double what she’s paying,” the woman countered.

“She’s not paying me,” Zeke started to pack up his tools. “Doin’ it in exchange. She does a fine job of our mending. ‘Sides, can’t put ‘em off, even if I wanted to. Can’t have them cute girls sleepin’ on the floor now, can I?”

The disappointment was clear on her face. “I suppose not. Are you sure?”

“He’s sure,” Myron answered for Zeke.

The woman tutted and took her laden tray back inside, kicking the door shut with her foot. Myron glared at the closed door and folded his arms over his chest.

“I don’t want you to work for her again.”

Zeke’s fingers slipped easily into the grooves of the wooden handle worn from carrying around the tool box. “I won’t.”

“She’s a bitch.”

“She pays well.” Zeke fought the smirk threatening to tug at his lips when Myron turned the glare on him. The boy was a delight when he was worked up into a snit, but Zeke never wanted to feed his insecurities. “But, we don’t need her money.”

“Don’t see why you have to come back at all.”

“‘Cause I always finish a job I start,” Zeke told him. He kept the tool box in his left hand and settled his right palm onto Myron’s lower back. “A man’s only good as his word.”

Myron didn’t pull away from the touch and Zeke noticed some of the tension in his shoulders lessened. “You’ll be done tomorrow?”

They headed out through the side yard to the street where Zeke’s battered pickup was parked, looking out of place on a side street lined with cars. Zeke carefully placed his toolbox into the back of the bed and covered it with a tarp.

Before he pulled his hand away from Myron’s lower back, he patted it gently not giving into the temptation to pat his ass. “We gotta go shopping. No food in the house.”


“You’d live on those if I’d let you.” Zeke chuckled fondly. He saw that Myron was glaring at the woman’s house. “Get in the truck.”

“Let me?” Myron took Zeke’s verbal bait, turning the death glare on Zeke and getting into the truck. “I don’t need you to let me do anything. If anything, I let you think you let me do anything.”

Zeke started up the truck and decided to ratchet up Myron, too. “Uh huh.”

Myron made an indignant noise. “I’ll have you know you don’t control me, Zeke.”

“Course not.” Zeke did a shoulder check, then pulled into traffic.

Myron made a strangled noise and gripped at the strap of his satchel. “I was the superior officer and I’m an independent thinker. I don’t need anyone, let alone you.”

“We outta apples?”

“Yes,” Myron answered without missing a beat and then continued on his rant. “I will have you know that I have offers all the time. Offers better than that tart back there. You’re lucky to have me.”

Zeke kept his left hand on the steering wheel, but his right came to settle on Myron’s thigh and he squeezed gently. Myron’s insecurity was rearing its ugly head again. “I know I am.”

Zeke wished he had never taken this job because now Myron was going to be worked up in a righteous snit, and not the kind Zeke enjoyed. Every so often, Myron got it into his head that Zeke was going to leave him despite Zeke’s assurances he would do no such thing. The best thing Zeke could do was ride it out, keep distracting Myron in other ways, and keep touching him. Myron wasn’t one for public displays of affection, but the odd brush of a hand and pointed look would remind Myron he was wanted. He kept his hand on Myron’s thigh until he pulled into a parking spot in front of the corner grocery store.

Part of Zeke’s fondness for shopping was the novelty of the task. Both of his wives had taken care of it and when he was a single adult the army had fed him. There was something pleasurable about being able to figure out what he was going to feed himself and Myron. The mundane tasks with Myron by his side were the first taste of domestic freedom Zeke had experienced in his life. Zeke knew this was Myron’s first experience of normality and stability, and Zeke loved being able to give him that.

The choice of going to the store, rather than go straight home to allow Myron the opportunity to stew, had also been a conscious choice of Zeke’s. Whenever Myron got like this, doing something routine and domestic was comforting. It reminded Myron that they had built a life together.

Myron picked a cart with a wonky front wheel but was too damn stubborn to admit he had grabbed a defective cart, so pretended there was nothing wrong with it. Every time the cart wandered off to the side, Myron pulled it back with a glower. Zeke thought it was endearing that Myron had a habit of glaring at inanimate objects, as if his scowl would scare them into submission and working properly.
Moving down the first aisle, Zeke started to go over the list in his head of what they needed. Myron was a creature of habit and liked to have the same things in the house, even though if left to his own devices, he would wait to the last minute and go to the convenience store to buy stale donuts at two in the morning with a package of smokes. If there was fresh food in the house, Myron would eat it, but it had to be convenient. Which meant Zeke usually bullied Myron into going with him just to get Myron out of the house.

They were in the aisle with breakfast cereal. Zeke put a container of oatmeal into the cart because after a lifetime in institutions, he was conditioned to start his day with a bowl of sticky porridge. He grabbed a box of Lucky Charms, knowing that Myron never ate it as it was intended, but instead would wander around the house with the box in one hand, picking out all the mini marshmallows as he plotted how to destroy the latest manuscript he was officially editing, but unofficially disembowelling.

Going into the soup aisle Myron was shuffling behind him. “Don’t get the stuff on sale and definitely not the dented cans.”

“We always get Campbell’s,” Zeke reminded him and grabbed two vegetable soup cans with one hand.

Myron would eat any kind of soup that was put in front of him, but Zeke liked to get vegetables into the boy this way. He grabbed a few more cans of cream of mushroom soup as his own personal indulgence. Myron snatched two boxes of crackers, tossing them into the cart. Myron loved to crumble a fistful of crackers into a bowl of soup until it was a soggy mess. He would also smear peanut butter onto crackers as a snack, topping them with cheddar cheese. Zeke thought it was disgusting, but always made sure they had peanut butter in the house.

