

Eliminate the Killing

Helith

Thanks to Arina, my wife, for bringing the topic to the table years ago
and
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The characters in this story are fictitious. Any resemblance with reality
is no more than a coincidence.

Author: Helith
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Chapter 1

Marco was extremely handy with computers. Many of the things he knew he had learned from his frequent forays on the internet. He spent countless hours at his computer; he was immune to the constant complaints from his mother that he should play outside instead of gaming and chatting with his so called virtual friends. It was obviously clear that his mother had no idea what he was doing in his room.

For starters, he had hacked into the school's computer and could see when they would have unannounced tests. Sometimes he found the tests themselves and usually the answers were available, as well. He didn't share this information with others from his class. He knew if a few heard; it wouldn't be long before it would get back to the teachers and if it came out he was involved, he would be suspended, that was clearly stated in the school rules.

So he kept this a secret and used it only when needed. For him, it was more about the challenge. He had always been a good student and remembered most things the first time he read them. Some said he had a photographic memory. That wasn't entirely true he had tested himself, and he couldn't reproduce whole pages of a book from only looking at it a short time. So he knew it wasn't that. He knew it was only that he was smart.

Going to school, to him, was more about the routine. The school books

contained most of the information which meant he only needed to pay a small amount of attention to the teachers. And he always finished his homework before the last hour of the school day. Yes, going to school was an enjoyable routine.

His mother, however, was right in one regard, he didn't have too many friends at school. He didn't have much interest in girls and boys were always talking about girls and football while his interest was in gaming and computers. He didn't even have a best friend at school, but on the internet he had plenty of best friends some even from abroad.

He often chatted in English with them, and his extensive vocabulary contributed to his good grades in English. Besides online gaming, he surfed the internet, and when he stumbled on websites that were restricted, he made it his mission to break in. Over the last couple of years, he had collected lots of different sorts of hacking software.

It was surprisingly easy to find these tools. He was also extremely skilled at hiding his presence on the internet. He not only collected the software, but he was surprisingly good at improving it. He had even perfected cloaking software that hid his IP address so that he left no trace of his presence on sites.

Gaining access to restricted sites gave him his greatest thrill.

In most instances, he only looked around and left quietly.

He wrote down his victories in an old notebook, used previously for biology. He didn't post them anywhere, deliberately. More than anybody else, he knew that the internet wasn't as safe as most people thought. So over time, he had not only hacked into the school, but also

the local police station, in order to wipe off a fine for littering in public and the bank in town. The bank interested him because he was curious to see if his father did have money or not to pay his mother. Since the divorce, his father had been living in a small apartment and had said that he didn't earn enough to support his ex-wife. His father hadn't lied.

So that meant his mother had to work as well and that he had to take care of himself. Luckily, he was old enough and didn't need a babysitter; because that would have been another hassle and expense for his mother. He was left on his own, to keep himself out of trouble, and this suited everyone.

During his surfing on the internet he had found some fascinating secrets; nude pictures of a couple that lived down the street, an online diary from a girl that had confessed that she had fallen in love with a teacher and a sort of private cash flow from a couple that earned an additional income from selling antiques on the markets.

All these secrets were relatively harmless, and he didn't even think about revealing them. Most importantly, he didn't want to reveal his presence, and he also understood that making these kinds of secrets public would also be bad for them too. He wasn't that cruel, and he disliked people that thought only of inflicting pain on others.

He was quite confident in his skills, but didn't fall for the urge to hack into the websites of the CIA, FBI or any other large government institutes. Reading the hacking forums he saw there were always guys that claimed their successful attacks, but over time you never saw them

back on the internet. He was sure that these agencies had planted traps that would sooner or later discover your identity. He had no intention whatsoever to cause more problems for his mother than she had already. So his forays were limited to private sites or sites of small companies. Two days before he had stumbled upon an interesting website. The name of the website wasn't even pronounceable and consisted of consonants only. He checked to see whom the owner of the website was, but he was unsuccessful. The owner of the domain had used a registry company in a country where by law it wasn't required to disclose the owner's identity. Marco hoped that by gaining access to the strangely named website, he would know what these consonants stood for. Yesterday he learned that no mail server was connected to the domain, but there was data stored online. This only piqued his interest more.

He watched his optimized hacking program at work. Lots of user names and passwords scrolled over his screen. So far the program hadn't found a hit. He looked at the passwords and realized he had already discovered something about them, they consisted of eight characters. That implied that the password was strong enough to survive a direct attack; he had to become more creative to crack this one. But before he could try something else his mother had called for him to come down and help her carry in the shopping. He left the program running and ran down to greet his mother and have a look at what she had bought. He was out of chewing gum.

