

FML

Written by

Paul Bae

Copyright (c) 2017

bigloopproductions@gmail.com

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

The sky was this bright blue. I'd never seen it so blue. Not that I really ever looked up at it before. I'm laying on the ground thinking, I should have looked at it more. But sometimes, when you're so wrapped up in yourself, it takes a lot to look outside of that to what's around you. And it takes even more to look up. Who looks up? When it happens, you get this sudden realization, or re-evaluation. Of everything. Everything leading up to that moment. And you think, Fuck. Have I made a mistake? I think I made a mistake. Is it too late to call it off? I remember thinking, Please, God. I don't want to see a light. Not now. That panic starts to set in real quick. And all I can think is, Please, no light. Just...just blue sky.

INT. STUDIO

MICHAEL

From QRX you're listening to The Big Loop. I'm Michael Kim. In today's episode, we present the story of Daniel and Jack. Those are not their real names. It will become apparent why we had to change them. Here is part one of, "FML."

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I suppose I've had an easy life. It wasn't a life of leisure, but my mom and dad were good parents. Provided a good home for me. And because I was their only son I got all the attention a boy could want. So I don't blame them for anything, but in hindsight, I suppose a boy could benefit from experiencing some hardship. To build character.

DANIEL (cont'd)

I met Renée at St. Andrews in my last year, just before I started trading for UCS. She worked in analytics until she was pregnant with Thomas. And perhaps because I grew up an only child, I wanted more children in my own family. So Danielle followed the next year. We moved to our new flat in Hampstead. Life was as it should be. Or how one would imagine an ideal life to be.

DANIEL (cont'd)

When the crash came, we had to funnel some stocks elsewhere. Well, we didn't *have to*. We didn't have to do anything aside from taking care of our client portfolios. But, when you've grown accustomed to a certain climate, you tend to dress for it. Get used to how things are done. You don't think, Well, this is wrong. No one thinks that who's spent years in it. It just...this is the way it is. Everyone's doing it. You'd be silly not to.

DANIEL (cont'd)

I didn't find out in any board meeting or the news like everyone else did. I was in my office. And I got a text. From Renée. Just four words: WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? Of course I didn't understand what she was on about. So I called her and the stream of invective that came pouring out of her.... And as this is happening, from the windows in my office I see my colleagues all gathering around the television screens hanging above the cubicles. We have the financial news with stock tickers on constantly. And as Renée is shouting in one ear, I can hear people crying from the main area. And Freddy, our CFO, I see him standing outside my door, and his face is just...drawn of all color. And that's how I knew--I was going to prison.

TRANSITION MUSIC

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I first met Daniel one night in this pub in London. A stone's throw from Camden Market. He was drinking in a corner by himself when I walked in. There were eleven other people in the bar, not including the bartender, and I took a seat by the window with my back to him. But I kept watch over him from the reflection in the window like I always do. He kept glancing at his watch. And I waited. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Fifteen. I let it stretch to thirty. He didn't move. Except when a waiter asked him to put out his silly e-cigarette. Have you seen those? Ridiculous, but it helped me gain a measure of who I was dealing with. It looked like he would have waited all night for me. So I let him out of his misery. Because that's what I do, right?

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

He'd been sitting there at least an hour while I waited for him. I was upset at first because I'd seen him when he entered the establishment but then he went to a seat on the other side of the bar. An hour later, that same man approached my table and introduced himself. He claimed it was a test of sorts, to see how serious I was about his services.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

Because not everyone's serious. There's different types, you see? Depression is a natural state of being. Everyone has depression. But there's different kinds. There's the clinical type which is a chemical imbalance. There are drugs for those, and depending on who you speak to, they work in various order.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

Then there's the kind that comes from just being dissatisfied with the world. A kind of ennui. You ever listen to Cole Porter? His songs are filled with that. "When I'm out on a quiet spree, fighting vainly that old ennui." Ennui. A perfect word for that sense of not being satisfied with anything but not being sad. Just...ennui. I always say, "If it's just ennui, no need for me." I should put that on my business card.

JACK (cont'd)

And then there's the depression that seeps into your life because of things that have happened to you. It's not in your head. It's not the chemicals in your body telling you you're unhappy. It's your life. You have a reason to be unhappy. Now, take that group, and split it into two subgroups. There's subgroup A and subgroup B. Subgroup A is people who have shitty lives through no fault of their own. That subgroup, I leave alone. I want no part of that. Then there's subgroup B: people who bring it on themselves. For this subgroup, the darkness, the depression descends like a dark cloud over their lives because they're the ones who pulled that cloud over their heads. And Daniel claimed to be from that subgroup. He'd done a shitty thing, and caused a lot of shitty things to happen to a lot of good people, and he couldn't live with himself any more. But he could have been lying to himself, as we often do. So, I had to test his resolve. People from subgroup B, if they're serious, will never walk away from that table. They will wait for me. And for the service that I provide. Because once you hire me, I am like Death. I will come for you. It's inevitable. At some point before the expiration date on your contract, you will die according to your stated preferences.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

At times, I would find myself standing in front of my bathroom mirror, completely lost. I'd have no idea why I was there. What am I doing? I'd feel my toothbrush to see if I'd already brushed. I couldn't look in the mirror. I couldn't stand myself any more. My face disgusted me. I wanted to end this. End it all.

