

Jerry was there, naturally, and we had the usual conversations, “Hey man! What’s new? How’s work? Seeing anyone? bla bla bla.” This time he brought a friend. Joel Tookus. This guy was just as big as Jerry. It was like Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum playing who could eat the most hot dogs. The difference between Joel and Jerry was the size of their necks. I mean Joel had a neck the size of a gorilla’s head. Jerry was huge but Joel was a massive beast.

“Hey Tim! This is my buddy, Joel. He just transferred to us and doesn’t have family in the area so what better way to introduce him to the closest group of nut jobs than bring him the summer bbq bash?” Jerry kind of yelled even though I was standing right in front of him.

“Hey man, Tim Mooro. It’s great to meet you,” as I shook his hand and tried to not cry from the pain of the terrifying grip he gave me.

“Tim Mooro? The journalist Tim Mooro?” Joel said with that weird one eyebrow facial expression.

“Um, yeah actually. You read my stuff?” I excitedly said.

“You’re an asshole! You don’t know anything you’re talking about! Who the hell are your sources? That story you wrote about the steroids in the military? What gives you the right to say anything about the people who protect you and give you the freedom to even do your job?!” Joel was fuming.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Jerry intervened, “I don’t like most of the stuff Tim writes but this is family, that’s his job, and it’s not like he name called you out in the article, right?”

“Whatever man. Go ahead and side with the media enemy,” Joel snarked to Jerry.

So much for being Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. They apparently don’t see eye to eye or bounce off each other like natural crazy twins. Jerry took Joel down the street to cool off. Our neighborhood was like something out of a Hemingway book. Streets lined with oak trees, draped in leaves that changed with the seasons, brownstone houses neatly nestled against the sidewalk next to each other in a way that seemed to endlessly move down the street, and a neighborhood function constantly happening in the streets on the weekends and holidays. This was a street where we all knew each other or knew someone that knew you in the neighborhood.

Jerry and Joel came back and Joel seemed better since he gave me a hard Heimlich back slap along with a, “No hard feelings, right?” Yeah, right. I had a feeling this would end up being a long day.

I don’t know how Joel did it. He spun a charm with my mom better than a psycho killer trying to lure in prey. She fell head over heels with his wit.

“Tim, have you met Joel? He’s just such a gentleman and...,” she kept going on and I just tuned it out with a simple smile and nod. I mean come on. Did the entire bbq not hear him degrade my ability to write the facts about 20 minutes ago? I guess not.

“Tim, you’re heading back into the city tonight, right?” My mom awkwardly questioned.

“Yeah I’m heading back tonight. I need to finish up a story tomorrow. Then dinner?” I asked. My mom and I always had Sunday dinner so I’m not entirely sure why I asked.

“Yes, of course!” She quickly answered then turned to Joel, “Ok so you can stay in Tim’s room. Jerry just lives right next door. I’ll make breakfast for you boys in the morning before you head off and do your boy stuff. Jerry’s mom and I have BCB time tomorrow afternoon so after that we’ll whip up some dinner and have all the boys over! It will be fantastic!”

You had to be joking. So much for dinner with mom. I just didn’t get a good vibe from this guy. He had a fuse that could be set off at anytime. Forget a ticking time bomb, this guys was gonna explode without any ignition. The last person I wanted him around was my mom, and with that, alone.

I pretended to be sending an email and gave this face of excitement.

“Oh, mom! Look at that! My deadline got extended. Looks like I can hang out tonight. Movie night?” I tried to express excitement without sounding like a sneaky high school girl trying to find out if her boyfriend was cheating on her.

“Oh fantastic! Yes! How about we all go and see that new movie based on that book we just read?” My mom and her book movies.

“Oh that sounds great. I’m not sure Joel is up for that,” As Jerry and I tried to shoot him a ‘please be quiet’ look, “How about you two go enjoy that and we’ll go see that new robot movie?”

“Great. I’m sure they play at the same time so that will be perfect.”