Downstairs, he kissed his mother on her cheek and ran off to her old

car. Two shopping bags were waiting for him. He took them both and walked back up to the kitchen. His mother passed him in the hallway in order to lock the car. 'I have strawberry gum for you in one of the bags. No sugar as you asked for.' He smiled. She was thinking of him as always. He forgot the real world when playing in that virtual reality. He set down the bags and started to put the groceries away. Surprised to find ice cream he put that in the freezer. Apparently it was on sale as he found a second package. Halfway through the second bag he found the promised gum. He took the package out and stopped unpacking. 'If you want ice cream as dessert, please help unpack the rest, as well. I'll start cooking in a minute.' He felt guilty; his mother always thought of him, and just now he was being so selfish.

Marco was easy to bribe, especially with ice cream. A couple of minutes later and all the groceries were unpacked. Marco ran upstairs while taking out a piece of gum. He looked at the screen and noted immediately that the passwords were no longer scrolling. Had the program completed all routines? That wasn't likely. He looked again and then he spied the reason. He had found a matching user-id and password. He typed in the winning combination and waited.

Within seconds, a new window opened, and he found one large text file. He copied the file instantly onto a USB-stick. If contaminated, the damage would be limited to the stick, not running through his computer. He ran his personally improved virus software on the file but no threat was found. Then he opened the text file. It looked like a kind of survey, but the language used was unfamiliar to him. Maybe he could understand more of it after using Google Translate. It wasn't the

best tool, but it was good enough to understand the basic content. He used it regularly to chat with someone who didn't speak English. In most cases, the online chat could be understood when he translated it into their language and vice versa. Every now and then he had to rephrase a sentence just for clarity.

He copied a couple of phrases into Google Translate and selected a language. The result was disappointing. This wasn't the right choice. Randomly he chose another language. The result was just as ineffectual. Again and again he selected a different language, but he couldn't seem to find the right one. What if the text was also encoded? That would make things much more difficult. Marco was now beginning to be extremely interested. Who had gone to all the trouble to avoid anyone gaining access to this text? He became more and more intrigued with each new language he tried. Just when he was doubting that the Google Translate would provide him the answer, the first sentences were translated and finally it began to make some sense.

Now that he had found the right language he ran the entire text through Google Translate and saved the result in a new text file. He would have to wait to read it because his mother had called him for dinner. He had totally forgotten about the time and was glad that he had already finished his homework. That meant he could continue right after dinner.

His mother had prepared a lovely meal, and as expected they had ice cream as dessert. His mother had stopped long ago asking if he had a

good day at school. She knew the answer. Besides she had more problems of her own to deal with, like paying the monthly rent of the house. She didn't want to burden Marco with these problems. He was a young boy, who should be allowed to enjoy the last years of his youth. The divorce of his parents was already burden enough she felt. While Marco was thinking of his recent discovery, his mother looked at him. He was obviously up to something. When would he turn off his computer and go outside, she wondered. How could he stay upstairs behind that screen for hours on end? To her it looked extremely boring. She felt tired after a whole day of work and also doing the cooking. 'Marco, please do me a favor and put everything in the dishwasher. I want to lie down on the couch and watch my favorite soap. They have a double episode on tonight.'

Marco stood up and cleared the table while his mother retreated to the couch. Once the dishwasher was filled and turned on he went upstairs. He could focus now on his recent discovery. He sat down and typed in the screen password. The translated text had been waiting patiently for his return. He started reading.

Chapter 2

My name is Aval, and this is a true story. The accident happened when I was ten years old. I was together with my parents in the car, when a large truck hit us. There was no traffic that night, and my dad was driving cautiously like always. He couldn't be blamed for this, on the other hand, the truck driver could. Most likely he had fallen asleep while driving and the truck veered into the wrong side of the highway. After the crash, it was painfully silent. There was little left of our car. The last memories I have of both my parents are of their bloody unmoving bodies. Shortly afterwards I fainted.

I awoke in a hospital bed. After a few days, a nurse explained in a patient voice that my parents died shortly after the accident. Just like the truck driver. Within a week, they had been buried. I hadn't been able to attend the funeral; as I hadn't recovered enough and I was too young she informed me curtly. Shortly after, she was called away and I was left alone with a lot of questions. For a long time, I hoped that I would die quickly like my parents. The pain was unbearable, and because there was a shortage of pain killers, during the daytime it was rationed, only at night were there pills available to help us sleep.

