

Blow Back
By, Richard Tornello © 2011

I
2025 CE, Reston VA

I woke to very heavy knocking on my condo door. It was more banging than a knocking. What was it this time? I've got rugs, the XM Radio was low, and the cats were not chasing each other. "Oh go away, I mumbled

I'm still half asleep. "Hang on, Hang on, I'm coming." It had to be someone in the condo. The Concierge would have called ahead before he let a visitor into the building.

I opened the door. I didn't even bother to check the security viewer. There, in front of me, taking up most of the entrance, is one well dressed human, holding a badge.

"Mr. Titillo, Good morning. Sorry to wake you. I'm Detective Bradley from Homicide. May I come in?"

"Yeah... sure, its okay.

"Homicide, what brings you here?" And I really wake up. "Is there someone in my family? Was it my daughter Nire. "Nire's not....?"

"Please, relax. No, no one in your family is involved."

"It's *nothing* like that." He stresses the nothing.

"I have a few questions on an incident that has been turned over to my department."

"Homicide?" As an incident? I question outloud. "Come into the kitchen." An incident, he must be hardened to his job. As I lead him to the kitchen, I say, "Nice suit. I used to sell men's clothes. I do notice." I use the conversation to gather myself. "What a way to wake up. I couldn't recommend it."

He laughs.

Then he tells me, "Past job with a good retirement from a special military forensics outfit allows for these rags. I can't afford it on my current salary. I just couldn't stay retired." And he adds, "I like good clothes."

"You're here because?" I questioned as I set the perk on. The aroma of fresh coffee fills the room.

"To the point, and this is a bit different. This homicide is a cold case."

I notice that he's looking at the coffee machine.

Not to be rude I ask, "I'm having coffee, do you want coffee or tea or water?"

"Coffee, if you don't mind. Black no sugar please."

"A cold case? So what can I do for you? Now I'm curious. It's not current, so?"

"Thanks," he says as I hand him the mug and inquires as he sips, "Does the name Tony Di Martino mean anything to you?"

I stop and turn to him. "If it's the punk I remember, yes it does. He was THE local bully along with his so-called associates and friends when I was in high school. Why do you ask?"

"Next question. Ever have a run in with him?" He's looking straight at me. It's piercing.

That answer was easy. "Everybody did. He shot at me once. One day he beat the tar out of me on the bus, for the fun of it." And then I added, "If anyone else had done a fraction of what Tony did, Whitey, the bus driver, would have pulled the bus over and thrown the kid off. Not Tony, even the bus driver was afraid of him."

"Shot at you? There's no record of a complaint ever being filed. Did you tell you parents?" Detective Bradley says incredulously.

I gave him a look. "Tell my parents, are you kidding? No one squealed on anyone back then. It's not like today where you get arrested for flipping the finger. I just dealt with it. And with Tony, you didn't file anything. He was well placed if you get my drift. Why are you asking me all this?"

"His nephew is a detective back where you both lived. Tony was murdered fifty three years ago. There was no suspect that the police could trace. The only two witnesses claimed some short punk just shot him for no reason. The case went cold.

"The kid always swore he would find his uncle's killer. He didn't care about his uncle's personal history. He was murdered one afternoon fifty three years ago."

"Yeah, so? I can't say I'm sorry to hear that. Why are you here?"

"There were two spent shell casing left at the scene of the murder. The kid kept the casings in a safe for years. When he became a detective he had all but forgotten about them until a month or so ago. He ran a few checks. First the powder residue was not manufactured from that era. Second, the company that manufactured the ammunition, PCM, didn't even exist. And thirdly, your DNA and prints were on the casings. That's why I'm here."

He added, "What's also odd, the bullets extracted from the corpse are missing."

It's New Jersey, nothing is odd there. I sip my coffee and give him the *so go on*.

He continues, "I can't figure out what is happening or happened. I have modern ammunition with a current upstanding citizen's prints and DNA on fifty year old evidence. It points to you butBy the way you do own a few hand guns, correct?"

"Yes I do."

He states, "A Glock 19 C and a Sig P239 and a Sig P210-5, if I'm not mistaken." It's not a question. He's done his homework.

"Yes again. I sold the P210-5 a few years back when I stopped competing IPSC and Bulls Eye. I have the records if you want to track it. By-the-way, you forgot to list the FWB and Pardini."

"No I don't care about the FWB and Pardini. They're not the correct calibers. "The purchase data is on record. You seem to only purchase from dealers?" It's a question and statement.

"These guns, except for the Glock, are all special order competition weapons. That's why the dealers. And I like to support local business." I respond

"If you still have the others in your possession I'd like to take them in for analysis."

