

Tower of Strength

By

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INT. INTERROGATION ROOM (THE BOX) POLICE STATION - DAY

Two men, both in their late-thirties/early-forties sit at a table in the middle of a police interrogation room. One man is ALEX, ruggedly handsome, athletic. The other, is PETER, distinguished and polished -- clearly a cop. In front of Peter is a blank notepad, a binder, and a tape recorder.

PETER presses a button on the tape recorder.

PETER

We're recording. This is Lieutenant Peter Avery, today's date is May 15th, 2014, time, 3.23PM.

(To Alex)

Please state your name for the record.

ALEX

Alex Barnes.

PETER

Where do you live?

ALEX

456 Dorchester.

PETER

Where do you work?

ALEX

Crescent Security.

PETER

Doing?

ALEX

Digital risk assessment.

PETER

What types of risks?

ALEX

Cyber attacks. Data breaching, that sort of thing.

PETER

Where did you work before Crescent?

ALEX

Independent contractor.

(CONTINUED)

PETER
Can you elaborate?

ALEX
I was a freelance cyber security expert.

PETER
For how long?

Alex looks away, sighs in frustration.

PETER
Please answer the question, Mr. Barnes.

ALEX
Twelve years.

PETER
Before that.

ALEX
Is this a job interview?

PETER
Mr. Barnes you know why you're here. And you know I have to ask these questions.

ALEX
I know you're asking the wrong guy.

PETER
We need to rule out your involvement.

ALEX
Then start asking me the right questions.

PETER
Tell me about MIT. Says you dropped out after two years, and then went abroad to study...

Peter's voice starts to fade, as Alex looks over his shoulder to the outside. He's no longer listening... just looking at the sky.

INT. HOUSE GARAGE - MORNING

Alex is tightening a few bolts on a kids' bicycle. A door to the garage opens and a woman (MARY, mid-thirties, pretty, tall and athletic) steps through wearing PJ shorts and a T-shirt. She's holding two cups of coffee. Gives one to Alex. Mary looks at her watch.

MARY
He's gonna love it.

Alex takes a step back to admire his work.

ALEX
Ready to roll.

Alex wipes grease away from his hands using a cloth. Mary kisses Alex on the shoulder.

MARY
My man.

ALEX
Always.

Alex walks over to the edge of the garage -- the door is open. He looks up to the morning sky.

ALEX
Perfect day for a ride.

Mary walks up behind Alex and puts her arms around his waist, resting her head against his back.

MARY
Perfect.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM (THE BOX) POLICE STATION -
CONTINUOUS

Peter's voice fades back in, as Alex looks away from the window, back to Peter.

PETER
Mr. Barnes? Did you hear anything I
just asked?

ALEX
Nothing worth answering.

(CONTINUED)

PETER

You understand I'm trying to help you, right?

ALEX

Understand what? That you're wasting good tax payer money on hunting down the guy who did this?

PETER

You're painting gray over black and white. Murder is murder, justified or not.

ALEX

Keep telling yourself that.

PETER

Okay... we've deviated. Let's bring it back. Tell me about your profession. Where did you learn to become a 'cyber security' specialist?

ALEX

I was a hacker. Then I moved to private sector.

PETER

A hacker? Really? You don't look like a...

ALEX

Nerd? Geek?

PETER

I was going to say, the IT guy.

ALEX

IT guys have looks?

PETER

Usually they're... paler. And make less eye contact.

ALEX

Like you said, not everything is black and white.

PETER

(Looking at the file)
So you worked in Asia. Where?

(CONTINUED)

ALEX
Japan, mostly.

PETER
Like their culture?

ALEX
Never gave it much thought.

PETER
Lots of tradition in Japan: sushi,
the bullet train, manga...
samurais.

ALEX
Your point?

PETER
Bring anything back from Japan?

ALEX
I dunno... maybe a Kimono.

INT. CAR - DAY

Peter is in his car, reading through a file. The passenger door opens, and a younger man (Greg Dobson) lets himself in. He's carrying two cups of coffee... he hands one over to Peter.

GREG
Cream and two sugars, right?

Peter nods, keeps looking at the file as he leafs through some paper.

GREG
That the coroners report?

PETER
Yep.

GREG
So... anything pop?

PETER
Ballistics confirm it was the same
weapon.

GREG
One shooter... did all that?

(CONTINUED)

PETER

One very angry, very well trained
guy.

GREG

Great, we're looking for Rambo.
(Sips his coffee)
Anything else?

PETER

Their heads were removed using a
sharp blade... probably a sword of
some sort.

GREG

Not many swords can make a clean
cut like that. Perhaps a Katana?

PETER

Japanese Samarai sword, right?

GREG

Yeah. Could be Yakuza?