Though I was clearly unlucky on the road, ultimately, I was lucky with the doctor. He managed to save my life and my leg. There's no way he could have known what the far reaching consequences would be for my future by doing so. I didn't have any siblings or other family that could be found, except an old aunt, who lived somewhere in America.

Efforts were made to track her down, but without success. My stay in the hospital was long and tedious. I shared the room with five adults; none of which were interested in my well-being. I longed for my mother every minute. I wanted to hold her tightly, but she was dead. I missed my parents' presence. I didn't realize how valuable they were to me till they were gone. In the beginning, I always imagined that one of them would walk into the room and tell me it had been all a mistake. The only person that came to visit me had no resemblance to my parents at all.

As soon as I was declared fully recovered a nice lady appeared at my bedside. She told me that my parents wouldn't come back, which of course I knew, and nobody else was there to look after me.

The State took over the parent's role in these cases; I would move to a new home tomorrow. I wouldn't be alone; there would be more than enough children, of all ages, to play with. Until I had new parents; I would stay, eat, and sleep there and would continue to go to school on the premises. I politely declined her suggestion to go to my old house to pick up some of my personal belongings. I couldn't cope with the idea of finding my home deserted.

The next morning I received help with dressing. My right leg was still terribly painful. I had hardly slept that night which wasn't that different from the previous nights. The frightful images of the truck and my parent's death were still so fresh in my mind. Last night another fear had crept up; that of the unknown future. One of the nurses visited me quickly to say goodbye. He had helped me with the therapy for my leg.

When he had heard of my discharge, he showed me a couple of exercises, which would improve my walking over time. I had to promise him I would do the exercises twice a day. Then he left as well, and I sat patiently, waiting to be picked up.

I waited for hours till someone finally came for me. It wasn't the nice lady from yesterday, but another. 'You must be Aval?' I nodded politely. She took me by my hand, and we walked from the ward. I looked behind one more time, but nobody waved goodbye. I felt terribly alone. Once outside, I needed to shield my eyes, the world seemed so much brighter after weeks of being in the hospital. The lady asked me to walk quickly as we were already late. I wanted to tell her that it wasn't because of me as I had been waiting for hours. I stumbled along mutely, my leg hurting worse than usual due to this fast pace, but I swallowed the pain and said nothing. I didn't want to spend one minute longer than necessary at this boring hospital. Silently I told myself that things couldn't get any worse.

I was directed to sit in the back seat of an old car we approached. The lady, who still hadn't introduced herself, didn't say where we were going or how long it would take to get there. I didn't dare to speak to her and was extremely nervous about being in a car again since the accident. I was happy that she was paying more attention to the road than me. I was looking outside, but nothing was familiar. Wherever we were, I had never been here before. We left the crowded city center, and suddenly she spoke. She informed me that we had to drive for another hour. As we left the city behind; fields started to appear.

Chapter 3

The car slowed after crossing a bridge and turned on to a small dirt road. There were no road signs anywhere, but apparently the woman knew her way. The road was bumpy and again the car reduced its speed as we drove on through the woods. Occasionally I noted birds flying away. Just when I thought we lost our way, the car halted at a gate. Apparently we were expected as the gate opened almost immediately. While the car accelerated and continued on its way, invisible hands closed the gate. A high wall was covered almost entirely by high bushes of beautiful purple flowers.

I looked ahead and saw a large house with some lower built barns that connected to the main house. Wide stone steps lead to the front door where a man was waiting for us. As soon as the car halted the man descended the stairs. The lady got out of the car and apologized for the delay. Then she pointed towards me. She gestured for me to come out of the car. A bit clumsily I got out of the car. My leg was stiffer than ever from the ride.

The man shook hands with me, and asked if I was Aval, apparently everybody knew my name. Next he gave the lady an envelope that she put away, quickly, in her handbag. She looked at me once more, turned and strode to the car, got in and drove off. I stayed behind with the man. 'They call me Father. You may call me Father, as well. Before I will show you to your room and give you a tour, we will pay a visit to the doctor. He has especially waited for you. Everyone that

comes here for the first time is examined. It would cause problems if you had a contagious disease or lice. Please follow me.'

