

THE CONVERSATION

"An anonymous tip threatens to turn a
Detective's life upside down."

Writer Number: 25-DE04-W23

EXT. NEW YORK - SUBURBS - MORNING

Standard suburban house. Car parked in the driveway.

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

Kitchen table. Cardboard files, murder case notes. A man, face unseen, comes in SLURPING black coffee. A CELLPHONE ALARMS. NYPD DETECTIVE BADGE on a table. He swipes it up, sets down the coffee, spilling some. TUTS. Exits the room.

EXT. NEW YORK - SUBURBS - MORNING

Across the road a house door is open. A BOY (12) brings out his bike. On a driveway DETECTIVE JACK HESKELL (40), serious-faced opens his car door. GUN on waist. Cellphone RINGS.

HESKELL

Heskell.

DELANEY (V.O.)

Heskell, morning. A guy just called in: says he's got information on a cold case you were involved in.

HESKELL

Okay. What's his name?

DELANEY (V.O.)

He wants to remain anonymous but he says he'll meet you at *Bills Bar and Burger*.

HESKELL

He there now?

DELANEY

Yavo!

Heskell hangs up. The boy waves to him. Heskell holds up his hand. Gets in his car, and drives off.

EXT. BILLS BAR AND BURGER - MORNING

A HOBO (38), bushy beard, scars on his temple, forehead and under his green eyes is waiting. Heskell pulls up. The hobo waves hesitantly at him. His voice is SCRATCHY.

HOBO

Detective Heskell.

HESKELL
You called me?

The Hobo nods. Heskell looks at him and SIGHS.

HESKELL (CONT'D)
I'd better tell them you're with
me.

INT. BILLS BAR AND BURGER - MORNING

A corner seat and table.

HESKELL
What should I call you?

HOBO/T
'T' will do.

HESKELL
Well, T, I'm eating. You want?

HOBO
Crispy chicken sandwich'd be nice.

Heskell beckons the WAITRESS. She grimaces when she sees the hobo, but remains professional.

HESKELL
Sweetheart, Number 7 for him and
number 13 for me. I'll have a black
coffee.

He looks at the hobo, who nods.

HESKELL (CONT'D)
For him too.

WAITRESS
Sure thing Jack. Coming up.

She leaves. Heskell claps his hands.

HESKELL
So, what you got?

HOBO
I made some enquiries about you on
the street. People say you're
straight up. Treat the law like its
the word of God. No grace.

HESKELL

It's the only thing between us and the law of the jungle buddy. But we're not here to discuss me. You have information on a cold case?

The Hobo nods.

HOBO

I do. But let me ask you this first. You ever kill someone?

EXT. WOODS - EARLY MORNING [FLASHBACK]

A canopy of trees above. Sunlight flashes. Jerky movements as if the camera's being dragged. We stop. A THUD like wood hitting wood.

END OF FLASHBACK

HESKELL

No. You ever kill someone?

HOBO

Yes.

Heskell sits up. His hand moves towards his holstered weapon.

HESKELL

So you're here to confess.

HOBO

I am - but I got conditions.

The waitress brings the coffees, the crispy chicken sandwich and Bubba's Shrimp basket for Heskell. Heskell gives her waitress \$40 from his wallet.

HESKELL

Keep the change darling.

The hobo pouts his lip.

HOBO

That was generous.

Heskell can't tell if the Hobo is being sarcastic. Sips his coffee, watches him.

HOBO (CONT'D)

I'll tell you my story, then you tell me yours.

Heskell grits his teeth, rolls his eyes.

HESKELL

Story? You think I got time for stories?

(exhales angrily)

If you're here to confess - start talking. Otherwise, I wasted my morning for another attention seeking *bum*.

The hobo holds up one, then two fingers.

HOB0

I got info on one murder, two murderers. And don't call me *bum*. I served this country.

Heskell sits back and regards the hobo.

HESKELL

You served? Where?

HOB0

Afghanistan. Kunduz.

HESKELL

Okay. Thank you for your service. I was fooled by your...

He waves his finger towards the hobo.

HESKELL (CONT'D)

...disguise.

(beat)

Can we proceed, please?

The Hobo settles back on the diner chair.

HOB0

I thought going into the Service would straighten me out, you know. Train my mind. But in Afghanistan I saw it's not just war that's hell, it's what it makes people do...

INT. KUNDUZ - RUINED BUILDING - AFTERNOON [FLASHBACK]

A US Marine (30) green eyes, with 'T-Dog' on his helmet stands next to a DEAD SNIPER near a window. There's a table on its side across the room. He uses his radio.

HOBO/T

This is Alpha-One. Enemy combatant KIA. Room is clear. Moving to grid 38SLF311.