PETER

Unlikely. Isn't their turf. No...
this was... personal.

Peter looks up from his file over to a house across the
street. Outside it, standing in front of a garage, washing
down a bicycle is ALEX.

PETER

Definitely personal.

INT.INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter is staring at Alex. Alex is holding eye contact.

PETER

A Kimono? That's all?

ALEX

I dunno, maybe some Sake too.

PETER

Sake?

ALEX

Law against that?

(CONTINUED)

PETER
(Clears his throat)
Tell me about April 30th.

ALEX
We've been over this.

PETER
Not with me you haven't.

ALEX
It was Ben's birthday.

PETER
And he went for a ride?

ALEX
(Nods)
On his birthday bike.

PETER
What was he doing in that
neighborhood?

ALEX
Hanging with a friend from school.

PETER
(Looking at the file)
Enrique Guzman. Nephew of one,
Frankie Guzman.

ALEX
That's right.

PETER
What do you know about Frankie?

ALEX
Not sure. Never met him.

PETER
Do you normally let your son hang
out with families you're
unacquainted with?

Alex shakes he head, frustrated. Looks outside... looking
specifically at a car parked in the street.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

CLOSE IN on Alex in the front seat of his car, on the driver's side. He's staring intently at something off in the distance.

ALEX

That them?

No response. Alex glances to his right.

ALEX

You're at a fork in the road; one way you die... clean. The other, messy. Choice is yours.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

A 30-year old Hispanic man sitting next to Alex, his head and mouth has been strapped with duct tape to the headrest. His eyes are full of panic and fear.

ALEX

Tic toc, Frankie...

FRANKIE stares for a long time at Alex. One tear slowly falls down his cheek. He nods, slightly.

Alex looks away from Frankie and back to what he was looking at in the distance. His eyes sharpen and his jaw clenches in anger.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter is standing by the door, his arms folded.

PETER

So you knew nothing about Frankie?

ALEX

If I repeat it ten times, will you believe me then?

PETER

(Takes a deep breath)

The term, 'Mule' mean anything to you?

ALEX

(Shrugs)

'30 Acres and...'?

(CONTINUED)

PETER

What about Los Zetas?

Alex shakes his head frustratedly.

PETER

Frankie ran drugs across the border for a Mexican Cartel called Los Zetas... Apparently he got in a hole with a local bookie and started skimming. The Zs found out and... tried to take him out.

ALEX

(Through gritted teeth)
But they missed, didn't they?

PETER

(Sympathetic)
The first time, yeah.

ALEX

First time?

PETER

Try and try again...

Peter tosses a picture across the table to Alex. Alex looks at the photo, cringes.

PETER

Shot in the head at close range.

Alex looks over the picture and then throws back on the table, disgusted.

ALEX

Why show me this?

PETER

'Cos that's what turf war looks like.

ALEX

What's their beef gotta do with me?

PETER

Cards on the table?

ALEX

By all means.

(CONTINUED)

PETER

Where were you last Tuesday at 1AM?

ALEX

At home, consoling my wife.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex sits at the foot of his bed. He's wearing dark pants and a vest. He's staring out the window, lost in thought.

Mary enters the room and softly, silently crawls on to the bed behind Alex. She puts her arms around his shoulders and rests her head against his neck. Her eyes are puffy from crying. Her countenance distant and expressionless.

MARY

Do what you do.

Alex takes one of her hands and kisses it tenderly, nods in stoic agreement.

Mary lets go of Alex and heads out of the room, leaving Alex, alone on the bed.

CUT TO:

POV FROM UNDER THE BED

Alex's feet on the floor in front of the bed. He reaches between his legs and pulls out, from under the bed, a large black canvas bag. He stands. A THUMP as the bag is placed on the bed. The sound of a ZIPPER opening. RATTLING of metallic objects. A few CLICKS.

A single BULLET casing DROPS to the floor in front of the bed. Alex's hand comes down and picks up the bullet.

The sound of the bag being ZIPPED up. Alex's feet move out of shot, out of the room.

The door closes. The only object left under the bed is a solitary HOT WHEELS CAR.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter is pacing around the room.

PETER

Anyone else with you?

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

No.

PETER

Did you make any calls? Anything that could corroborate your whereabouts?

ALEX

No. Just my wife.

Peter sits back down. Taps his pen against the notepad, thinking.

PETER

I have twin boys; Adam and Zach. They both love football, so I put them in Pee-Wee a couple of years ago. They had this coach -- a real meathead. He'd scream at the kids, call them names, and run them ragged. One day he scared Adam so bad he pissed himself. Zachy being Zachy tried to stick up for his brother, and got his butt slapped for his trouble. Naturally, I was a... concerned parent. Now, I coulda let the 'powers that be' handle it -- but that wasn't gonna satisfy my need to teach that asshole a lesson. No one treats my boys that way. No one. So, I looked up this guy in the system and found a few unpaid parking violations. Threw him in the cooler with three dudes who like to play 'Doctor'. Did I feel bad about it? Hell no. So, if you hear what I'm saying, Mr. Barnes... I get it. Every father needs to be a tower of strength for their boys.