DANIEL (cont'd)

One night, I'd been into the bottle, thinking of my kids. Did they miss me? I know their mum didn't. But how about them? Was little Danielle crying out for her daddy in the middle of the night? Probably not. Why would she? I'm the one who cheated to get ahead. We were already doing fine, but I wanted better. For them, sure, but if I really wanted better for them, I would have thought of being a better man, not a richer one. But that's how weak I was. An opportunity presented itself, and I knew it was wrong, that it was illegal, but I chose it regardless. Because that's what weak men do.

DANIEL (cont'd)

And my vision was blurry, from the drink and the tears, and I found myself out on the balcony. I was shirtless for some reason. Likely for the drunken, dramatic flair. It was dark, no one could see me. There was no one on the street below, and I remember thinking, if I jumped, no one would care. It might be easier on my kids knowing that their daddy's gone, not just somewhere else choosing to avoid his own children. Or whatever fantasy my wife had put into their heads about me. So, I closed my eyes, and said a prayer. I don't know why. Maybe for good luck, or it's like ringing a door bell to Heaven.

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

Not that He'd let me in, but letting him know, I'll be out front in a minute, if you want to keep the door unlocked for me. And I'd rather be in there than out...wherever the other place may be. And I leaned forward, and I felt the cold iron of the balcony railing. And I opened my eyes, looked at the street below me, and I threw up.

DANIEL (cont'd)

I'm afraid of heights, and it just hit me then. I can't do it. I can't do it to myself. I wanted to die, but I didn't want to kill myself. I know, it makes little sense, but that's the sense that was in my head. I heard someone below swearing up and down, so I guess there were pedestrians. Good thing I didn't jump right then, or I would have committed suicide *and* murder.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

Word of mouth. That's the secret sauce. Your reputation is everything. Because it spreads, by word of mouth, tall tales people whisper to each other behind closed doors. And it eventually finds its way to those who look. And you search online long enough, you'll find me. Nothing that's good in life comes easy. That's why I make it difficult. If you're serious about ending it all, you'll eventually find me. But you have to be really, really serious. You have to be committed. Like a hammer to a nail. You hesitate for a second, you lose a thumb. You pause for one second in your resolve to find me, I'm gone. [snap fingers] Like that.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I needed help. How do people too afraid to kill themselves actually kill themselves? I had thought of pills, but it takes too long. What happens if you swallow all these pills and then you're laying there in bed, waiting for the inevitable, and you suddenly change your mind? What then? It's too late, and you spend your last minutes of life in pure panic, crying in a pool of regret. No. Not for me. Everything else seemed messy. The quickest way would be to shoot myself in the head, but how? It's not like the United States where I can just walk into a grocers and borrow his pistol and shoot myself in the head. This is England.

DANIEL (cont'd)

I went online and starting searching. I must have been online for half a day. I started by entering "dignified ways to end life", going from one forum to the next, deeper and deeper into this world of people's pain and suffering. If I had doubts about killing myself before then, it was removed entirely now. I wasn't the only depressed individual living outside Ireland it seems.

DANIEL (cont'd)

And then, finally, I saw this one post about a man who assists in ending life for you. With dignity, on your own terms. And it gave a portal to another site, and the person who posted it gave very specific directions. And at one point, you get this prompt to "Enter the code." And the code is three letters: "FML." So I did, and it unlocked the site. It was for an assisted death service in Australia. Well, I'm not flying all the way to Australia just to die. I can die here in London like everyone else. But there was an email address. So, I emailed him.

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

Now, I'd contacted several such services already in that time, and they were always hospitals and health care providers. But this was different. I inquired about his services and if they have a branch in London. And he replied immediately. He wrote, "I'm here." And when I read it, I had to turn and look behind me because it felt like he meant it literally, like he was standing behind me with a mallet ready to swing at my head.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

He said that? Well, that's all branding, isn't it? You don't want them thinking you're just some son of a bitch from Adelaide. You want him to imagine something, some wicked entity, forged in the heat of the Aussie outback, was coming for him, like Death itself. You put that in their heads, so by the time you meet them, you can fart into a cup and they'll think, What is that? The blood of Christ? Give me a whiff. It's about packaging yourself. Putting your best foot forward, but it's a fake foot. A shiny, expensive looking fake foot. But yeah, I make them enter "FML." Fuck my life. It's one thing to think, "I don't want to live any more." It's another to type in "Fuck. My. Life." It hits you in the face with what you're actually saying. Your belief about your situation. What you really want to do about it. You want someone to help you fuck your life. And I'm the man to do it.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

He wasn't what I expected. He was impeccably dressed. A bespoke three-piece suit that wouldn't be out of place on Savile Row.