"Sure. But I had the Sig's 19 C barrel and firing pin changed a few years ago due blow back from the open ports. I got covered with soot and the sites were blacked out with the gun blast. I changed the pin, due to wear. I had paid cash at a gun show. That will come up with my original records that I keep. Just thought you should know."

He gives me a look.

"You still have the original barrel?"

"No. I trashed it when I swapped the barrel out. Why keep it?"

"For resale. It is a 19C. I would have kept the barrel for matching serial numbers," he stresses. It sounds like an accusation.

I reiterated , "Even if I wanted to use the gun for serious target work when I shot about 2 magazines the front sites darkened due to the blow back from the open ports on top. I couldn't acquire the target properly. The barrel was useless. Now it has a little more recoil but it's still a great close in weapon. That's the only reason I kept it."

“Detective, do you want to come with me as I get them or wait?”

“Is it prudent for me to wait here?”

I give him a look “*as if*” and state, “Take your pick. They’re both in their cases.”

“If you wouldn’t mind, please go get them.”

I get them and with proper gun etiquette I open the box pull the Glock, lock the side back and drop the magazine. I hand it to him, muzzle pointing at myself. I do same with the Sig. They were both empty to begin with.

“Very good.” He states.

“These are in nice shape, very clean.”

“I hardly use them any more. I practice every now and then.”

Before he could inquire, “And I do not reload.”

I asked, “May I have a receipt for these before you leave?”

“Of course.”

“And the witnesses?” I ask.

“They’re long dead. Drug deals.”

“Oh, how convenient.” I answer.

He gives me another look and states, “I’ll be back in a few days. You’re not leaving the local area any time soon?”

“No, I have no immediate plans.”

“Good. If you do please call me. Here’s my card. By the way what type of ammunition do you use?”

“In the P210-5, I only used Winchester hollow point, 115 grain as per the importers instructions. The Glock, I use whatever is cheap for practice, and the P239, ball for practice. Hollow point for carry in both. Why?”

“Just asking. Keep the papers on the 210. I won’t need them.” He gets up to leave.

I walk him to the door.

“Thanks for the coffee. I haven’t had perked in a while. Nice flavor.” He shakes my hand. His hand is huge. I bet both hands could surround my neck easily.

“You’re welcome.” And I shut the door.

I finish my coffee.

If he only knew. I thought back to my old job.

In 2015 I worked as a recruiter in a very black R&D environment. I can’t even mention the operation or the clearance today. The things we did sometimes verged on what one would read in the fiction Zines. That place was blacker than the Site 51 bullshit.

Management called it an internal contest. They required some guinea pigs. They wanted 5 volunteers in all. The R&D scientists had worked out the processes for time travel. The technology was and still is beyond anything I understand.

The carrot was simple, if it worked, we would get full retirement and a very hefty bonus upon our return. I was informed, along with those who volunteered, “The Winners”, if we returned, and they stressed the IF, we would never have to worry about *anything* again. The potential down side was that the experiment wouldn’t work and we’d die or even worse.

I remember thinking, *Holy shit, time travel; this was a way to see if it worked.* What did I have to loose? I was older, divorced, and nothing really going on at the time. I didn’t care. This would be a trip of a lifetime!

Part of the deal was that we would never be allowed to tell anyone, ever. We could not EVER communicate with the other volunteers. Who would believe us?

If successful, the potential implications on our history as we knew it and the whole planet for that matter were enormous. These guys were playing for keeps.

I won! I won!

So did 4 others, what a rush! We each got to pick a time and place in our own past. There would be no jumping to some other reality or past that was not directly related to our lives. The final caveats were no drastic changes to history allowed. We were given a few hours and no one would ever validate this activity. So what ever happened, happened and that would be that. There were no other restrictions.

II

Simultaneously 1972 CE New Jersey and 2015 CE, at an undisclosed location.

The Black Crow Head Shop. The sign said it all. What it should have read was ‘Come right in and bust us’. What a bunch of idiots.

He was there. The blue Pinto Runabout was parked in front of the karate school next door. Parking in front of the school was fine until 5 PM.

I walked in, looked around and inhaled deeply. Ah yes, that old familiar perfume. Pictures flooded my memory. Speaking of which out of the back came two I remembered very well.

“Hello Nancy, Hello Grouch.”

They stopped dead in their tracks. The two of them long hair, wearing identical bell bottom jeans, tie died tee shirts and not much else. What a sight.

“Who are you?” they asked in unison.

