

Director

I didn't think about a summer job until May when the good ones were taken. I never had one before. Mom said I was 16 now, practically a man, and with my moviemania I was turning into a lazybones. She called it moviemania and she called me lazybones. She wouldn't give me any more pocket money. I didn't argue. I knew the real reason I had to get a job was because she couldn't give me \$10 on Thursdays anymore. She was working but sometimes the alimony came late and she had to give the landlady a story. It was one of the worst jobs she had because she had to be on her feet all the time. I could see her in pain but she never complained about the fallen arches, bad shoes or the manager. I told her I'd get a good job and pay my way. She watched me with those anxious eyes. We were both thinking of college, which I was supposed to start next year. Once she said it was about as realistic as financing one of my movie ideas.

By May all the good jobs were gone. My friends were getting ready to travel as tree planters, junior marketing assistants and mag crew workers. I had an interview with a local production company. I told this guy with a ponytail about my idea for a

werewolf movie. He drank some water and said they did mainly promo. He was professional and smiled and I knew I had a chance to change his mind. But while I was doing that he got quieter like he was too polite to say anything before I completed my idea. He had this way of leaning in the direction he was smiling that made you want to stop talking. He said they'd call me when they could use my idea.

I took the only summer job I could get that had some connection with my dream. This was at the same community college where mom had to leave off classes to have me. She told me it was okay to work there as long as I didn't make friends and kept getting grades good enough to get into university instead. She had this idea that I could get an impractical job as an engineer and make lots of money. I never told her that I wasn't cut out for that. I didn't care anyway because none of the directors I admire went to university.

The job was video technician. It wasn't as cool as it sounds. What I had to do was sign out a camera and set it up to film simultaneous translation exams. This was for Vietnamese or Latino people who wanted the certificate to work at the hospital and translate when the doctor wanted to tell Vietnamese or Latino families that their son was going to pull through or die or whatever. Filming a candidate took twenty minutes and we did

ten before lunch, eight after. Then on my own time I had to watch the tapes through to check that the picture and sound were okay, then label the tapes and drop them off in a cardboard box outside the department of modern languages. No one stole the tapes. They didn't have a secretary to work July and August.

What they didn't tell me when they hired me was that I'd be working as an assistant. I found out who I was really working under when I came to work the first day and saw this guy in a tucked in golf shirt half-sitting on the ledge of the AV room's Dutch door. He had thin arms and legs, and the tuck showed you how chubby he was, and how he didn't care about it. He looked like he was handling everything. He was a bit younger than mom with brown hair that was longer in back than in front. His moustache was small and lighter. We shook hands and he told me he was Mike.

"We gotta wait for Mrs. Jahangiri to come open the door," he said. When he grinned the lines went out of his face. "And kid, Mrs. Jahangiri gives the same rat's ass how long we wait that I give if she comes at all."

Those first few days we were like sailors, not talking more than necessary. I liked not having to make conversation when I had nothing to say. I'm more of a visual person. Mrs. Jahangiri, the

sessional who gave the exams, kept all the jangly keys on a pipe cleaner on a loop in her long skirts. She didn't like to touch anything. She was usually busy with family business on her cell phone. I didn't know what language that was but it was loud enough that you could tell it was family business. Between emergencies, she played solitaire until she got stuck, then cheated. She told me to always lock up the equipment carefully because last year they lost some.

Mike and me would haul the camera, tripod, monitor and dolly up four flights of stairs and set up in the exam room. Then one of us stayed to film while the other went back down to do joe jobs like clearing out the office of this dead prof to move in Mrs. Jahangiri's stuff. If there was time, we would watch yesterday's tapes. I don't believe in spookiness. But the college was empty like there was a war going on someplace else for the future of mankind.

I had it worked out: I could give some to mom, buy coffee and sandwiches, keep my bike running and go to the movies twice a week. By myself, to concentrate better. I could still save enough, with what I had already, by the end of the summer I'd buy my first camera. I told Mike about it on a break.

"What do you want that camera for?" he asked. He said for like fur. He said words like garage and Tuesday differently so I guess he was from somewhere else. He never said where. But he'd been all over and he told me about it. He told me he used to be a cop but then he went back to doing things he was better at.

"I'm going to make movies," I told him. I felt my ears getting hot. "Action movies and martial arts movies and horror movies, other good kinds, I love them. I just love watching and watching them again in my head, replaying the best parts and making the other parts better. Sometimes I get caught up in that and planning my movie and I forget to eat."