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

And a beautiful calfskin folder. He sat at my table and he made sure no one could hear us. He's...he's a strange man. An odd man. Well, of course he is, given his chosen profession. But, he'd be odd regardless. He sat across from me with his back to everyone else. Every time someone walked into the pub, he'd turn to look, but not so obvious as to draw attention to himself. I asked him if he'd like to trade seats since he was so concerned with the patrons. And he said the strangest thing.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I keep count of how many people are in any room I'm in. When I entered the bar, there were eleven people. Eight of them were men. Two of them looked like they use their gym memberships at least once a week. By the time I sat with Daniel, there were nineteen patrons in the establishment. You never know when a place suddenly gets crowded and for various circumstances and whatnot you have to seek a quick escape. You've been found out. I always know my exits out of any room. I know we're presently three flights up and if I were to jump out that window behind you, I'd land on that green awning at the entrance and bounce off it onto the red Toyota parked in front. I'm always ready. Fight or flight. It's how life in the outback prepared me. You have to be one with your environment, respect it, know it intimately, in case it wants to kick the shit out of you. Because that's what life is. That's why there's people like Daniel. Life's kicked him in the balls one too many times. And, understandably, who really wants to put up with that? A life of getting kicked in the nuts over and over again. Some would say that's not a life worth living.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)
People like Daniel say, "I've had enough. No more kicking in the balls. I can't take it." And that's why there's people like me. I stop him from getting kicked in the balls...(dramatic pause) by *killing* his balls.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL
He conducted it like a visit to the doctor. It was like a verbal medical exam. He wanted to know my allergies, if I've had any trips to the hospital in the last five years, if I play any contact sports. It was all very... strange. All these questions, and every time I tried to explain about why I wanted to hire him, he stopped me.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK
I don't want to know. I don't need to know. I'm not your friend. I'm not your enemy. I'm someone you hired to get the job done according to the terms agreed upon by parties laid out and such. I know what you want. That's why I'm here.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL
And when he was done with the questions, he brought out some papers. It was a questionnaire. And I had to tick the boxes that applied to me. And this wasn't a case of, Are you Male or Female? Check box. This was a list of preferred ways to die and not die. Death by gun wound. Death by knife wound. Does it need to look like an accident? Does the death need to be immediate? Do I prefer suffering? Do I cringe at the thought of--

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

--the thought of death by being crushed. Death by sword. Death by poison. I have it all. I've accumulated a thorough and deeply thought out array of preferences for my clients so they don't have to put too much thought into it. The list is exactly--

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

A hundred questions. I had to sit there ticking a hundred boxes, reading about various ways to die. He even had death by dismemberment. Who doesn't check that box? Who wants to die by dismemberment? And he had another that stood out: death by tiger. (Silent amazing.) What?? Where do you get a tiger in London.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I know a guy. I know many guys.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

So, I checked all the boxes that applied. He looked at my answers. Kind of muttered to himself, nodding here and there. I don't think he approved of some of them, but it's my life. I'll end it the way I want. And I wanted it simple. Under no circumstances did I want to see it coming. I couldn't take the dread. And no pain. I wanted it to be as instantaneous as possible. And no dismemberment. I want to be able to have an open casket. For my children, in case they wanted to come to my funeral.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I wasn't surprised. I get that all the time. Which is ridiculous. You're dead. Once they close that casket and bury you, do you know what you're going to look like in a few years? You ever see a rotting corpse filled with maggots? You're food. You become part of the cycle everyone talks about. The big, beautiful circle of life. Maggot food. But, it's his life to end. He calls the terms. I just carry them out.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

And then...I signed the paper. One signature. But before I signed, he slammed his hand down on the contract, and looked me straight in the eye and said--

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

Once you sign, there's no going back. I will end this for you. I will kill you.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I think it was meant to frighten me into rethinking the whole thing. And if that was the goal, well, goal achieved. But, I was determined. I nodded. And he slowly removed his hand and leaned back in his chair, not once taking his eye off me. And...I...signed. He then put his hand out. I thought he wanted to shake my hand so I extended mine. Then he said--

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

My pen. They always forget to return my pen. It's a very important pen to me.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I handed it to him. And he gathered the papers into his leather folder, got up from his chair, and said--

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I promise you this. The next time you see me will be in the after life. Consider this contract activated.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I closed my eyes because I thought he was going to kill me right there for some reason. When I realized I was mistaken, I opened my eyes. And he was gone. And that's when I began preparing myself. Because I had just given Jack permission...to kill me.