“I’m not a narc. That much I can tell you!” I knew that was the first paranoid thought all of them had when any straight appearing stranger came in. And I must admit I was straight looking therefore, suspect. I was wearing wraparound Ray Bans, cameo cargo pants and a long Hawaiian shirt.

I heard the exhaust fans in the back running.

Both of them looked at me, disbelievingly. They made no attempt to hide that fact.

“Yes, I know you don’t trust me. What’s a person, looking like me, looking like this, my age, doing in here, The Black Crow Head Shop, if not a narc?”

She is very cute, nineteen years old, tall, leggy and down right sexy, like her Mom. He is a frizzy headed student about 23 years old. He studies a street fighting form of karate next door and boxes. He had a medical discharge from the Marines. Both of them “hang out” and work at their friends business. In the early 1970’s, selling underground magazines and drug paraphernalia was a legitimate business. The drugs were not.

“Listen,” I tell them, “I’m from the future.” No one will ever believe them. That much I knew.

He chokes and spits his drink out. She starts to laugh. Her eyes are sparkling like I remember.

“And I’m from Alpha Centuri,” as he recovers from his shock and states a matter of fact. I knew he studied astronomy so this was not out of character. He painted too and some of his paintings hung on the walls. One in particular grabbed my attention. He had completed a copy of Picasso’s *The Rape of the Sabine* after David. It was that good. I should have purchased it.

“I’m his first mate.” She adds quickly.

I know he would have loved *that* to be the truth. So would I, even now. I thought it never happened. I learned different later on.

“Listen I know you two are not going to believe this.” I could see they were skeptical, paranoid, and intrigued. “I’m here, from the future. I won a trip back in time to see what I could see. It’s an experiment. We, I took a chance that it would work. If it did, and it does. I’m here,” pointing to myself, “we are allowed to have some fun and stuff.”

She smiled, “And stuff?” she asked.

“Yeah Nanc, and stuff.”

“So where’s your time machine?” he asks sarcastically pointing to nothing outside. “Or are you some nut case from Marlboro? Where did you get those pants?” I’m wearing modern cameo cargo pants. They’ve never seen anything like it. It was a clothes shop too.

“And who are these others you mentioned?”

“I’ll answer your questions. First, I don’t need a machine. The transporter, the actual machine is in the future. I’m only here for a little while. This is a one shot R&D experiment that as you can see is working. I am tracked by what we call a RFID device imbedded in my skin. They know where I am geolocation wise, but not what I’m doing.” I pull up my shirt and show the faint square of a chip. They have no idea.

“The others are in where ever they picked to go. I don’t know and it’s none of my business.

“I have a few things I want to do and some people I would like to meet before *I have to return*. I should be able to meet them here.”

“You know... you look very familiar, Mister what’s your name...?” The Grouch asks.

“Artie, just call me Artie.” He doesn’t get it. Good, he must be stoned.

“You know Artie,” he points to the glass case and the goods for sale, “If you’re not a narc, why would you pick this kind of place. This can’t be a safe place for a time traveler considering what goes on here, at times.” He laughs at the poor pun.

“Maybe so, and then again, maybe it is. Thanks for your concern.” I responded sincerely.

Then I said and I have no idea why, “Listen you two, you especially,” I point to the guy, “You need to get your butt out of here. This place is nothing but trouble and YOU know it! You have two kids, and....” I point to Nancy.

To her, “Listen sweetie, I know intimately what you’re about. Why do you keep doing that? Where’s your pride? You’re pretty, smart, and by god, you really need to get away from here before it traps you. Do you want to be like your Mom and Dad?”

Back to him, “The same goes for you. I know you like her, but you are encumbered with other responsibilities. Take care of that first, finish what you set out to do and then see what happens.”

I know now nothing good ever did, oh well. I tried.

The two of them pull closer together protecting each other and looking at me like I’m a mad man.

“I’m going to tell you both something that only someone returning to their past’s would know.”

I whisper in his ear and he turns white. I whisper in her ear and she turns bright red.

They look at me a bit differently, then at each other.

“What are you suggesting?” she asks.

“As I said, you, my sweet, should not go to that ashram. That’s a lost path. Finish school the way you planned, and quit doing what you’re doing here! This is degrading, all of it. You’re better than that.”

“And you, you fucking hormone driven idiot,” pointing to him, “Get your butt in gear, dump that other crazy psycho girlfriend of yours. I know she’s great in the sack. There will be others, trust me.

“She’s an absolute destroyer. Due to the abuse heaped upon her by her parents she’ll never be a whole person. You didn’t know that did you? That’s what’s behind that part of her that appears so out of place, that anger you witnessed.”

“And your wife?” I add.

He nods. He has to be very stoned not to punch me out at this point. I just blew his cover.