. A chunk of wall EXPLODES beside him. T jumps aside.

. A RIFLE BUTT has emerged from one end of the table.

. T FIRES BACK through the table. A BOY YELLS. A small hand slumps into view.

'T' cautiously approaches, and sees a NINE-YEAR-OLD AFGHAN BOY... dying. T's face crinkles with anger and grief. He slides off his helmet and lets it fall to the floor.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. BILLS BAR AND BURGER - AFTERNOON

Heskell is watching the Hobo closely. He says nothing.

HOBO

I came out the service angrier at life than when I went in. One day I got into it at a bar: well, Marines ain't trained to fight nice. Judge wouldn't even look at me when he passed sentence.

HESKELL

So you're a con then?

HOBO

Yeah, I made bad choices.

A LOUD TAPPING on the bar window. A DRUNK is there, LEERING in. Makes kissing expressions at the waitress. Heskell turns to watch.

HOBO/T

Why did you become a cop?

HESKELL

To protect and serve - why else?

The waitress points to the drunk, then points down the street. The drunk staggers off, his trousers sagging at the back.

WAITRESS

Every damn day!

The hobo scoffs.

HOBO

You want to protect and serve *this*?
Are you sure there ain't some other
reason?

Heskell just looks annoyed. The hobo taps his own chest.

HOBO (CONT'D)

Ex-con. But jail actually changed
me for the better.

Heskell's eyebrows went up.

HESKELL

That's not usually the case.

HOBO

It wasn't - at first. I lashed out
at everyone who even looked at me
sideways. Yeah, you can't do that
in there. The last time I got
rushed I remember thinking "This
time I'm dead."

He indicates to the scars on his face and throat.

INT. PRISON INFIRMARY - AFTERNOON [FLASHBACK]

T's eyes open. He's bandaged around the head, waist and chest
in a hospital bed, opposite a stained wall. Scarred. From the
ceiling above water drips regularly. Moving is painful. He
watches the drips, grimaces with hate.

A PRISON MINISTER steps into view. He looks at T for any sign
that they can talk. T ignores him, just keeps on staring. The
minister leaves a GIDEON BIBLE on the table. Night falls,
morning comes - multiple times.

INT. PRISON INFIRMARY - MORNING

Darkness. A SONGBIRD is SINGING.

We see sunlight. T opens his eyes. He looks up, face softens.

HOBO/T (V.O.)

That bird was free. It was so
joyful with its simple little life.
And *then* I thought "Do I *really*
want to keep on feeling this?"

T's eyes go down to the floor. The concrete is worn down where the drips keep falling. He narrows his eyes, cocks his head.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. BILLS BAR AND BURGER - MORNING

The Hobo pours his coffee onto the bread until a patch starts to dissolve. Heskell looks aghast. The Hobo holds up his hand. Wait. He puts his fingers into the coffee and then shakes a drip into the soggy circle on the bread. Then another. A hole appears in the bread.

HOBOT
I thought maybe, just maybe...
drips of something *good* could wear
away the hate I felt.

INT. PRISON INFIRMARY - EVENING [FLASHBACK]

T hesitantly takes the Bible, opens it, and starts reading PROVERBS. We focus in on Proverbs 4:23.

HOBOT (V.O.)
"Above all else, guard your heart
because everything you do flows
from it."

T stops, impacted. He continues reading with renewed interest.

We HEAR DRIPS... DRIP...DRIP...DRIP.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. BILLS BAR AND BURGER - MORNING

Heskell rolls his eyes.

HESKELL
So you found Jesus in lockup. That
doesn't make you profound, it just
makes you a cliché.

The hobo leans forward.

HOBOT
It made me free. You feel free?

Heskell shrugs. It's too early for philosophy.

HOBOT (CONT'D)
Okay. What's the hardest part of
being a cop?

HESKELL
That's easy. People like you. Day
after day after day.

HOBOT
Protect and serve eh?

HESKELL
What do you mean?

HOBOT
It looks like you forgot to protect
yourself. You know, guard your own
heart.

Heskell smiles uneasily. The Hobo leans forward.

HOBOT (CONT'D)
You ever seen any bodies,
detective?

HESKELL
That's a stupid question, I'm a
murder detective. Of course.

The Hobo watches him. Heskell draws back, watching the hobo
in turn.

HESKELL (CONT'D)
Where you from, T?

The Hobo points up.

HOBOT
North. Barrington.

Heskell freezes a little. His eyes crease suspiciously.

HESKELL
I know Barrington.