INT. STUDIO

MICHAEL

When we return, part two of "FML." After these messages from our sponsors.

*MIDROLL MUSIC

ADS

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I think I closed the pub that night. I got properly smashed until last call when I realized I'd have to go home and Jack could be waiting for me. You see, he never gave me a time frame for when he'd carry it out. It was so vague. I'd asked him when it would happen, and he looked at me as if I'd said the most ridiculous thing. And he said, "There is a time for everything." And some other things I believe were biblical.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

"A time to be born, and a time to die. A time to heal, and a time to kill." Ecclesiastes. I like to quote Scripture for my clients. Gives the whole thing a spiritual quality, because the decisions they're making are of the highest order. About life and death. It all comes together in that last moment which they've apportioned to me, as it be. And then, I go to the work of planning it. And they...wait.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

That was the hardest part. Waiting. Every night I went to bed, I lay my head on the pillow thinking, Is tonight the night? Is this my last sleep before the eternal sleep? Was today the last time I opened my eyes to a new day? And when that thought hits you, you begin to worry. But then every day, I kept waking up to a new morning. And it wasn't the glorious feeling you'd expect of being given another day. Because I knew he'd be coming for me. But when? One week stretched into two. And I genuinely began thinking, Am I a sucker?

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

Did I get scammed into giving a stranger my money for a service that will never be rendered? And I had no way of contacting him. It's not like he had a customer service department to air my grievances. I was quite upset. I was already filled with self-hatred, like the an awful cheater and liar. Now you could add world's biggest fool to my cv.

TRANSITION MUSIC

DANIEL (cont'd)

It had been ten days since I met Jack. And I was understandably upset with myself for falling for his grift. And I was at a park that I regularly visit, on a bench, and this starling flew and came to rest on the other end of my bench. It was so tiny. With a bright yellow beak. I'd never seen one so close. I had never noticed how pretty these birds can be. And I turned my head, thinking it will fly away once I moved, but it stayed there. And, it's difficult to explain, but I felt as if it were a kindred spirit. There's something about a nice park bench, where you can go and watch strangers enjoying the fresh air, with others but often just by themselves. Like me. And there's something about seeing people smile at nothing at all--it's slightly infectious, if you see it enough. Perhaps that's why I went to that bench often. But it wasn't until then that I'd ever given the reason much thought, why I was drawn there so often again and again. And at my lowest point, there was this tiny bird, this beautiful creation, who chose to sit by me. So, I inched a little closer to him, and that's when I heard something above me. And then I blacked out. I woke up staring at the sky. I was on my back with a crowd of strangers looking down on me. One of them was holding my head, telling me not to move. But of course I moved. And there was this enormous tree branch laying next to me.

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

It had apparently broken off above me and just grazed my head. Enough to knock me unconscious and nearly remove my left ear. It fell so hard that it broke the bench. And my left arm. If I hadn't moved towards that bird at that exact moment, I'd be dead.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I usually spend the first week or so observing clients from a distance. It's like that Bette Midler song. "From a distance, you look like my friend, even though we're at war." It's not personal. We're not friends. We're not enemies. We are participants in a contractual, mutually beneficent arrangement of ways and means. It's like hunting. You spend days stalking, observing patterns, watering holes, pathways of habit. He liked that park. Went there every two days. Same bench. He seemed relaxed there. Unaware of everything around him. It was so peaceful. So, I rigged a tiny explosive on that large branch just over his head. It worked perfectly but, Nature decided otherwise and whatnot.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

He missed. And...it was like a wake up call. What was I doing? What have I done? I paid a stranger to crush me under a tree? What's wrong with me? I don't want to die like that. That's not what I had in mind at all.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

He said to make it look like an accident if possible. I assume it's for insurance reasons.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

A lot of insurance companies don't pay out if you off yourself. So, that was the job at hand. The first time didn't go off as planned. Fucking birds. Hate 'em. Always have. Except ostriches. Cuz they don't shit on your car. Imagine if they did. Crikey. Anyway, I only had two bars on my phone, so maybe the signal to the IED was late. There was a lag after I pressed the button. Who knows. I'd make sure it wouldn't happen again.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I needed to reach him. To call it off. I went back to the original website and entered "FML" again. And the same form came up on the screen. And I typed in, "Please cancel the contract. Keep the money. Just don't kill me." Because...because I wanted to live. It's like, waking up to all those faces staring down at me, and seeing how close I came to death--I'd been a coward. What a ridiculous way to end a life that...that wasn't all that bad. People do horrible things all the time. And, yes, it does make you a bad person. But people change. People redeem themselves. We hear about it all the time. I can't think of anyone off the top of the my head, but I know they do. It happens with regular occurrence. It was my cowardice that made it bad. I cheated at work, I cheated my family, I was too afraid to do it the right way. And even in death, I was too cowardly to kill myself. So I decided, right then, no more. I was going to live, not like a coward, but like those people you read about who go through redemptive experiences and are refreshed, born anew. But to do that, I had to call off Jack.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