Nancy is looking at him, “Other girl friend?” She’s pissed. A wife she can deal with.

She looks at me, “Ashram, how did you know about that?”

“I told you where I was from. Hello!

“I’m waiting here for some people I know who show up almost every day. I have a few things to settle. You two just happen to be here and not the boss. I know who you both are.

“To reiterate, I’m not the cops!”

“Okay,” he says. “I’m going to lock the door for a bit. Why don’t we go into the back and talk? I want to know more of what’s going on.”

She is a bit frightened. She notices my 9mm. It’s a Glock 19 C, accurate and compact.

“If you’re not a cop what’s with the gun?” she squeaks.

He stops in his tracks, “GUN?”

“Yes, I always carry. We are allowed where I come from.”

“Maybe you should leave. I think you are a cop. We just work here, and.”

“*Yes I know,*” I interrupt. I do something I thought I wouldn’t. I pull my license out of my wallet and present it.

They both look at it, me, and the license, again.

“Look at the DATE! The NAME!” My voice is raised.

“Do you have any other proof?” He asks. He is shaking.

If that wasn’t enough back then they didn’t even have the holographic technology for style ID that I carried.

I pull my gun out, drop the magazine, lock the slide back and empty the chamber. The gun is now empty and I hand it to him, muzzle pointing at me. “You ever hear of this type of gun? It’s made of plastic. Here is my interstate weapons permit too.” I hand both of them my other photo company ID.

Mean time there is a banging on the front door. We all ignore it. They keep banging, hard, for a while. Then it stops. In that time I tell them all I know about them and what they will be doing if they do not turn their lives around.

I ask, “Would you please re-open this store. I really am waiting for one person in particular. I owe him something. I’ve done my good deed for today,” as I off handily

point in their general direction. They both look at me as I reload, and chamber a new hollow point without even looking down.

“If I don’t meet him soon, I have to return without accomplishing my goal. I will be most upset.”

“Who are you supposed to meet?” nancy asks.

“Tony, Tony Di Martino. I owe him big time for something he did.”

“You know that knock on the door?” He pointed out front.

“Yeah...?” and I don’t finish.

“That was him.”

“Damn, I win this trip back. I can straighten a few little things out. No major changes they say. And what? I blow it... talking to you two. Fuck.”

I still had some time. The Shamrock Inn and topless bar was just down the end of street. I guessed he might be there.

I walked in. It was dark. There were a few souls that I recognized from back then. Some were already drunk their heads on the bar and others ogling the dancers. One dancer I knew. She was a heart throb from high school, and later a lover. Ah yes.

She was into drugs and prostitution years later. She committed suicide. What a waste.

I refused to look at her. She was smart and I knew that she probably would have guessed who I was.

Tony, the guy I was actually seeking was with his usual group of guys. They were loud and brutish. Did I expect anything different?

I ordered a soda not wanting to cloud my senses. I had just a little more time. Would he make a move that I could follow?

Time to go. Oh well. I paid my bill and left a tip for the soda.

No use waiting for nothing. My time was about up. I got up to leave and go to my pick-up time zone by the shop. I walked out the door. My tracking sensor indicated my geolocation. That would be it, experiment over.

I may have saved two kids but never got to take care of the unfinished business that festered all these years.

Walking out into the bright sunlight I was almost blinded. I put on my wraparound ray bans. From behind me, “Hey you, short guy, you with the funny lookin pants and glasses. You got a problem?”

I turned around and there he was. Two of his friends were just behind him. I think I recognized them.

“No, no problem. Just a drink and a look see. Why?”

My hands were in my cargo pants pocket and I had my hands on the trigger which released the safety. I had the combat trigger replaced with a lighter target trigger. I had to be careful.

He says it again, “Hey you with the odd pants. You were staring at my girl in there. I don’t like it when a stranger stares at my girl.” Tony was not original. He was holding a baseball bat.

“Your girl? She’s a stripper, a pole dancer; she’s there for the view. You mentioned my pants. You got a thing for them?” I was thinking, Is he looking for a fight or what?

“So you’re a smart-ass too.

“You didn’t pay her anything.

“That’s not very gentlemanly of you.”

“I had a soda and was there for all of five minutes. Oh, so now you’re her pimp too?” I retort.

“Listen you little wise ass, I ought to kick the living shit out of you.” As he said that two of his buddies, Steve and Tory, began to make a flanking move. Yes I do recall them.

They had jumped me once. Tory, the taller one held me down and Steve beat the crap out of me because I was “lucky to be on the street I was on,” as he had put it.

“You know there’s something real familiar about him,” Steve, the smarter of the three said.

