

## Summary *Zoomed*

40-year-old Robert

#single

#male and

#sociophobic

is *HOTinLOVE* with Reeva; a cutie working at *RUGGED*, the hipster-infested fashion store opposite 2C.

2C? Robert's flat on Mercer at the corner of Prince, NYC.

The place where he zooms in on Reeva whenever he likes - with *whenever-he-likes* being Robert's default mode.

He's got plenty of time; is more of a stay-at-home kinda guy, y'know?

So, golden days for him :::BUT::: Robert faces a problem that threatens to spoil his happy times: 2C's going on sale, right into lower Manhattan's booming real estate market. Offering him \$\$\$, all the while numbering his precious days with Reeva.

Desperately in need of a plan B, he sets off through the people-packed asphalt jungle of sweaty Manhattan to find out where Reeva lives. After a couple of days he hits the jackpot. Now knowing her whereabouts he decides to rent a staggeringly expensive flat with great views of her place. *Mission accomplished*, he considers, after signing the contract.

Well, hold on there, Mr. Robert!

Why? He forgot about Benji.

*Benji?* Yes, the dwarfish pop star Reeva gets all excited about. And then there's Clint, a bad, bad boy who pushes his luck with Reeva waaaaaaay too much...

Breathing vengeance, Robert goes face-to-face with the brute soon after. A confrontation that clearly puts him in the David role, of course. But instead of a slingshot he has a syringe filled with Rohypnol buried in his pocket...

Having stilled his thirst for revenge, elated Robert returns to his flat, only to watch Reeva sitting

#lonesome and

#vulnerable

at home.

To lift her doleful mood, Robert comes up with a plan: he slips into Benji's role, ensnaring and flirting with his beloved using a faked online identity.

Lo and behold: his idea seems to bear fruit - Reeva blossoms again. But in all the heat and alcohol, the boundary between Robert and his adopted *Benji-I* starts to blur. Resulting in the fatal decision to invite Reeva to Benji's upcoming show in Miami, front-row seat and all.

It should be clear by now at least that the story isn't going to end well. Something the reader will probably figure out on the very first page...

### ***Zoom on...***

#### ***Foreplay***

Imagine the mess after somebody perforates the *vena cava superior* with a randomly aimed stab.

I say this because

A) that *somebody* is *ME* and

B) I'm standing directly in front of a perforated Benji, whose blood is *:::SPOUTING:::* out like a fountain and fucking up his fancy white linen shirt.

And who's gone and got completely spattered with gore?

MeMyself&I, of course.

The guy with the knife.

The knife? Yes, a Yoshikin boner knife with a seven inch blade, to be precise. I grabbed it seconds ago from a showcase displaying Japanese craftsmanship way beyond priceless, as I was hurling myself through the lobby towards the dwarf. And right now I'm pulling it out of Benji's chest.

*:::BIG MISTAKE:::*

As if I could undo *anything* that way. Like stabbing him, to begin with...

Sure, that's crap. You can't take back such an action that easily. What's worse is that without the blade sticking in poor Benji's chest, the blood has started gushing out even more.

No longer propped up by my hand holding the knife inside him, he sinks silently to the floor. I stare down at him, then at my spattered shirt and finally at my trembling hand. Out of fear, fury or confusion? I dunno.

A quote from *The Godfather* crosses my mind. The scene before Michael shoots that corrupt pig McCluskey. It's kind of *drop the gun as soon as you've shot that bastard*.

Witnesses would stare at the weapon, not him, Michael, the killer.

So I let go of the knife which clanks onto the marble floor, making one hell of a noise.

To cut it short - the saying is utter *:::BULLSHIT:::*!

Nobody looks at the knife.

Everybody looks at me...

And I?

I

GO

RUN

RACE

straight through the lobby, away from all the escalators, doormen, guards and cops.

Off to the pools round the back, the minimal-material bikini-babes and their umbrella drinks. Plenty of them around; it might even be the world's highest density of such sweet temptation on this nice & sunny July afternoon.

Hey, we are in Miami Beach, after all.

I could almost have liked the place, if only this viscous, stinking blood wasn't smeared all over me.

*What a shitty day!*

You'd probably like to know what brought me and poor Benji into this mess?

