

# THE BUY (DANA) – ALT ENDING

(from THE MANUSCRIPT)

by Michael Stephen Fuchs

Cold and clear. It was one of those perfect central Virginia late autumn nights when everything more or less stops, and sound carries a hundred miles, only there's no sound to carry. You just know you'd hear anything going on, so the stillness comes with proof. You're alone in this night, and you know it. Just you and everything you can see, last soul in the world. The light is as crisp as the air, and your crystalline breath in front of you partakes a little of both, and you could walk around here forever, only you're going somewhere, 'cause it's a little too cold to stay out. Immensely pleasant, as long as you keep moving, and don't make a lot of noise, 'cause it just wouldn't seem right. Your footfalls are beautiful, the sound fuzzing around you, and the cold nibbles around the edges of your toes. Where the leafless trees aren't actually casting shadows, you can see everything beneath them. The available light is tireless, but merciful – it picks out everything, but gives it a lustre too. "You . . . get out here," says the light. "But let's clean you up. Here's some powder for your wig. And a little detailing. Smile a little, can't you?"

Yahoo and Dana and absolutely the biggest guy you've ever seen in a leather mini-skirt (Thomas) moved through the night, across the gentle coordinated landscape. Dana was still in the black lingerie she had sported for the party – but wrapped under a thigh-length winter coat. Yahoo in his zoot suit; the feather on his head waved serenely.

The three ascended stone steps, skirted the corners of a large Jeffersonian building with lots of double-paned windows. They traced a winding sidewalk, disappeared

beneath the shadow of a glass walkway suspended overhead, reappeared in a tiny parking lot. Lights from the next building annointed each of them in turn, and they sloped onward, hands in pockets, wordless, their heads shrouded in halos of their breath. They were a train, with three puffing locomotives. *Choo, choo*. They chugged through a valley, one seen from a very distant mountaintop, because they were almost totally silent. You could hear the footfalls and the breathing. *Clump clump, whoosh*.

They were going to The Buy – where they were going to Buy into a lot more than they planned on.

These three were, like pretty much everyone else, Seekers After Something: Truth, Meaning, Love, Power, Money, Peace, Home, Fulfillment, Death, The Divine.

Mind-Altering Drugs.

Whatever.

In fairness, the mind altering drugs were most likely really a means to some end, probably either The Divine or Death. Which night of the week is it?

Whichever . . . but Truth and Meaning were definitely on the agenda, too.

"I think she's in the can, man."

"What?"

"I said I think Dana's in the can. I think I saw her go into the can."

"Okay, thanks. Hey, doll, I'm going to go upstairs and see if she's up there. Why don't you tell the story about the Snowmanmobile?" Miles shouted in Her ear, withdrew and bowed his head, expectantly. He smiled a little, lips parted. She pouted, beautiful.

"Okay, Miles," She mouthed, then shouted, "But, outside, everyone outside. I can't shout like this all night. And I'm getting hot."

"Me, too," noted one leering wag.

The tight knot of extravagantly and mostly obscenely dressed youths followed her through the foyer and out the glass door. Relative quiet and cold enveloped them as they emerged. Heat and noise and bodies followed Miles up the stairs.

"Do you know who's in the bathroom?"

"Some chick."

"It was last December, after the first snow. About eight of us or so were trekking through the College Hall parking lot, the big one. There were many parked cars, stranded in the snow. More or less." She wasn't a born storyteller, not a gifted orator. She worked at it, as She did most things, was adequate to the few occasions. "It was me and Miles and Wade and Rachel and a couple of other people."

*Clunk, chunk, clunk.* "Occupied!" "Dana?" "I said, occupied!"

"A snowball fight erupted, the half-hearted silly kind. No one really ran away, and not many shots were on target. Everyone just ducked a little. After a bit, we were all sort of just standing around at the bottom of the lot. Wade ran up the big flat hill, the one adjacent to the tennis courts. He wanted to write 'Feh!' on the hillside in twenty foot letters. He did. While he slid down down the verticals, and rolled across the horizontals, we saw that Rachel was packing snow on the roof of one of the cars. We found out it

wasn't actually her car, and she didn't even know whose it was. 'What are you doing,' we asked. 'Building a snowman,' she said."

"Wow, last time I was in the Alpha house, we were burning crazy amounts of weed. I thought they got shut down?" Thomas was galumphing along, cocking his head with the question. They'd picked up their pace a little as the cold had started seeping in.