Yeah, it happens. Again, "There is a time for everything." A shift in the wind. A sudden pause in momentum. In all probability he shouldn't have moved. But he did. Because of a bird. That's nature. That's God. That's the universe saying, "it's not his time." Not yet. But his time was coming. I was coming.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

A few days passed, and they were not idle days. He wasn't responding to my request and I couldn't just wait like a sitting duck for him to carry it out. I found myself calling old mates, some from school. They were surprised when I asked to meet for tea. But one of the clauses in the contract was that he couldn't injure bystanders. So, I wanted to constantly surround myself with people. I hung around mostly in cafes and pubs. But, I was too distracted to thoroughly enjoy my time with my friends. I found myself constantly looking over my shoulder. Every sudden noise, someone bumping into a table, the sudden shattering of a glass--these all sent me jumping. I became a nervous wreck. But I was determined. I just needed Jack to see my message.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

Yeah, I'd seen his message. What of it? It states specifically in his contract...

Takes out sheet.

JACK (cont'd)

(reading)

"All engaged parties will adhere to the stipulations within. Under no circumstances will either party cancel the contract until the terms are fully executed by the service provider."

Puts the paper down.

JACK (cont'd)

Even if I'd wanted to, I can't just cancel the contract. Because, the thing is, people in his circumstances are known to waver. They're not entirely right with themselves. One day they want to live, another day they want to die. There is no here nor there when it comes to the contract. When you sign it, you have set in motion the wheels of the universe to come crush you under its weight. Or, better, it's the weight of the universe crushing your spirit that brought you to me in the first place, and I'm there to relieve you of that pressure. Either way, I made a promise to you. And I've never broken a promise. Never.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I left the pub one evening. I believe it'd been twelve days since Jack's first attempt. He was nowhere. And I started thinking, maybe he forgot about me. Maybe he gave it that one try, and that was it. Maybe he thought to just keep the money and go back to Australia or wherever in the world the next poor bugger is. It was obvious I couldn't find him. So, I said goodbye to another mate from school. He had thought it odd that I had contacted him after all these years. He wished me well but I could tell he didn't want anything to do with me after that. Who wants to be around someone who can't listen?

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

I could hear what he was saying, but I wasn't really present. I was too wrapped up in my own predicament. And part of the contract was that I couldn't tell anyone about the contract and Jack. So it's not much of a discussion. But I left the pub and started walking down the hill back home. And I was half way there, and someone yells, "Watch out!" Well, I look behind me just in time to see something massive about to hit me. I jumped like I'd never jumped in my life, probably because I was already a little on edge still. And this full sized lorry came crashing onto the sidewalk and into a book shop. It wasn't going that fast, but enough to have taken me out definitely. And I remember being there on the cold concrete, and yelling, "Stop it! Please, stop it!"

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

You cut the line, rig it to a wire and a smaller IED, and one touch of my phone, and there you go. They would have blamed it on mechanical failure, his children would have got all his money. Well, all he had left, which I take wasn't that much after paying me. But the point is that he would have left a legacy for his kids. I think that's important. All my dad left me was a bible and some scars. Maybe some survival skills, yeah, but I could have learned that on my own out of a desire from within. Not because I had to. I swear, if I ever have children, I will leave them more than that. The best way to raise children is to die well. Knowing you've done everything you could to raise them right. Or you're nothing. Look at Daniel. I could tell without him telling me that he'd done his family wrong. That kind of guy, you know what gets him thinking this way in the first place? Putting himself before others.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

It's always some guy who spent years doing something he knows is wrong, but convincing himself he's doing it for family. And then when he gets caught, it's, "Oh, how will my family see me? I can't bear for them to see me this way." Me, me, me. If he were a right man, he would have thought, "I better be there for my kids when they grow up. That's the right thing to do." But he approaches death the way he approached life: making it about him and him alone.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

A crowd started gathering around the shop. A woman helped me up and asked if I was hurt. My ankle was badly hurt from jumping out of the way. And the cast on my arm was cracked. She called me lucky. I ran home before the police showed up. I remember locking the door and logging into my computer. And then I just stared, because I didn't know what to do. Twice now, that man had tried to kill me and failed. I had a broken arm from the first attempt which I most likely broke again, and now a sprained ankle. And no way to call this off. I opened my window slightly, but kept the curtains drawn in case he was out there watching me. He obviously knew all my habits outside of my flat. I took out my e-cigarette and sat by the window. I remember pressing the button and inhaling, and then phone rang. I was about to get up but then, it all went black.