You want the quick version or the XXL director's cut?

Okay, I'll try to make it short.

## ***chapter 1***

This damn heat!

Bathed in sweat I welter on the damp sheets and curse myself.

Curse myself for the fact that I still live in this musty hole in the middle of an asphalt desert known as Lower Manhattan. That's curse number one. Curse number two is for the fact that I still haven't got round to investing in proper air-conditioning, or at

the very least a working fan. *Only got yourself to blame, sucker!* I hiss as I curl up on the stifling linen like a worm crumbling to dust under an Armageddonish sun. What'd you say? *Why not just open the windows?* So that even moooooore of this f\*\*\*ing heat, dust and stench can enter my flat?

Let alone the noise:

fire sirens

police sirens

delivery vans

tourist hordes

construction vehicles

And all of that crap 24/7.

Hey, this is NYC, after all!

So, in conclusion: the windows stay shut!

Besides, we're only at the beginning of June. Nice forecast for a hellish, sweaty summer with me and my ramshackle flat in a half-condemned apartment block on Mercer Street, New York City 10012, United States of *Whateverica*.

Anyways, what do you need air-conditioning for when there's always a humid sponge at hand? With closed eyes I fumble *splat, splat, splat* around, till my fingers settle on the washcloth somewhere beside me. *Gotcha!* My hand firmly presses the lukewarm sponge on my overheated face until I gasp for air. The question of whether or not the crooks down at Guantanamo at least use chilled water for their waterboarding sessions crosses my mind as I chuck the hopeless cloth against the wall and scratch my itching butt.

And then, in spite of the permanent :::RIOT::: infiltrating the room even through the barricaded window panes, another noise emerges out of the depths of my flat.

DRIP.

OMG, that lousy tap strikes again...

Initially evenly, then in short burst, the porous faucet spits its water

:::DRIP - - DRIP - - DRIP - - DRIP:::

into my kitchen's enamel sink and fills the whole flat with another disgusting sound.

Suppressing a groan I turn aside, bury my ear in my outstretched arm and stare at the blotchy wallpaper in front of me, where the damp sponge has left a dark, mucoid trail.

DRIP - DRIP - DRIP

I don't need to check the vintage 80s *It's a Sony* alarm clock beside my bed to know that the little fucker has let me down, that he didn't even think about my 09:55 wake-up call. Not that it really matters; turning up somewhere dead on time is not exactly my cup of tea. I just believe that life needs a little structure. At least that's what my little brother always says. Jeff, my oh-so clever, effective brother. Who has decided to wrench me from my lethargy precisely *:::NOW:::* with a simple call. Maybe it was right on time. I mean, I was at that moment desperately trying to create the outline of a vulva out of the blotchy structures the sponge left on the wall. Thankfully the call stops this activity, together with my weak attempts to jerk off on this pitiful delusion.

*Youporn won't run away*, I cheer myself up, as I roll off the bed and onto the filthy carpet. A sudden dizziness rises inside my head as I get up and start searching for the damn phone, all the while praying that the caller gets bored and disconnects before I find it.

A high-pitched "R-O-H-O-B-E-R-T-O!" flutes through the receiver, prompting me to swear under my breath. Jeff, sounding like a fag. Which he isn't, however. Together with wife, children and double garage he lives in one of those hipster nests, besieged by *:::FAIR TRADE:::* coffee/chocolate/pineapple/toilet-paper selling biodynamic producer's markets, occupied by masses of trendy and profoundly square inhabitants somewhere in upstate New York.

"What's up?"

"Hey, brother. Just little reminder about our appointment on Thursday."

The *APPOINTMENT* - as if I could forget about *that!*

Maybe I need to go back a bit. By the time our mom died, she had left behind - besides four cats, a huge and unsorted collection of film posters from the fifties - two things which helped us immensely: savings worth over 250 grand and a spacious, but rundown flat. *That time* was five years ago: a period when Jeff, adhering religiously to his stringent life plan, was

- fresh in love
- fresh off UCONN
- fresh father of twins
- fresh owner of a shabby house
- and precisely for all these reasons: freshly in debt

So we quickly made a deal: he got 200K, me the remaining 50 and unrestricted residential rights for 1,500 square feet on the second floor of the residential complex @Mercer Street. In apartment 2C, which winds itself like a dog's leg through the whole level, I inhabit solely the loud and dusty part that gives onto Mercer. The unused *east wing* houses the poster collection, and probably also pussycat's mummified remains. *Pussycat*, the last remaining clump of fur to survive my chaotic relocation. Of course I got the critters kicked out immediately. However, the exterminator didn't get all of 'em; number four seemed too smart. But I soon got tired of the chase. So I just locked the door to the rear rooms and stopped thinking about pussy's destiny.