ALEX

What do you get exactly? That I'm angry? Powerless? That you jackasses couldn't do a thing to find the scum who blew my son's head off?

PETER

It's -- or at least it was -- an ongoing investigation. But now... now it's a cluster fuck. Do you even know who Los Zetas are?

(CONTINUED)

ALEX
Like you said, a Mexican cartel.

PETER
They-

A loud knock at the door. The door opens, Greg pops his head in.

GREG
A word, boss?

PETER
(To Alex)
Sit tight.

Alex stares at the door... and then looks over to his hands. He slowly clenches and un-clenches his fists.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Three Hispanic men are standing in front of a small house. All looking mean and ominous. The house has a nondescript front lawn, with a path leading up the doorway.

A car pulls up to the curb in front lawn.

A man wearing a dark pants and a black hoodie gets out the car. The three men watch him closely.

The man goes to the trunk of his car, opens it up and pulls out a child's bicycle. The three men continue to glare.

The man walks the bike up to the front path leading up the house and then rolls it down the path toward the three men. The bike rolls about half way down the path and then topples over to the side, falling over.

One of the goons goes over to the bike to look it over. The other two reach into their jacket pockets.

GOON 1
Whatcha doin' man?

The man in the hoodie says nothing.

The goon over the bike notices a dark liquid substance on his handlebar, brushes one of his fingers against it and then looks at his finger; it's blood. He tenses and looks up at the man in the hoodie.

(CONTINUED)

GOON 1
Back the fuck off, bro.

The man in the hoodie doesn't move. He pulls down the hood... it's ALEX.

ALEX
You have blood on your hands.

GOON 1
I said step off, 'less you wanna
get bloody too.

CLOSE IN ON ALEX'S FACE

ALEX
(Half a smile)
I'm counting on it.

FADE OUT

INT. POLICE STATION HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Peter and Greg and standing the hallway looking at a file.

PETER
Whatcha got?

GREG
Not much. Background checks out.

PETER
Any known associates?

GREG
No one that fits the bill.

PETER
So, he's clean?

GREG
I guess.

PETER
You guess?

GREG
I... it's nothing.

PETER
I didn't make you a Detective to
hold your tongue... spit it out.

(CONTINUED)

GREG

Well you know I did a couple of tours in Afghanastan, right?

PETER

And?

GREG

Well, I did my share of recon and door kicking. Even got in a couple of firefights. For a while there, I thought I was a pretty tough hombre. Then one night our platoon was asked to support a Delta squad on a smash and grab of some Taliban badass. We took up positions on the perimeter of this house that must've had a least two dozen Hajis armed to the teeth inside. Five of those Delta guys ghost in from the roof and in less than three minutes they clear the entire building and walk out the front door with Public Enemy number one black bagged and tagged. As for the other guys in the house... all dead. Killed every last one of them. And I gotta tell ya, Boss... from that day forward I never thought of myself as a tough hombre again.

PETER

Love a good war story Detective -- but what's it gotta do with our boy?

GREG

Not for nothing, but to me, the way the Zs house was taken down was too precise, too professional. Had special forces written all over it.

PETER

Do they train them to take the heads off the bad guys and place them on their chests?

GREG

No... I think that was a message.

PETER

Agree. But your story doesn't explain how Mr. Barnes was involved.

(CONTINUED)

GREG

Well, I got chummy with some of those Delta guys... turns out nearly all of them get discharged with new identities. New record, the whole nine.

PETER

So you think our guy was Delta?

GREG

All I'm saying is his record is spic and span. Too clean, you know?

PETER

We need more than a hunch. Keep digging, OK?

GREG

Will do, Boss.

Peter opens the interrogation room door and steps back in.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary is sitting at the kitchen table, sipping a cup of coffee. On the table is a HOT WHEELS car -- she rolls it back and forth under her index finger.

Alex walks in, still wearing his black hoodie. In one hand he carries a BLACK DUFFEL BAG and in the other he's holding a KATANA.

Alex places the Katana on the table in front of Mary, then walks over to the sink where he starts to wash his hands.

Mary opens up the Katana... drops of blood speckle the blade. Mary nods an affirmation to herself.

MARY

How many?

ALEX

Twelve.

MARY

All of them?

Alex continues to wash his hands... lost in thought.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

Alex?

Alex looks over his shoulder and nods to Mary.

ALEX

Car packed?

MARY

When do we leave?

ALEX

After.