We got to the movie theatre that night, got the mom's all checked into their movie with their popcorn, soda, and Raisinetes. Then, Joel had this great idea of going to the bar instead of the movie. Jerry loved the idea and I, well, I wanted to see the movie but I'm not a sissy so along to the bar I went. Remember Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum? They were back. Who can take the most shots? Neither of them. The more shots they tried to consume, the more the dares came. I wasn't sure if this was a military man thing or just a burly man thing. Somehow we got into a debate about who was the bigger man, a smart, educated man or a muscle, gun wielding man. Brains over brawn. This all happened so quickly, my frustration with Joel's stupidity took over so the more the dares came, the more I was keen to tackle them.

"I bet you wouldn't even jump out of a plane. You're probably scared of heights. You would scream like a little girl all the way down even though you'd be strapped to a professional which you'd probably enjoy," snarked Joel.

"You are just a nonsense, pig headed, steroid consuming idiot who only joined the military because there was nowhere else for you to go! You know what? I would jump out of a plane. I would enjoy it and I wouldn't scream like a little girl, you would!" I tried to retaliate with words but could hear how juvenile I sounded.

"Deal then. Tomorrow we jump," Joel said somewhat calmly which creeped me out. We were in a cab back home before my mom's movie was over. I guess it was a good thing we took two cars. Jerry and Joel wouldn't both fit in a car with the three of us anyway.

I don't know if it was their training or what but those guys were at my house, dressed and ready to go jump out of a perfectly good airplane at 7:30 am. I was in my sweats and needed about a gallon of coffee before even conversing with anyone.

"Hey morning glory! Ready to go?" Jerry cheekily smiled.

"Oh yeah. Just let me get some coffee and I'll go get dressed," I think I said. I wasn't entirely awake.

Pancakes, waffles, french toast, eggs, regular toast, orange juice, fruit, and coffee. These guys eat like bottomless pig pits. I could've slept for another hour with the way these two ate. My mom, of course, thought this "bonding" moment would be so much for us. She

packed her book up and her little BBCB snack and jaunted off next door for her book club shindig. I, on the other hand, got dressed and hopped in the car with the two J's.

I'm not sure if it was the three cups of coffee or the eggs, actually it was probably the nervousness that I was going up in a plane with two guys who could probably take it down.

After a safety video that was worse than my sixth grade sex ed video, we strapped up, got in the plane, and headed up to the clear blue sky. I had never jumped before so I went tandem with Jerry since he was all military certified.

"Hey man. I just wanted to say sorry again about bursting out at you during the bbq with your family. The military is just a very close thing to my heart and I don't appreciate it when people, especially reporters, say things about us that degrade our ability," Joel said.

Well, not the best timing since we are in a plane, high in the sky, with nowhere to run.

"Thanks, Joel. I really do my best to verify all my facts before sending it to my editor. I'm not a liar, just a journalist trying to inform the readers," I mentioned.

That didn't go over well. Remember when I said he was worse than a ticking time bomb? Explosion in t-minus two seconds. Well, no, it was less than half a second.

"You're just jealous! We get to carry a gun, protect the people of the United States, see the world, create bonds, and what do you do? You write words that attack us. The people who protect you! You're all the same! You probably tried to enlist and got denied because you're too damn little and couldn't survive bootcamp. You're a just a sissy little girl," Joel yelled.

"Joel, man, let's just jump and have some fun," Jerry tried to reason with him.

"You're on his side! You're a two faced asshole! Go ahead and side with the enemy!" Joel screamed as he hunched up in the airplane towards Jerry.

I've been in turbulence in an airplane but a full on brawl between two people who resemble rhinoceros' in a confined space? I thought the plane was going to roll. The bangs, the hits, the spit, the blood, everywhere. I tried to stay in whatever corner I could find. I turned around to look out the window and I all I heard was a loud rip and I felt as if I had just been a car crash and experienced the worst whip lash. My back fell to the floor of the plane and as I turned all I could see was Jerry trying to get up. His face swollen from punches and

Joel just standing there with my parachute. I wasn't joking when I said he was a beast. He ripped my pack open and tore the strings my bag. A sitting duck had a better chance at surviving an attack from a hawk than I did with Joel. I tried to scream for the pilot but those planes are so damn loud. There's only a little window the pilot opens up to let us know we are at the right altitude. The window opened, the pilot gave the ok, I screamed bloody murder to try and get the pilot's attention, and Joel just said, "Bon voyage."

Joel was right. I screamed like a little girl.