Transition music.

DANIEL (cont'd)

I came to on the floor. The smoke alarm was blaring, and I could barely see from all the smoke. My ears were ringing and the curtains were on fire.

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

I grabbed a pot and filled it with water and threw it over the curtains. I did that a few times to extinguish the flames. And then I took down the smoke alarm and removed the batteries to stop it. Someone was knocking on my door. It was my neighbour, Mrs. Gelding. She was yelling for me and I yelled back that I was fine. But I wasn't. I could see blood all over the floor where I'd been laying. I went to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. My face was bloody and black, as if I'd been beaten with a dirty bag of coal. And my hair. It was smoking and half of it gone.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I'd learned it from a book about the CIA. They tried to kill Fidel Castro with an exploding cigar. I've done it before. Once at a poor SOB's bachelor party. But you can only pack so much explosive into an e-cigarette. If he hadn't turned his face away for the stupid telephone, he'd be dead. And I'd rigged it perfectly to look like a normal, everyday e-cigarette malfunction. This bugger was proving harder to get rid of than an STD.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

It's like his failure made him more determined to kill me. Two days after that, while walking to my lawyer's office, a grand piano fell from above me. Missed me by a foot, but it was enough to throw me onto the street where a taxi hit me. I was taken to the hospital. I now had a broken arm, a sprained foot, and a cracked femur. I needed a wheelchair because my one arm was in a cast which made crutches impossible to manage. I was in agony.

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

And I looked ridiculous because I had to shave the rest of my hair off from the e-cigarette explosion, and my scars were forming scabs. Children were afraid of me when I wheeled past, and their nannies would shield them from me. I overheard one little girl saying, "Mommy, what happened to that man?" I was hideous.

DANIEL (cont'd)

I woke up the next day in the hospital, my leg in a full cast. The nurse brought me a tray with soup and crackers. I wasn't hungry but knew I had to eat. The soup tasted strange immediately. Perhaps the painkillers numbed my tastebuds and olfactory sense. Because I started choking. I felt my throat closing. It was getting harder to breath. That's when I realized: it was a Thai soup. With peanuts. I hadn't tasted peanuts since I was five years old when my parents discovered I was deathly allergic to them. I pressed the button for the nurse and they administered a shot of epinephrine as I went into anaphylactic shock. And I realized: I'd informed him of my allergies when I filled out that form. He was using the information I'd provided. I'd hired a maniac to kill me.

Transition music

DANIEL (cont'd)

And then one day, I decided: enough's enough. There was no way of stopping him. Events had been put into motion. I had signed a contract. There was no end to this except the inevitable one. So, I went back to that park where I'd broken my arm. The bench had been repaired. So, I sat there. And waited. I waited from noon until about six o'clock. I kept thinking, Where is he?

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I'm not accustomed to a man without patterns. Everyone has them. But the recent string of events had thrown all his patterns off. He had become unpredictable. When you're out in the bush, the only dangerous game to a good hunter is one without patterns of behaviour. I had no way of knowing he'd return to the original scene. And he was waiting. I realized that after the first two hours. But how do I make another accident happen on such short notice?

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

It was shortly after six. The sun would be setting in two hours. . And...I heard something behind me. It was a quick pitter patter. You know the sound of something running on soft grass. And I heard people screaming, and saw people running away from me. I was sitting in my wheelchair next to the bench when something large lunged at me and threw me out of my wheelchair. I felt like a rag doll, being tossed about. At one point I heard growling, and felt something hot on my upper back near my neck. I remember thinking, Is it a monster? What is going on? It was too dark to see clearly, plus I was being thrashed about. Then, I heard a gun near me. And everything suddenly stopped. And I heard voices screaming. I remember seeing the sky. It was so clear.

Transition music

DANIEL (cont'd)

The sky was this bright blue. I'd never seen it so blue. Not that I really ever looked up at it before. I'm laying on the ground thinking, I should have looked at it more.

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

But sometimes, when you're so wrapped up in yourself, it takes a lot to look outside of that to what's around you. And it takes even more to look up. Who looks up? When it happens, you get this sudden realization, or re-evaluation. Of everything. Everything leading up to that moment. And you think, Fuck. Have I made a mistake? I think I made a mistake. Is it too late to call it off? I remember thinking, Please, God. I don't want to see a light. Not now. That panic starts to set in real quick. And all I can think is, Please, no light. Just...just blue sky.