I followed Father through a dark hallway. The lights were off, and I thought that I walked over a carpet, positioned in the middle of the hallway, but because of the darkness, I wasn't sure. At the end of the hall we came to a door, there he knocked once and then opened the door. The door remained open, and I guessed that I had to follow him in. Standing behind a desk was an elderly man with glasses and unusually short hair. Father introduced the man to me as the doctor and left the room, leaving us alone. 'Well Aval, welcome to the orphanage. I'm the doctor, and I am here every Tuesday afternoon, having consulting hours available for everyone. No appointments needed. In the event, you have a question you may see me then.'

The man appeared to be friendly. Being a doctor here, did not seem to be an exceptionally busy job. He motioned to me, and I followed him to the window. There, he could examine me better. While examining me he explained what he was doing; I learned that I had no lice fortunately, had good eyesight, and good hearing, as well.

Next he asked me to undress, but I could keep my underpants on. He listened just like in the hospital with a cold stethoscope; to my lungs and heart and nodded reassuringly. Everything was working well for a boy of my age he reassured me. Once in a while he walked back to his desk and wrote down something. Later he asked me to remove my underpants and I was examined where I'd never been examined before.

This part I disliked the most; finally I was allowed to pull my underpants up again. Apparently everything was as it should be there too.

My right leg got the most inspection; he felt every bit of it, looked how far I could bend it and asked if it still hurt. I nodded at his last question. 'You should practice a lot with your leg. It will hurt in the beginning, but if you stop exercising it, you will limp for the rest of your life, and that is truly unnecessary. So you have to be brave and bite the bullet. Can you do that?'

Fearing for a life in which I had to limp, I nodded again. When the doctor kept looking at me, I said: 'I must do my exercises every day, so that everything will heal right they told me in the hospital.'

I was allowed to dress entirely now. 'Come, I will take you to Father. I can tell him that once again a healthy boy joined today.' While I was putting on my clothes, the doctor took his bag and a small blue colored cool box and then we left the room.

I walked through the dark hallway again, this time following the doctor. Finally, we found Father by the front door. The two men had a brief discussion. I couldn't overhear their conversation. Then the doctor shook hands with Father and disappeared through the front door and down the steps. Apparently he actually had delayed his departure waiting for me. 'Well Aval, the doctor was pleased with you. He told me you had to exercise your leg each and every day. As the lessons are still in progress for the day, I will give you a short tour. First let us go

upstairs. There are the dormitories. The boys sleep at one side of the house while the girls are on the other side. Girls aren't allowed over here, and the same applies for boys over there. Not adhering to these rules leads to punishment.' What kind of penalties Father was referring to wasn't mentioned, but the tone of his voice implied a kind of threat.

We came to a large dormitory. Each bed had a blue blanket and all the beds were neatly made. The floors were clean and tidy. The beds were separated by high closets. Each closet carried a blue tag with a name on it. We stopped at a cupboard that had my name printed neatly on it already. The bed to the right of the cupboard was my bed.

Each morning prior to breakfast the beds should be made, I was told. Breakfast was downstairs in the dining room. Quickly I guessed there were about thirty beds, but it wasn't apparent if all the beds were in use. Then I noted that two cupboards lacked a blue tag, and I knew then that there were only two vacancies left. 'In the event there has been a small accident during your sleep, you need to take the sheets off yourself and bring them to the washing room. There will always be a clean set in your cupboard.' As I wasn't prone to incontinence, I didn't worry.

Next to the dormitory was the bathroom. It had a few showers, sinks, and there were two toilets with doors. Everything looked tidy and clean. 'As of tomorrow you will receive your household chores. Everybody is expected to do their part to keep the place organized. Discipline is quite serious here.' Even if, the last remark hadn't been made; this was becoming quite clear to me. Now that we had seen the

top floor, that is to say the part for boys only, we descended one floor. Here were the kitchen and dining rooms. Two people were working in the kitchen, and I was briefly introduced to them. Apparently they were busy as they only looked up quickly, nodded and continued at their work. In the large dining room, one table was placed at odds with the other tables. 'That dining table is for me and my Staff. You are allowed to talk quietly during meals. But please bear in mind that we are here with almost seventy people. Imagine what would happen if everybody shouted. Nobody could understand one word.' Next to the dining room were a couple of other doors, but these were only meant for Father and the Staff members I was told.

Once more we descended the stairs. 'I will show you where the lessons are held and where you can do your homework. Please, follow me.' The house was bigger than I imagined. We walked along a wide corridor, which was parallel to the dark halls that lead to the doctor's office. We turned to the right and there I saw one large classroom. It looked like dozens of children were doing their homework. It was quite silent. Once in a while somebody coughed or a chair was repositioned. There was some whispering, and when the children saw me, the wave of whispering swelled. Father coughed once, and suddenly there was silence.