"For a semester," replied Yahoo. "Their national was going to reseed them, but gave them one more chance. And they had plenty of money to hang onto the house."

"So it's the same brothers, though?"

"More or less. The ones who didn't get kicked out with drug charges."

They charted a narrow sidewalk in single file. Passing a large bush and a larger shadow, Yahoo led the group off the road into an ill-lit parking lot. A little light from two shaded windows spilt out of the large house, some faint music leaked from somewhere deeper inside. They picked their way up some winding footstones, the three of them, and clambered onto the porch. Yahoo thumped on the words 'ABT,' which were peeling off the door in red flecks.

"It's freezing," Dana croaked, holding her arms.

"Just take it easy," said Yahoo. "We'll be inside in a second. Anyway, I'm not even supposed to be bringing you tonight. Just take it easy."

*Creeaaakkkk.*

"Yahoo, what up. Who's the chick?"

"Soon, we were piling snow on the roof, and Wade and Jen were rolling another big snowball on the ground. Miles was over in the trees, scavenging for sticks and rocks. We put the second ball on top, and did arms with two sticks. We sort of improvised a face with rocks and leaves . . . no carrots. But when we were done it was a fairly credible snowman. It must have stood three feet off of the roof."

"Holy shit. And you just left it on that poor person's car?"

"Yes. But it gets much better. By the next evening, the roads had cleared a lot, and Miles and I were driving out for food. We were stopped at the intersection of College and Oak; traffic coming south was turning left in front of us. And what goes by, but The Snowmanmobile. Just zips right by with the snowman on top, totally intact. It looked like a float in a parade. When we thought of those people finding their car, shrugging their shoulders, and just driving off, we laughed so hard we had to pull over."

"Holy shit! The Snowmanmobile!"

"Fuck, you're not Dana. Where's Dana?"

"I don't know – and fuck you, too." Random Incensed Chick slammed the bathroom door, shoved Miles aside for access to the stairs.

"Hey, I'm Dana."

"Hey! This is my man T-Bone. T-Bone, you know Yahoo and Thomas, right? Ya'll met last time." Burner Fraternity Guy turned theatrically to the dark corner of the room, rubbing his scruffy van dyke beard, and grandiloquently introduced "Jean-Michel."

"The man with the bag."

Dana saw a cappucino-skinned youth with dark rope for hair and a retiring manner and a red duffel bag under his chair, and the glare from the one bulb in the room generated more shadows than light. She felt her buzz draining away just a little. Gave a cutesy little wave in the direction of the rope and shadows, cocked her red head.

Thomas shook his thick tresses off his thick neck, settled on the edge of the waterbed, fell backwards heavily, setting off a tall set of slapping waves. Yahoo slapped him on his belly, sat down on the mahogany edge without falling, said with a straight-toothed grin, "Let's do some business, motherfuckers."

"Alright," allowed Burner Fraternity Guy, who was looking slightly ill at being able to see right up Thomas's skirt, in the pose in which he had fallen. He looked away significantly, and pointed a pale finger at Jean-Michel. Jean-Michel gingerly laid his duffel on the stormy surface of the bed, eased the zipper open, scanning the faces in the room. Inside they could see the clear plastic surface of a bag, white underneath, masking tap circling it, small numbers written in black on the surface. He reached past that, and came up with a large bag of grass, then another. He laid them on the bed, and hastily rezippped the bag. Dana, retiring to the dingy wall, gingerly examined the Budweiser Girls thereon. None of them were as slim as she, although breast differentials were substantial. Yahoo slipped a tan envelope from the inside of his suit jacket, started dropping cash on the bed.

T-Bone was scratching his ankle with his other ankle, but no one noticed.

The door erupted with knocking; the bags and bills disappeared, as did traces of expression. Movement went that route, too. "What the fuck are you bitches doing up here? Some kind of faggot bullshit going on?" BFG splayed his fingers parallel to the

floor in an I'll handle this motif, stepped to the door and cracked it. "Not now, bro, we'll be down in a few." "Yo, second keg's kicked, ya'll are drinking piss when you get here." "Alright, just bail, bro. I'll see you in a few."

Miles held Her hand, an event She likened to rare celestial phenomena. It was more common, admittedly, when they were not in sight of other people. His grip on her was too tight though, even in the freezing air, even through the gloves.

"Not like you to retire so early, beau," she said.