Transition music

DANIEL (cont'd)

I saw all these faces above me. There was this great commotion. An officer was there. And I looked over next to me, and laying there...was this... massive tiger. And I thought, Fuck me.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

The zoo was only up the street. I purloined a key and snuck the tiger out of there towards the park. I'd left a small trail of raw duck meat towards Daniel. I wasn't sure it would work, but my time in the outback taught me that in a world of competing odors, birds win every time. Unfortunately, it wasn't a real tiger. Zoo tigers are useless beasts. If it had been a natural tiger, it would have broken Daniel's neck in a second like a twig. But zoo tigers. Shit. It started playing with him. Like he was a toy. I think it eventually would have got around to killing him but ever since 9/11, the police are on high alert and had this guy ready with a gun nearby. What are the chances?

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

That's when I realized, I don't have to do this alone. I need help. So, when the police showed up to the hospital where I was at, I...I told them everything. I didn't care any more about Jack's ridiculous contract. I told them who I was. That I was involved in the UCS stock fraud. That I had found Jack online. And how I met him at a pub, and how I signed that contract. And one of them said, "You signed a contract out on your own life?" And I nodded. And he said, "And this fellow tried to kill you by letting a tiger out of our zoo?" And I said yes. And they looked at each other, and laughed. They wouldn't stop. The more I implored them to take me seriously, the more they laughed.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

He went to the coppers. He told them about me. He broke my cardinal rule: do not talk about me to anyone. For this voids the contract. He agreed to terms which he did not respect.

Tense, dramatic music begins. Builds.

JACK (cont'd)

Everyone has a role in life. I believe that. My father was a useless shit. All he left me was a pen. A stupid pen. Thought I could be a writer one day and write about him. He was wrong on every count, in every way. But he still had his role to play. To be a jackass to my mother and me. But that made me who I am. Tougher than any sonofabitch in the southern hemisphere and several parts of the north. You rarely see an injured animal in the wild. You know why? Because nature shows mercy. You wouldn't think it with all the suffering in the world.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

But that suffering is not natural. It's all man-made. We get in the way of nature. When an animal is injured, something comes to eat it within the hour. That's the cycle of life. You're part of that. I'm part of that. Daniel here, he's like an injured animal. Unable to fulfil his role in life any longer. So I have to do my part. He broke his covenant with me. And for that, I have to kill him.

Pause. Music suddenly stops.

JACK (cont'd)

I know I was going to kill him anyways, but this time, no rules. No contract. No more "accidents." We tried it by his terms. Now we'd have to do it by mine.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

I implored them to send more officers. To guard my room. I knew Jack was watching, because he seemed to know everything about me and my whereabouts and comings and goings.

Transition music.

DANIEL (cont'd)

I was released from their care after two days. I begged them to keep me there but they responded as if I were an annoyance by this point. I called the police from the hospital lobby. I implored them to come for me but they told me to file a report. So, I went home. It took me seemingly hours because I wasn't used to the motorized wheelchair. My leg was stuck out in front of me because it was bound up which made it difficult in the lift. But I made it home. And when I got into my living room--

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK
I was there. Waiting for him.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL
He'd apparently been there for at least a day. He'd ordered Indian food. I supposed a man works up quite an appetite waiting to kill someone.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK
The strangest thing. He seemed upset. Of course, I expect some bloke about to be killed by me to be upset. But he looked upset about something else.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL
He'd left a mess of my apartment. I could see the delivery containers left everywhere on the table. He didn't bother to clean up after himself. And he'd been sleeping on the couch and using the sheets from my own bed. He was disgusting. And I told him so.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK
I'm sitting there in an armchair, a Mark Two with an Element silencer in my hand. You couldn't miss it. And he starts going off about me being a bad houseguest. And he wheels up to the sofa and starts wiping off the dirt my boots had left on the cushions.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

Who sleeps on a person's couch with his shoes on?! Who does that? And...(pause for breath, to calm down) and I realize how ridiculous it must have seemed. There he is: the man about to kill me. And I'm complaining about the mess. But there is a line. It's not just the mess in the living room. It's him. He was a mess. And that's me talking--a man who wanted someone else to take my life for me. He tried various times to kill me and couldn't do it. In fact, if let alone, he would have maimed me to death. Or I would have eventually died of a heart attack. And I told him so. I told him: you're awful at your job. The worst. I know I wasn't the best at mine, but that was by choice. Here he was trying to kill me, and he was failing with every try. If I wanted to die slowly and horribly, I could have just walked into Gunners Pub on match day and proclaimed that Arsenal fans routinely get fingered up the arsehole by the Spurs for warm-up. He was terrible at his job, and I told him so.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

