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## And I Alone

Steve Gaston

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"I won't make excuses. It never should have happened. I don't know. Maybe I secretly wanted it to happen. I knew he wouldn't be able to handle it, but somehow I managed to convince myself he stood a chance. Actually, I wasn't hard to convince. You see, I really hoped he would make it. Of course, he didn't, and I alone take responsibility."

"Yes. We'll get back to that. Who was he?"

## And I Alone

*Steve Gaston*

"His name was Frank Stemac. What's more important is that he was a loser. Oh, don't look at me like that. It's not some arbitrary judgment of mine. He was born into this world destined to lose. He tried to be good in sports, and he blew it. He couldn't get a date to save his life. Quite a bit of irony, isn't it?"

"Are you saying he wasn't fit to live?"

"You're a real bundle of laughs, officer Peter Colbath."

Glancing up from his notebook, Peter once more studied the young man sitting across from him. Eric Thompson was around nineteen, tall, and brown in both hair and eyes. He wore jeans and a jacket around a powerful frame and had a smirk that never quite went away. Peter knew Eric was trying to goad him. Peter had been on this job too long for that to happen.

"Is that a yes?"

Instantly, Eric jumped up.

"No, that's not a yes! Frank had just as much right to live as you do. All I'm saying is that if I had to live my life with all my dreams passing me by and ending up at the bottom of the heap, I hope I'd have the courage to kill myself."

"Frank had as much right to live as I do. Are you saying you have more?"

Eric laughed. "Who, me? Haven't you heard? I'm a bastard. I didn't deserve to get born, let alone live. At least that's society's judgment. Personally, I think society can go to hell."

"Any particular reason?"

"Because it's full of a bunch of small-minded hypocrites who are too afraid to face the truth. Of course, if you mean why am I a bastard, let's just say I'm a child molester and leave it at that."

"I wouldn't go around saying that if I were you."

"Why? Because it might affect someone's delicate sensibilities? I think it's a little late to prevent that. But it's all right: let the bible thumping, backwoods, moral majority come screaming for my blood. If I have any guts, I'll laugh in their face."

"You're not very religious, are you?"

"Oh, I like religion. The problem is that most people don't understand it. They go through their whole lives watching good, decent people get hurt for no reason, and it scares the hell out of them. So, they pray that someone somewhere is going to make it all even out in the end. I can't live like that. It took me a long time to be able to face reality head on. Though I think Frank understood in the end."

"Getting back to that. You, Frank, and who?"

"No, it was Frank and I alone."

"Why would you hang out with a loser?"

"Because I was his friend. He couldn't get a date, but he had lots of friends. The eternal paradox of a nice guy."

"If you were his friend, why did you want this to happen to him?"

For a long time Eric stood thinking. When he finally sat down the smirk was gone.

"Look, I'm just going to start at the beginning. I won't leave out anything important, so just sit there and be quiet."

"It started Friday. That's when I gave Frank the fake I.D. He was really excited. Except for school he almost never went out, so the thought of hanging out at a bar was very liberating to him. When Saturday came, he kept talking about all the wild fun we were going to have."

"Anyway, we went into a sleazy bar downtown. Its name was Roadstop. Since this was Frank's first time drinking, I only had a couple of beers. It didn't take long for Frank to be feeling real good. Then, we sat around for a few minutes. Frank kept talking about how he was going to be rich and famous. I was pretty much bored. Suddenly, Frank stood up and half staggered over to another table."

"There was this girl sitting there. Just to be sexist, I'll

call her a babe. She filled out a tank top and had this real short skirt on. It wasn't hard to guess she knew her way around. The strange thing was that even though she was out of his league, she was not trying to get rid of him. In fact, she started coming on to him. By the time I figured out what she was up to, her boyfriend had arrived. This guy was big and he wasn't happy. He was just about to hit Frank when I got there. I have to give the Neanderthal credit. When he saw two of us, he calmed down fast.

"That's when he said, 'Get out of here, asshole, and if you ever get near her again I'll kill you.'

"Frank stood up calmly, and replied, 'Can you say that outside?'

"I couldn't believe it when Frank actually headed for the door. Fortunately, I still had my senses, so I grabbed him. I tried to tell him there was no way he could beat this guy, but Frank just said he wasn't afraid. When I looked in his eyes I knew I couldn't convince him otherwise. Frank had just lost so often, he had to try, no matter what. So, I let him go. I kept trying to come up with reasons he could win, but deep down I knew he was going to get slaughtered. I even wanted it to happen. I wanted him to get beaten up so badly he finally had to accept the truth. It didn't take long for the fight to start, and I alone watched. The girl in question hadn't even bothered to come outside.

"After a few minutes, I couldn't believe my eyes: Frank was actually winning. He had to be outweighed by at least fifty pounds, but he was winning. Frank had a bloody nose and the start of some good bruises when it was over, but I had never seen Frank so completely happy than when he was standing over that guy.

"That's when I saw the knife. It was a stupid thing for that guy to do, considering how fast I got my gun out. Of course, I wasn't fast enough. You know it's a lie what they say about things slowing down in a crisis. I never saw anything move so fast as that knife going into him.

Frank never even saw it coming. Not even the bullet came close."

"Why did you kill Frank"?

"They were both lying there on the ground, and the blood from that jerk's head started running towards him. I didn't want the blood touching him. I bent down to move him, and he moaned. Then he coughed up some blood, and I..I."

"Go on."

"I looked in his eyes. The idiot was dying, but he was still happy. For a long time I didn't understand that. Finally, it hit me. Frank, the loser, had actually won. Since he wasn't likely to make it, I decided to send him out in a blaze of glory. Even when he saw the gun, his expression didn't change. That's when I pulled the trigger again, and I alone walked away."

Silence filled the room. Peter closed up the notebook. Eric was too young to be in a mess like this. They all were. Peter got up, but before he left, he needed to say something. Something that would get this kid thinking straight.

"You really should get a lawyer. The coroner said Frank would have survived if prompt action had been taken. A jury is just not going to accept an 'I knew he was going to die' defense."

The smirk returned to Eric's face.

"I'm not having a defense. I'm going to plead no contest. See, that's the problem with the rest of society. They're real quick to condemn other people, but when it comes to them, they are to be forgiven. I'll admit I'm scared, but if Frank of all people could face it, then so can I. I'm a guilty bastard, mister policeman, and I alone will take the consequences."