Mike slowed chewing and looked at the ground and at me. "I thought kids today just got daddy to rent them dumb videos."

I didn't want to tell him that we didn't have a VCR or a daddy, or even a tv since mom sold it. She said it was to make me start reading. I didn't argue.

"People think movies just make themselves," I told Mike, "but they don't. If you want to understand movies and make movies, you have to go to the movies. You have to get there on time and get one of the good seats and enjoy it but not

enjoy it too much, so you can watch it like surgery and stay until the end of the end roll."

Mike's bony shoulders went up and down. "And the camera?"

"It's for my demo, *The Curse of the Werewolf*. You have to have a demo or people just think you're a clown. I figured out the cheapest way to make one is to buy my own camera and borrow everything else. I'm getting all my friends to help." I was going to ask him if he'd do the editing or something else because so far I had no one. But he had this way of leaning in and opening one eye. I could've asked him but I didn't want to.

I admitted that I hated having to review our tapes. It was okay when we could do it on the clock. But usually I had to watch them on my aunt's VCR, which meant listening to her talk about positive ions and coming home smelling like a vanilla candle. Besides, the tapes were boring. I didn't speak Vietnamese or Latino so there was no way I could tell if the people were mic'ed properly.

This time Mike opened the other eye. "You actually watch the tapes?"

"Yeah."

"What for?"

"Because we have to."

His lips shook as air came out. "Are they paying us to watch the tapes?"

I couldn't tell if he wanted me to answer. "So you don't even watch them?"

"Nope."

"You just label them and hand them in without checking them." It was like he was telling me he didn't need to sleep.

"Look kid, I know what's on those fuckers because I saw it when I filmed it." He chewed over a mouthful of muffin and looked around. "I don't owe this place nothing. And in case you didn't know, we're using the same tapes I used last summer."

"You mean—"

"We're taping over last year. Nobody watched the tapes, nobody'll ever watch them."

"But they must've hired us for a reason."

"Eight bucks an hour's no reason at all. Don't assume your job's so important."

"What if they find out?"

"Checking up on us means dick-all to them. To do that they'd have to do something that even I'm not willing to do. You know, it would be worth getting fired from this dump just to know that those candy ass academics had to watch all my tapes to do it. It's all bullshit. The special bullshit committee just voted these tapes and our jobs into

existence." He wiped crumbs off his knees and stood up into a big stretch. I'd never heard anyone talk that way outside movies. "C'mon," he said. "Break's over."

It was hard to drop off that first unwatched tape. I didn't want anyone to see me do it. I squared it against the corner of the box and let go slowly. Nothing happened.

At home mom stopped bugging me about getting a job and started bugging me about senior year and how important it was and getting into the right engineering program. Like Mrs. Jahangiri, the madder she got the calmer she wanted to look. It wasn't her fault. She was trying to get on disability again but her note from the podiatrist was too old and she couldn't get an appointment for months. She would get me to tune something in for her and she'd sit listening with her red and blue feet plunged in a tub of salts. I told her I was still going to aunt Henny's to watch the tapes. Then if I'd spent my movie money I biked to the park where I could be alone and think about my new camera and cut together *The Curse of the Werewolf* in my head.

It was Mrs. Jahangiri who told me about the missing tv's. We were in the exam room waiting for a candidate to show up. I asked her how many tv's and if she thought I took them. She said two and

no, of course not, we just couldn't lose any more. I asked her if the tv's belonged to her. She said of course they didn't. I said whoever the owner was we should call the police for him because he was going to be pissed. She said being away from her son and daughter for the whole summer just to supervise this acid nine project was enough hassle without dealing with the police. I asked Mike about what kind of acid that was. He just had his hands in his pockets, rocking on his heels.

"Michael," she said, "do you know anything about this?"

"Can't say I do, Mrs. Jahangiri." He said her name fast so it sounded like angry.

"Doctor Ja-han-gi-ri," she said.

"Mm-hmm," he said.

She told us to get going and move her books into her new office until the candidates came.

A couple weeks later, Mike and me were coiling cables in the AV room. He asked me what I was so excited about. I told him I was going to buy my camera right after work. He said he could give me a lift, but I told him I had my bike. He said he'd meet me at the mall anyway.