Yeah. He said that. (pause) He reminded me that the conditions included a painless and quick death. I guess I hadn't really thought of that. Because to me, pain is part of life. What he was experiencing wasn't really pain or suffering. In the contract, I meant I'm not going to leave you screaming on a roadside for hours in the blistering sun until you die. To me, that's suffering. A little flesh wound here and there--that's not what I call suffering. But that's all semantics, right. Tomato, tomato. Potato, potato.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL

He started singing some old song about potatoes. And then he said, "You don't listen to Gershwin?" I had no idea what he was rambling on about. And he says, "You need more music in your life." Can you believe it? In the middle of all this, my biggest nightmare, my body slowly falling apart because of his doing, he say that. So I raised my head, tried my best to stand up from my wheelchair, and I demanded he get out. I believe I said, "The contract is void. Your shoddy work makes it null. I refuse to die this way. Not today." (pause) And then he started brandishing his gun.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

I have this theory. I got this from living in the outback so long. When you're connected to nature, everything is music. It's all around you. The whistle of the wind, the rustle of brush. Bird song. But in the city, you're disconnected from nature's rhythms, from its music. And that's why we created music. It's a way of compensating in a positive way, to reconnect with that which we've lost. If you don't have enough music in your life, you lose yourself. And Daniel had lost himself. I was looking at this poor sad sack of what was once almost a man. He didn't even have the guts to kill himself. And now, here he was, fighting me. Arguing over the smallest detail, because he didn't want to die. He wanted to live. Because of me. And I had an epiphany. My role had changed. I used to be a messenger of death. I would help usher people on to their demise. But now, I was called upon to be an angel of life. Through my actions, this man now wanted to live.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)
I brought value to his life. And it
felt good. No, it felt great.

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL
And...he didn't say a word. He got
up, walked up to me with his gun, and
said, "Welcome to the world of the
living. Now, live." And then, on his
way out, he lay his gun on the
kitchen counter, and said, "Just in
case you change your mind." And he
was gone. That was the last I'd even
seen him.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK
Why'd I leave it there? (takes a
moment, thinking) Because to truly
live, with agency, you have to be the
one making the choices. But you have
to do it in rhythm with nature. So
it's all harmonious. That's what we
call balance. So I left it there, to
remind him it's all about his choice.
You know that song by The Beatles?
"She's not a girl, who misses much...
do do do do...oh yeah..."

INT. DANIEL'S ROOM

DANIEL
It's strange. It's been years since I
saw him. I went to prison, served my
time. Three years. But now...look at
my life. I have this house, a new
wife. We're expecting our first in
three months. Which is why my den is
becoming a nursery. But yes, I think
about him often. I still get a pain
in my leg when it rains. And it
reminds me of him. Of that time. How
I had ruined my life. And how he
nearly ended it. But then ended up
saving it. It's all...saying life is
a circle is so typical. It's more
like a bicycle, isn't it? And no one
knows how to ride it.

(MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

But as long as you somehow find a way to keep the wheels moving, you learn to stay up and keep going. It's not always a pleasant ride. But, it's a ride nonetheless. And I know it's such rubbish, but...I've learned to keep peddling. And I partly have him to thank for it.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

JACK

He said that?

Long pause.

JACK (cont'd)

What song is that from?

End.

*PROCTORS' "SIGNS OF LIFE" OUTRO MUSIC.

INT. STUDIO

MICHAEL

The Big Loop is written and produced by Paul Bae. Mixed and engineered by Steve Jin. Today's episode stars two amazing actors. In order of appearance, Ireland's own Dave Rudden, and Australia's own Lee Shorten. You can catch Lee on The hit Amazon TV series THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE, and you can purchase Dave's novel KNIGHTS OF THE BORROWED DARK. And check out his podcast DOWN BELOW THE RESERVOIR. All their links are on our website at THEBIGLOOPPODCAST DOT COM, where you will also find all the music from today's episode which was composed and performed by the extremely gifted LEE ROSEVERE. He wrote the score specifically for this episode. Check out his links in the MUSIC section of our website. And last but definitely not least, this song, this marvelous song you're hearing right now is called SIGNS OF LIFE by THE PROCTORS.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)

We ask that you go to our website's MUSIC section and follow the links to THE PROCTORS and check out their songs. You will not regret it and I have a feeling, if you like jangly guitars and shimmering dream pop, some of you are about to discover your new favorite band. Follow us on Twitter, @ BIGLOOPPODCAST, and on Facebook. And we'd really appreciate a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. It makes it easier for others to find us. It's just a minute of your time and it would mean the world to us. And please if you could fill out that survey on our homepage we'd truly appreciate it. And... that's it for us. We'll be back in two weeks with something entirely different. There's no way for you to prepare for that one. So until then, tell your friends, tune in, peace out.