I haven't been back to the east wing since.

What for? Five hundred sq ft at the front of 2C is more than enough, although the layout's not exactly ideal.

Let's start with the bedroom, a fusty cubbyhole of ninety sq ft which comes along with a French double bed, a clunky wooden cupboard and an ancient Zenith TV perched atop a ramshackle acrylic table. Next to the bedroom is room #2. Windows also give onto Mercer, cue identical noise and dust. Instead of a bed and cupboard, however, it contains a couch, an armchair and an old chemist's table. Everything's cluttered with

- worn clothes
- empty pizza boxes
- and tattered newspapers

Welcome to my home office.

Yeah, from time to time I need to earn some money for newspapers, clothes and pizza.

*Wait, this guy works from home?*

Guys, I've got my reasons. I'll get back to those in a minute.

First, where does a bearded, short-sighted, middle-aged man with the beginnings of a paunch and low social competence generally work?

Exactly. In IT!

May I introduce: Robert Welsh, freelance software developer.

I send my work by email or FTP and get the money via wire transfer. No personal contact with customers, accountants or applicants needed. Better for all parties, I guess.

Did I go to university?

Definitely ::NOT::! Studying really isn't really my thing. Far too many people for my liking. I'm more than happy to have ticked off the education box by graduating high school.

So how did I learn that IT stuff?

I'm more of an autodidact, I read a lot. And the rest is GoogleYahoooood-up  
Which works just great for me.

All right, enough of that and back to 2C and the raging mess I've just described.  
STOP! Underneath all that crap you would find an almost clinically *kosher* table, on, beside and under which an arsenal of motherboards, monitors and laptops are neatly aligned: my workstation.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not a program-addicted nerd wanking off on my art. I don't even like all that software stuff, but for drinks and pizza I sometimes have to prostitute myself.

:::BUT::: not for long, because 2C's just about to sell to the highest bidder. And this is exactly where Jeff's *APPOINTMENT* comes in.

*Um, you got a buyer for that piece of crap...?*

You bet, but no worries, I'll explain that miracle. It coincides with a mix of investment bonuses, spoilt kids from Central Park West, soaring stock prices and stinking rich Russians, Chinese, Arabs, Iroquois or Mongols.

*Say what?*

Well, all those guys' money drives for Manhattan's south, to live there, to hang out or to invest a hellish lot of it down here. And this goes on for quite a while. So the value of our apartment block, including the seedy 2C, has gone through the roof.

Which means: nearly two grand per sq ft; that's the greedy *donald's* offer, who wants to tear down the whole complex and build picturesque townhouses that will go for seven million each. He's nearly got the whole building in the bag

:::save::for:::2C:::

By the way, *donald's* a mid-size property shark from Hoboken. Some kind of XS version of the big Don T; that's why I've given him the lower case. Got it?

Taking into account our 1,500 sq ft, his offer would turn each of us into a millionaire.

No surprise that Jeff wants to be on the safe side. I think he still remembers an appointment we had last year, when I greeted the realtor with a drawn bread knife.

In my defense, the night before had been pretty boozy and my hangover mood the next morning was accordingly sour. Plus, I just wasn't ready to give 2C away.

Nevertheless I had promised Jeff to behave next time. *Next time* seems to be on Thursday.

Can't wait to sell 2C. I won't miss this dump. Except for one exception.

There's more to come about this *exception* soon...

"What day is it?" A grunt, probably meant as laughter, snorts through the receiver from the Hudson Valley. I close my eyes in agony and say nothing.

"Monday, dear brother" Jeff answers his own damn question a second later.

*Thanks for the lecture, asshat!*

I hang up and leave for the john to pee.