I saw that the class room was split in three. Two teachers assisted the children. The oldest and longest children were furthest from the door. The youngest children were closer to where I stood with Father. I guessed that I would sit somewhere in the middle. Father turned

back to me. 'After school, it is time for homework. That is to be done also in this room. The teachers will remain here for an additional hour after class time to assist where needed. Next you will continue to work independently here. The oldest children are in charge. You will have an older boy assigned today who will help you out. His name is Tomas. Please, pay attention to what he will tell you. That will avoid a lot of problems later.' It seemed there was a threat in his voice, but I wasn't sure. 'When your homework is done, you may play outside in the garden. Everybody remains on the premises.'

Again I felt a threat or was my imagination running away with me? 'When you are late for meals you don't eat. We don't tolerate lateness. Tomas will tell you what you can do for the remainder of the week. If you adhere to your responsibilities, then you will have a pleasant time here.'

He looked at his watch and said: 'We have two minutes before Tomas will be finished. Let's go to my room and wait.' Father was obviously good at estimating time; shortly after we entered his room, there was a knock on the door. After Father gave permission to enter, a tall boy with pimples stepped in. 'Hello Father, I was told that I should see you after my lessons. I hope this isn't about yesterday? I have cleaned up everything.' Father reassured Tomas and pointed to me.

'You will mentor Aval; he is ten years old and new here. I want you to make him welcome. If something happens to Aval, I will hold you responsible.' Obviously I hadn't mistaken the earlier threats as Tomas swallowed hard. 'Come Aval, I'll tell you everything you need to

know. Goodbye Father.' He turned to leave, and I followed, but he halted at the door. Nervously, he nodded at Father. 'Say goodbye,' he whispered. I turned and said: 'Goodbye Father.' We quickly left after that.

Chapter 4

Tomas was twelve years old and explained that he was one of the oldest boys currently at the house. Before he turned fourteen new parents had to be found for him, no one over the age of fourteen was allowed to stay. Most parents wanted to adopt younger children, his chances became more difficult over time. He had no idea what would happen if nobody turned up to adopt him. So far, they had looked after him exceptionally well, and he was confident that, by that time, a solution would be found.

We went to the dormitory. I pointed out where my bed was but Tomas took my name tag off the closet and hung it on another unmarked closet instead. 'Now we sleep next to each other. The boy that was sleeping there is gone now. Lucky for him he found parents that wanted to adopt him immediately just before he turned fourteen.' Tomas showed me the contents of the closet; it contained some sheets, towels, toothbrush and a comb. He asked me if I had a suitcase with me. I explained that I only had the clothes that I was wearing.

'Well, let's first get some clothes for you. There are plenty to choose from downstairs. People donate a lot to the orphanage.' Tomas and I walked down the stairs and approached one of the teachers. 'Hello Sir, I have been appointed Aval's mentor, he just arrived today. He has no other clothes than what he's wearing, so we'd like to get him some from the clothing room. Can we get in, please?' I nodded to the teacher in introduction. Then we followed him to a locked room. The teacher

had a large key ring and after he found the right key, he opened the door. Saying to Tomas: 'Don't make a mess. Pick out a few outfits and I will be back in half an hour.'

Together we walked into the room. I noticed that on each side of the room were shelves with boxes on them. Each box had a label that described its contents. There were boxes with socks, underwear, sweaters, shirts, trousers and shoes. The sizes, which were also written on the labels, went up gradually, it was well organized. We had only thirty minutes to get my clothes sorted out and luckily I soon found the boxes that had my size. I took two pair of everything after trying the trousers, a shirt and some shoes. The rest was put back in the boxes and placed back in storage. We were just in time as the teacher came back just as we put the last box away. Both Tomas and I had a pile of clothes in both hands, and we quickly walked away, while the door was locked behind us.

While walking upstairs, Tomas filled me in on the daily routine at the orphanage. The evening bedtimes took the longest to explain.

The youngest ones had to go upstairs at 19:00 hours and should be in bed no later than 19:45. They were allowed to read another fifteen minutes, and it should be quiet from 20:00 onwards.

The older kids had to go upstairs, no later than 20:30; it had to be quiet after 21:00. Also, the bedroom lights would go out at that time, except for the night lights in the hallway. You weren't allowed out of your bed after 21:00 unless you liked to do extra chores. He said I would go with the older kids to bed because of my age. The military timing reinforced