He didn't respond, needn't have, both knew perfectly well why he was in his State.

Abruptly, though – unexpectedly – he recovered. "I'm sure she's fine." He cracked an honest smile at the epicenter of his breath cloud. "She probably hooked up with Chris again, silly girl. He'll ignore her again on Monday – but he'll make sure she stays safe tonight."

She squeezed his arm, they approached their building. He scanned the shadows, fingered the keys, guided Her ahead of him. His multi-tasking was enviable, but then this was his chief application. Miles was, at his core, an Indefatigable Protector application, and freeware to boot. She owned the source code; Dana was an eternal beta tester (a merciless one).

To Dana it became clear that something was fucked up when she saw Dreadlock Boy – Jean-Michel – when she saw him look at the other black guy – B-Tone – that way he did. He was looking at T-Bone's waist, and his jaw and forehead were both working

into an extremely dangerous expression of recognition, and his brows were going low, and his hand was disappearing inside his shirt and into his waistband.

Burner Fraternity Guy was fucking around with his tank of Sea Monkeys and stealing occasional glances at the money being arrayed on the water bed.

Thomas was passed out on his back.

Yahoo had stopped counting bills and was frozen where he sat.

It was that funny sort of frozenness which can happen in a group, in that last fragile moment when everyone is still friends on paper, but when everyone knows that the social space is about to disintegrate. No one really wants to shatter the peace . . . or risk offending anybody . . . even sometimes unto the point of endangering oneself. The stillness thumped for three more heartbeats.

After that, it was simply a quickdraw contest between Jean-Michel and T-Bone, and everybody came in third.

*BLAM, BLAM, BLAM, BLAM, BLAM!!!!* Stanley's head snapped down in time to marvel at the black and white figures blurring frantically by on the video monitor in the case.

Jean-Michel's fire was wild, because, hey, who gives a fuck? His rounds plunked into the drywall, and the Sea Monkey tank (sploosh!), and through T-Bone's several layers of clothing and into his mid-section, always fleshy and doubly so with the kevlar vest strapped sweatily around it. The drug courier's expression was still wild as T-Bone put two distinct double-taps in his chest, and he disappeared permanently into those

corner shadows, buried at Sea Monkeys, in the new pool between the waterbed and the grungy wall.

It was so loud, and so very dreamlike, there in that tiny little fraternity house bedroom. It was unlike anything, to be in a twelve by eighteen foot gunfight, to see people dying. To recognize these misunderstandings, apprehend this confusion.

Events took an additional tragic turn when BFG splayed his fingers out toward T-Bone, whose real name was actually Theron, a look of panic on his white face, his palms just a little too close to the melee. Theron spun crisply, snapping his outstretched arms and pistol to the right to cover BFG. But the tragedy spiral continued on from there because Theron's drawing down on BFG spurred Yahoo – timid gentle Yahoo – into thoughtless action: he dove for Theron, never could have said why. The two – the pale one with the kinky red hair, and the dark one with the kinky black hair – struggled on the bed for about two seconds before Theron got the upper hand, pinned Yahoo on the bed, straddled him – and got shot three more times by Jean-Michel, who had sat up from behind the bed, regained his aim, and – as the saying goes – "wasn't dead yet."

Jean-Michel kept firing, laying into Burner Fraternity Guy now, until they both fell dead a half second or so later.

Stanley Luther stared at the grainy image which bathed him in pale light. In a small crowded room, replicated in grayscale and shadow . . .

In the final act of our tragedy, those three well-placed rounds happened to throw the young quick bright black man off of Yahoo, off of the bed, and onto the floor at the

feet of the other red-head – Dana of course. And as he fell, his pistol floated gracefully up right into her bust. As it rebounded off of that slim precious cushioning Dana caught it with both hands, this woman who had never displayed any manual dexterity in her whole young life. Dana brushed the safety upward with her right thumb, just like Miles had taught her, and trained the big handgun at the man on the floor before her.

Theron wasn't much into negotiation, and was panicked as shit anyway, and he pulled frantically at the velcro release on his ankle holster.

Dana closed her eyes and fired.

One foot on the asphalt, he saw that the slight woman had stepped back into the frame. She reached under the body of the black man and lifted a small dark duffel bag.

Miles turned the bolt-lock, drew some breath. Looked toward the office, thinking about trying salvage a bit of prose from an otherwise unproductive evening.

*Clickety clackety.*

*Bang.*