“You know this old guy?” Tony asks.

“Never met him but something just reminds me of someone, I can’t place him,” said Steve.

Tony was smiling and said, “This is going to be too easy.

“Here’s the deal. You, Old Guy, you pay me and my associates here \$100.00 each and we only hurt you a bit for being disrespectful to the lady and to us.

“You don’t pay and who knows.
“The swamp is behind, there.” He points.

I don’t need to look and it wouldn’t be prudent either.

He pointed to the woods that I knew like the back of my hand when I was a kid. We used to play there all the time. Major subdivision construction had not yet reached this far. The woods were thick and deep. I knew what he was talking about. A few people disappeared and were discovered years later. No convictions or leads. This is New Jersey.

His friends were grinning. “This is going to be fun,” one said to the other.

“And easy.”

Tony demanded, “Ok shorty, the money.”

“The name is Artie, and thank you but I think I will decline your kind offer to donate to such a worthy cause and I will decline the invitation for the nice stroll in the woods you just offered. If you don’t mind, I must be leaving.”

Talking gave me a few more seconds to prepare.

It was mid day and there no traffic to speak of. No witnesses. There would never be. They had thought of that I’m sure. The parking wrapped around to the far back side of the building. I let myself be slowly backed up. It was away from the street and was empty of vehicles.

Tony said to me, “Have it your way.
“Gentlemen I get first crack at Mr. Polite here. Mr. Artie Polite.
“Rest in pieces,” I heard him mutter.

The two of them began to move, to circle me to keep me penned as I got closer to rear delivery section the building.

I kept backing up, slowly. I let him get close, not quite a baseball bats length.

I could guess Tony was confident of the outcome and looking forward to it.

The IPSC training came into play. As he raised the bat I pulled the gun, rapid fire, and two to the head. I heard the spent cases hit the ground.
Finished.

I put a bead on Steve and had enough room to keep Tony in view. They quickly backed up.

“Gentlemen,” I remember saying. “This is not *exactly* how I planned this day, but thank you.”

“You mother fucker.”

“We’re gonna to get your ass. We will hunt you down.” Tory was always the first to mouth off, as long as he wasn’t alone.

I turned to my right, backed out and then slowly headed toward the Crow. I put my hand in the pocket with the gun. I made sure they saw that. I took my finger off the trigger, the safety came on, and placed my index finger alongside the trigger guard.

They both moved away looking at me and staring at the late Mr. Di Martino.

They did not come after me as I started walking back to the head shop. They were not that stupid.

I had 8 rounds left. Single stacks left something to be desired. But they were more concealable.

There was soot on my hands, face and front sites from the blast ports. I hated that. But the upside was little or no muzzle flip.

Just as I reached the front of the store and was about to enter, I was transported. The two inside stared in wonder as I disappeared. That’s a look I never forgot.

III

2025 CE Reston VA

A week went by and Detective Bradley knocked on my condo door again. The concierge called ahead this time. He just knocked; no banging.

I opened the door. He’s still just as big.

“Detective Bradley, please, come in.”

He asks, “Thanks do you have any coffee brewing? I could use it. I’ve been working this case all this time and spent the last night trying to figure it out.”

“Sure, black no sugar, correct?”

“Yes and ?” I question. He is looking at me in a very strange manner.

He stares straight into my eyes as he hands me my guns.

I inspect them. They are immaculate. “Thanks for returning these in such nice condition.”

“Two to the head, one right on top of the other. Either very lucky shots or someone *knew* what he or she was doing.” He is shaking his head as he makes the hinted accusation.

“I researched this victim’s history in more detail. Di Martino was a thug. Someone did us a favor back then. I’m guessing if he or she had not, Di Martino probably would have cost our side a few good lives.”

Then he says, “There is no statute of limitations on capital crimes like murder. I know it was you but this would never, in a million years, hold up in court. And if it wasn’t you, then our entire legal basis for DNA and finger print convictions would be thrown out the window. And, that doesn’t even explain *how* you did it.”

Is he waiting for me to say something? Gloat, brag I’m not sure, but I remain quiet.

Silence.

As I drink my coffee I pop some bread in the toaster. “Want some?” I ask breaking the silence.

He shakes his head no and continues, “I know you worked for some extremely spooky technical operations that *never existed*.

Even with *my* old connections, I was *told*

No, I was ordered to drop it.”

He’s looking straight into me as he talks. He hardly blinks. Why does he do that? What is he expecting me to do?

“Case closed?” I ask.

“Case closed.” He declares

I look at him. “Have another cup of coffee. Thanks for returning my guns.”

The End

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