EXT. BARRINGTON WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON [FLASHBACK]

SOUNDS of a STONE STRIKING A CAN. LAUGHTER. Two scruffy
looking boys, YOUNG TOM (15) and YOUNG JACK (17) are knocking
cans off a wall with a slingshot. Jack's holding a stone.

YOUNG TOM
Damn, Jack. They should call you
'One shot Heskell!'

Jack looks around. It's getting dark.

YOUNG TOM (CONT'D)
(plaintive)
I don't want to go back.

Jack says nothing. He angrily loads the stone. Pulls back the elastic. Fires. Can BLASTS furiously off the wall.

END OF FLASHBACK

HOBO/T
So you know the woods. The Dell.

HESKELL
Yeah, I know them. Used to play
there with my brother.

HOBO/T
You remember they found a body down
there? Roger Dupont. He ran a
foster home. Rumour was that he was
abusing those kids.

Heskell feels a chill, his shoulders squeeze in a bit.

HESKELL
I heard. What of it?

HOBO/T
What does your brother do
Detective?

HESKELL
I don't know. We lost touch.
What's your *point*?

The Hobo runs his hands through his hair.

HOBO/T
The locals say that two boys from
the foster home did it. That's why
they disappeared the day before the
body was found.

Heskell feels his hands sweating. His hand moves towards the gun again.

HOBOT (CONT'D)
 Talk is that one joined the army;
 and the other... became a
 detective.

Heskell launches across the table, grabs the Hobo and pulls him close. The plates skid away, one falls. The waitress looks shocked, other DINERS watch on.

HESKELL
 (growling)
 Who ARE you?

The Hobo looks him straight in the eye.

HOBOT (TOM)
 Don't you recognise me Jackie?

Heskell goes weak. Eyes open wide. He leans forward - takes a *really* good look at the scarred, bearded man in front of him.

HESKELL
 Tom?...

Stunned, Heskell releases Tom. People watch - then go back to their food. The waitress looks scared. Heskell holds up a placating hand. Heskell turns to Tom, gestures helplessly.

HESKELL (CONT'D)
 I thought you were *dead*. What...
 why... *Why this?*

TOM
 Because you wouldn't have talked to
me about *this*, Jack. We swore,
 remember?

Tom emphasizes 'me' and 'this' with hard finger taps.

EXT. BARRINGTON WOODS - EARLY MORNING [FLASHBACK]

A canopy of leaves. The camera points to the sky, moving like its being dragged.

ROGER DUPONT
 Urgghhh.

A teenage face - YOUNG JACK comes into view. Then YOUNG TOM comes into frame.

YOUNG TOM
 Jack. He's still *alive*. What do we
]do?

YOUNG JACK

We end it.

We see Jack with a CHUNK OF WOOD in his hand. It comes down towards the camera. Then... a THUD and abrupt total darkness.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. BILLS BAR AND BURGER - MORNING

Tom leans forward.

TOM

(quietly)

We *killed* that man, Jackie. At the time I thought he deserved it for what he did but.. I went to war to try and make things right. Maybe you thought the law would balance the scales... But in the end only God made me right. And now I need to pay for what I did. Take me in.

He puts his wrists upright on the table. Heskell stares at his brother. A hot tear forms in his eye.

HESKELL

(quietly)

Are you CRAZY? I'm not turning in my own *brother*. And what about me? This'll be the end for me... they'll figure out I was involved.

TOM

Yes. It'll be the end... but also the beginning.

He reaches over, puts a hand firmly on Heskell's hand.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm at peace Jackie. I'm free - *wherever* I go. And if even the smallest part of you trusts that I'm telling the truth, you could be too. Let me show you what I know.

HESKELL

You sound like a Jesus freak.

TOM

Better a Jesus freak than Judge Dredd. My name is Jack Heskell and I AM THE LAW.

Heskell LAUGHS because otherwise he'll cry. Wipes his eye.

HESKELL
You may have bought into this God
thing but you're still an idiot.

He shakes his head as if to clear it.

HESKELL (CONT'D)
I need a beer. No, something much
much stronger.

TOM
You open to beer and a few scraps
of wisdom?

HESKELL
(sighs)
...Yeah... I suppose. If there is a
God it can't hurt to hear Him out.
Come on.

They get up. Heskell leaves \$50, addresses the waitress.

HESKELL (CONT'D)
Sorry about the plates.

They exit the Burger bar. A BIRD is SINGING. Tom smiles.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

HESKELL
What are you smiling about?

TOM
You DO still have a heart.

Heskell stops, looks annoyed.

HESKELL
Can't you at least wait until I've
had a drink?

Tom puts his arm around his brother's shoulder. He says
nothing. They walk off towards the morning sun which soon
obscures their figures. The BIRD keeps SINGING.

THE END