I biked fast without signalling to the front of the electronics store. Mike was there, sitting at the wheel of a van with his arm out the window. It was one of those times when he was cool without

really trying. Under the dust, the van was grey with some white parts and spiderlines on the windshield. It was kind of strange that he didn't tell me he could fit my bike in the back of the van and give me that ride. He got out and tucked in his golf shirt and asked me all about the camera. It was fun to tell him the specs because he listened and he was impressed that I knew them all. He said it sounded good but the price was too high and if I could wait a week he could get me a better deal on a camera like that one. I told him this store had the lowest price and it was my plan to buy the camera today and start the demo.

I couldn't wait anymore. I went into the store without him. My heart was beating in a different place and I told myself this is the feeling they call excitement. I wished the camera could peek out of the box and film me buying it. I guess there were surveillance tapes but I'd never get to see them. It almost didn't seem right for other customers to be in that store buying ordinary things. I picked up the box and took it to the cash and I paid the exact change with taxes.

Outside Mike said the camera looked good and he wanted to look at the receipt. He took it and went into the store. He came out with a white box under his arm and a camera case in the other. He was walking fast toward me.

"Hey Mike," I said. "That's the same camera as mine."

"Here kid," he said, throwing me the case. "I got you this, you'll need it." It was good leather. The receipt inside was for the case but not the camera.

"Wow, thanks Mike," I said. I asked him why he got the camera but he didn't hear me because he was starting up the van. "Are you gonna help me shoot my demo? With another camera and a van I could put in a chase."

"Sure," he said. The box was in the footwell, not on the passenger seat. "We'll shoot the car chase together. Wolfmobiles and silver bullets. I got an appointment to make now so go home." He drove away hitting the speed bump hard. I balanced my camera on the handlebars and pedalled home.

A few days later I came over the hill and coasted down to work. It was the dog days and hot and everyone moved slow in the stickiness. I was happy with my camera but I knew that there was going to be just one weekend between the job and grade 12 and no more pocket money and a lot of mom talking about the Importance of the Future.

The people Mike was talking to out the window of his van shook their heads. He was cruising up the hill and poking his smiling head out and saying the same one thing to everyone he passed. One Asian

guy with good sandals stopped to talk to him. Mike jumped out and opened the back of the van and the Asian guy looked inside and touched his chin. Mike hauled out a big, black thing which the Asian guy turned over and tapped and looked at before walking away. Mike loaded it back into the van and got back in gear. When he saw me he waved and pulled over.

"How's the demo coming, kid?"

"Good," I said.

"Put your bike in back."

Around back the windows were duct taped over from the inside. I opened the van doors. There was the speakers he was just showing and other speakers and a tv. I looked around for his camera but it wasn't there. I moved aside the stripped cable and wrappers to fit my bike in.

In the cab it smelt like behind buildings. It was good to have someone to tell about the demo. I told him about *The Curse of the Werewolf* and how I made the werewolf come out at night. Mike was listening except when he was trying to sell the speakers. One guy told Mike this wasn't the neighbourhood for doing what he was doing. Mike told him to shove it up his ass.

"This is all my landlord's stuff, kid," Mike said. "I sell it for him and he cuts me a deal on the rent. How am I suppose to make rent on the squirrel shit they pay us?"

I didn't know what to say. I wanted to talk the way he talked but I couldn't. I concentrated on remembering the conversation.

"Do you know what squirrel shit is?" he said.

"Yeah."

"Squirrels don't shit," he said. "They don't have no buttholes."

"So where does it go?"

"It just cycles through and gets turned back into squirrel food. Think about it: you never saw squirrel shit."

I felt dumb for not knowing that but I didn't say anything. I asked him about his landlord. He said he was a rich guy who knew everyone and bought and sold a lot of stuff. He lived in a big house and partied and liked to go cherry picking.

"Did you get a cherry yet?" he asked.

I said, "Yeah."

"Do you know what a cherry is?"

"I know."

"How many did you get?"

"Like three."

"Only the good ones," he said.

He was driving slow and looking across me up and down the sidewalk. He couldn't find anyone to buy the speakers so he drove us to work. I asked him about the equipment at the college and he said it was pretty new and good but they didn't know how

to use it. This was the last day of the job and he said he might be going away for a while. I told him he didn't need to help with my movie if he stuck around. I didn't want him to go. There was no one else to talk to who understood the werewolf movie and I didn't know if I could make it without him.