MARY

After what?

ALEX

They bring me in.

MARY

Right... then make the call?

ALEX

Yeah.

Mary stands up and walks over to Alex. She pulls off his hoodie.

MARY

Take the rest off in the bathroom.
I'll burn them in the yard.

INT.INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter steps back into the room.

PETER

Where were we?

ALEX

The Mexican cartel. Zicos, or something?

PETER

Los Zetas. THE Mexican Cartel. Made up of ex-elite military. Known for their brutal tactics, including beheadings, torture... general indiscriminate slaughter. A few years ago they started to expand into the US via a street gang

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PETER (cont'd)
called the Latin Kings. The neighborhood your boy biked through was ruled by the Kings... of which Frankie, was a member.

ALEX
Ok... so?

PETER
You telling me you never heard of the Kings or Los Zetas before today?

ALEX
Never.

PETER
I get the feeling you're bullshitting me. In fact, I get the feeling that you know a lot more than you're letting on.

ALEX
Well you're wrong.

PETER
Be that as it may, this is a very regrettable situation.

ALEX
Regrettable? You call ridding the world of these monsters... 'regrettable'?

PETER
These 'monsters' are like locusts. For every one put away or put down another three will appear. For every eye they take two. They fear no one. Not the police, not the government. No one. They are a law unto themselves. And while this may seem morally defensible... I can assure you that all it's done is a stir up a hornets nest.

ALEX
You're worried about retaliation?

PETER
It'll be a bloodbath.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

So?

PETER

You should be worried. You and your wife.

ALEX

Why?

PETER

Whether you're telling the truth or not is irrelevant. These guys will see you as their numero uno suspect. And unlike me, when they question you they'll use a car battery instead of a tape recorder and scalpel for a pencil.

ALEX

So you're gonna protect us?

PETER

If it comes to that. But there's nothing I can do, with what you've shared.

ALEX

(Incredulous)

What? You want me to confess?

PETER

If you weren't involved we have no precedent for protecting you. No threats have been made.

ALEX

You guys are a piece of work.

PETER

Mr. Barnes... some very bad people are coming and when they do, you'll be on your own.

ALEX

I'll take my chances.

Peter reaches over and turns the tape recorder off.

PETER

You can keep denying this 'till your blue in the face... but from one father to another... I wanna

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PETER (cont'd)
buy the guy who did this a beer.
About time someone dished out some
vigilante justice. But the reality
is, we live in a country where
everyone is subject to the rule of
law. Even the bad guys.

A long pause Alex looks down at the desk. He finally looks
up, his countenance deadly serious.

ALEX
But what if this wasn't an
impetuous act of revenge? What if
it was just the beginning? A
stirring of the hornets nest to get
the attention of the queen. What if
it led to the
complete annihilation of the
colony? What then?

PETER
I'd say it'd take a joint task
force, tens of millions of dollars,
and an army.

ALEX
Or... just one very motivated
father.

PETER
I doubt one man could-

They are interrupted by a knock at the door. Greg let's
himself in. He's holding a phone.

GREG
Boss, you have a call.

PETER
Can it wait?

GREG
I don't think so... it's... it's...

PETER
Who?

GREG
Charlie Underhill.

PETER

Who?

GREG

Charlie Underhill... as in,
Secretary of Defense, Underhill.

PETER

Are you shitting me?

Greg hands the phone to Peter. Peter stands up, and walks over the corner of the room.

PETER

(Into the Phone)

This is Lt. Peter Avery.

(Listening)

All do respect, but why should I believe you are who you say you are?

(Listening, removes the phone from his ear and places it in front of his face)

Yes, I'm on video now.

(Looks at the phone)

Mr. Secretary. My apologies.

(Brings phone back to his ear)

Will do. Thank you.

(Switches off the phone, looks over the Alex)

Cut him loose.

Greg looks over inquisitively at Peter.

GREG

Boss?

PETER

He's free to go.

Alex gets up from the table and puts on his coat.

PETER

Thank you for your time, Mr. Barnes.

ALEX

Right.

Alex exits the room.

(CONTINUED)

GREG

Boss... you telling me the
Secretary of Defense just ordered
we let our lead suspect walk? Why?
Who is he?

Peter walks over to the window. Looks outside, seeing Alex walking over to a parked car.

PETER

No one. Just a dad of a dead child.

INT. CAR, OUTSIDE THE POLICE STATION - DAY

Alex gets into the passenger side of the car. On the driver's side is Mary.

MARY

So?

ALEX

We're good.

MARY

Where to?

Alex reaches into his pocket and pulls out a HOT WHEELS car.

ALEX

Mexico.

Mary nods, puts on a pair of sunglasses and starts the car.

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The car pulls out from the parking spot and heads down the street.

END