“We need more peanut butter?”

Myron shook his head. “No, but we need more jam.”

Peanut butter and jam sandwiches were Myron’s favourite meal, especially when Zeke wasn’t there to cook. More than once Zeke would find Myron’s shirts stained with a blob of red strawberry jam since he smeared it on so thickly and then slopped it easily when distracted with editing. As they came into the aisle the jam was in, Zeke grabbed the strawberry jam even though he preferred blueberry on his toast. He had no problem indulging Myron’s taste. Zeke smiled when he saw Myron grab a jar of blueberry and put it into the cart.

“That stuff is noxious,” Myron commented with a sour expression.

Zeke didn’t respond and steered the cart down the next aisle, slipping some toilet paper into the cart. He silently waited for the rant to begin, because every time they bought toilet paper, Myron started the same rant.

Right on cue, Myron started in with, “This time make sure you put the toilet paper on the right way. Every time you put a new roll on, it’s put on the wrong way. You have to put the roll on with the paper lying against the wall, Zeke.”

“That so?” The truth was Zeke did it on purpose just to drive Myron crazy. Just like he was sure Myron left his socks all over the house and walked around barefoot just to drive him crazy.

“Yes!” Myron spat. He bumped shoulders with Zeke because he was walking so close to his lover. “If you put it on the other way, it rips and hangs wrong. It has to be the other way. And while I’m at it, how many times do I have to show you how to fold your towel when you hang it up?”
“I folded it.”

Myron let out an exasperated sigh. “You folded it the wrong way. I had to refold yours this morning.”

Myron continued to bitch at Zeke the entire shopping trip and Zeke wore a small smile the entire time. Myron complained as Zeke picked out fresh vegetables and grumbled as they made their way to the checkout about the price of food these days. Myron scowled when Zeke started chatting with the checkout girl. It was Zeke who slipped several chocolates bars into the cart when he noticed Myron eyeing the sweets. There were Myron’s favourite Reese's peanut butter cups and Zeke made sure he had his own Baby Ruth bars.

Zeke knew that tonight was still going to be a long night by the way Myron pulled away from his touch as he laid his hand on Myron’s shoulder. The boy was still mad at him, even though Zeke hadn’t done anything to welcome the woman’s advances. Myron’s gut was so tied up with jealousy and his head filled with insecurities that it would take time to soothe the constant doubt. Zeke made a point of talking about their plans to go camping in the upcoming months as they walked out of the store, trying to remind Myron that he had every intention of sticking around.

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As they unloaded the groceries and put them away, Zeke made sure to keep touching Myron. Tonight was going to be long and Zeke had to make sure he didn’t let Myron withdraw to brood. As they sat down on the couch to watch ‘All In The Family’, Myron tried to sit at the opposite end and only slightly resisted as Zeke pulled him down until his head was in Zeke’s lap. Myron relaxed as they watched the show and Zeke carded his fingers through Myron’s hair.

Zeke knew there were no actions or words that could correct the wrongs done to him by others. The mistakes of his parents had hurt Myron, making him ill at ease to open his heart to trust. But Zeke knew that perhaps the single worst betrayal of Myron’s adult life had been his doing. Myron had dared to open his heart and love Zeke, only to be betrayed and abandoned. To his dying day Zeke would regret that choice. Myron had pushed him away, but it was Zeke who made the mistake of letting him. There was no comfort in saying the decisions you make made you the person you are… the person Myron loved.

Zeke was responsible for Myron’s insecurities in their relationship. That’s why he was forever tolerant of Myron’s jealousy and possessiveness. He could only be patient when Myron snapped at women for shaking his hand and understanding when Myron yelled at him for no reason. Seeing the pain and uncertainty in those brown eyes tempered his own anger. Feeling Myron relax against him now, made it all worth it for Zeke. He loved how Myron quietly laughed and rubbed his cheek against his thigh. It was during these everyday, quiet moments that Zeke started to feel redeemed for his mistake of marrying Jennifer. He was pretty sure that he was the only person who had ever got to experience Myron like this.

Leaning over, Zeke gently kissed behind Myron’s ear. Tonight wouldn’t be intense and passionate as it often was after an argument. It would be about soft touches and the ease that came after a long time knowing a lover. Zeke planned to kiss every bit of Myron’s pale skin and tease him with his mouth until Myron cried out with ecstasy.

Clichéd perhaps, but with this damaged boy, actions spoke louder than words. Zeke would touch Myron like he owned him with tender possessiveness, because Myron would read that he was needed. He would take Myron slowly, with deep thrusts while he held onto those trim hips. Zeke planned to make love to Myron with the younger man on his back, lean legs wrapped around Zeke’s hips, and gazes locked. It had to be that way tonight because it seemed to make Myron feel and
understand that he was loved.

However, that would all come later. For now Zeke whispered promises to Myron that flowed together in a rough poetry of their own. He dared not stop the hushed litany in case Myron tried to protest or argue.

“No one else, LT. Promise ya that. No one,” Zeke murmured and kissed along the arc of Myron’s neck. ‘Only you ‘n’ not leavin’. Stayin’ with ya no matter what. War couldn’t kill me, but losin’ you would. Love ya…”

Myron moaned softly, reaching up to pull Zeke into a deep kiss. His lips parted and he begged in a broken voice, “Don’t leave.”

That was the confession that Zeke had been waiting for. It was the most torturous for him to hear, but it meant that Myron trusted him enough to confess his deepest fear.

Zeke fisted his fingers into Myron’s hair and kissed him until they were both breathless. Now he confessed his own innermost fear. “Can’t lose ya again. Love you…”

END.

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