The last day was busy. Him and Mrs. Jahangiri weren't talking except through me so I had to run a lot of messages up and downstairs. The last time I saw him, he took my bike out of the van and told me to get a good U-lock or someone would swipe it. He told me to not take anyone's bullshit ever. I said I wouldn't. I asked him when he was leaving and he said tomorrow and left. He never saw me again. I walked back in and set everything up and went home.

At 4am I came back to the college and climbed the grab irons onto the roof. It was a hot night and the aluminum under the gravel felt hot. I looked down into the parking lots for the van and it wasn't there. I kicked out the splint I'd wedged under the maintenance door and came in down the stairs. It was a long walk to the AV room in the dark, but I knew the way. In a movie you would need better lighting to show the hauntings and killings. The door was open. Almost everything was gone and there was lumpy puke stinking on the floor. My head felt heavier or lighter and my fingers hurt. I wanted to stand there feeling it until I remembered

that later I would know what it was I was feeling. It took a couple minutes with a screwdriver to get the screen back off the ventilation and take my camera out of the shaft. It was still running. The blanket I wrapped it in to make it quiet was dusty and I sneezed into my elbow. I put everything back and biked home and snuck back onto the sofa.

On Sunday two cops came over to talk to me. There were two of them, big, and they had the cleanest shirts. Mom acted like they were going to lock both of us up. They asked me a lot of questions about the theft. They showed me pictures of Mike where he looked different. They asked me if I knew where he lived and did he tell me where he was going and did I see him do anything suspicious. I said no.

The younger one said: "Like if an individual mentioned to you that he was considering..." When I didn't finish his question for him, he asked: "Would you consider that suspicious behaviour?" I said sure.

The older one looked at him with no expression. "Look," he said to me, "we've been looking for this creep for a long time. If he stays on the loose out there he's going to rob and hurt more people."

Mom was shaking. If she knew about the tape she would've made me give it to them. I almost wanted to give them it, but it wasn't like other movies

because I couldn't show it and keep it mine. It was hard to make and I wanted to keep it. It was all I had of Mike now. They knew Mike did it, but it wasn't enough for them to know. They had to take everything away from me and turn it into a good reason to know.

I waited for them to say that was enough and I went to sit in mom's bedroom. I heard her lie to them that I was silent because a lot of things were hard on me but I was good in school. When the cops left, mom hugged me and said she was so glad I was alright. She said she couldn't believe the college hired Mike and put me in a dangerous position. She was on disability now and she was going to get a better job so I could get good grades and go to engineering school, etc.

I couldn't watch the tape at aunt Henny's because she'd see it. I biked to the park to watch it through the camera's viewfinder. It was the last day of summer and breezing and I zipped my jacket.

What you see in the movie is, first, a lot of black—I had it set up to tape eight hours. Then you hear the door opening—I left it open for him—and the screen flashes white. When the iris closes enough, Mike's casing the room in dark jeans and a long-sleeve black t-shirt and gardening gloves. What surprised me is that he's huffing air and keeps looking over his shoulders. He looks like

he's going to collapse and he holds himself up on a wall-mounted shelf, hunching over to spit out his toothpick and breathe hard at the ground. He heaves a few times and his back snaps straight as the rope of puke splashes onto the floor. First he takes the cameras, then he comes back for the tv's, one by one, then last the adapters and the diesel generator. He looks at his watch a lot without really reading the time. He sees the puke but doesn't know what to do about it and then he's looking in the direction of the camera. Now he doesn't look so much older. I never saw a grown-up look that way. He's tired and his eyes are darting like a scared and lost animal's who can't get used to being hunted. He turns off the lights and then you realize you were listening to that buzz all the time. You hear him leave and then a minute later come back to close the door.

By the timecode, it's 1:52:15 until the next flash. My body flies together out of the whiteness. I look taller in an empty room. I put on my glasses, which I forgot I did, and I liked the feeling that I was watching myself do things I was about to do. I come closer, out of the depth of field, pixillating into lines of scan. When I unscrew the panel, it sounds like a ship scraping against the rocks. I'm so close now that except for

a sliver of light getting to the lens between my arm and body, I fill up the whole screen.

I watched it a few times to see if I was scared. I watched it again to see if I felt good. I guess it's hard to be those things when you're not supposed to look into the camera and there's nothing else to look at.

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