



SHORTS

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Apartment A

His eyes were almost hidden in the dark circles surrounding them. They showed days of sleeplessness. They blinked rapidly, in no pattern. Between blinks, his nose twitched. As he stood at the window of his fifth-floor apartment, beads of sweat slid down his chubby face, wetting his thin black moustache. He gazed out through bloodshot eyes, terrified.

He held a broken walkie-talkie, which he spoke into every now and then, to no one at all. The five strands of hair growing on the left side of his head were combed over his scalp in an attempt to cover the baldness. A red Porsche pulled into the parking lot he was looking down at. He brought the walkie-talkie to his mouth, pausing for a moment before he spoke. "Enemy sighted," he said, suddenly hiding his shuddering body behind opaque white curtains. Peeking out with one eye, he saw a strip of sunlight glinting off the front window of the Porsche.

He leaned away from the curtains and held them shut with one hand. With the other, he again brought the walkie-talkie to his lips and whispered to the empty living room, "All right, men! Prepare to counter-attack!" He paced the worn carpet, trembling. The back of his hand wiped sweat off his brow, which was wrinkled in deep thought. He stopped suddenly, sprang to the window and ripped the curtains from the rod. "This is what we need, men." Opening the window, he said, "I don't see anyone. They must be undercover, waiting to ambush us." He set back to work, folding the curtain into a perfect square, army-style. That accomplished, he stuffed it down the back of his shirt. "I've trained you men well. No one can defeat us now!" he shouted to the empty room.

Someone was walking up the stairs outside his door. Standing frozen, he listened intently. The footsteps grew closer . . . and closer. He began walking slowly sideways, toward the table where

he had set the walkie-talkie. Just before he was within reaching distance of it, the footsteps he'd heard stopped. "They're coming, men!" he screamed.

"Mr. Ramon, are you OK in there?" his neighbor asked through the door.

He froze in his steps, his hand, too, freezing in its reach for the walkie-talkie. He whipped around and glared at the door with frenzied eyes.

"Why don't you answer?"

"Go away!" he shouted, as he made his way toward the window.

"Mr. Ramon, please let me in!"

"I'm f-f-fine. Go away!" he called in short breaths.

"Mr. Ramon, I mean it. Let me in: You don't sound very well." There was a pause. "Mr. Ramon! Mr. Ramon!" his neighbor shouted as she turned the door knob. It opened. He was sitting on the window sill.

"We have to get out of here, men! I'll parachute out first. You follow," he yelled to the room.

"Mr. Ramon!!!" his neighbor screamed as she ran to him.

"When you hit the ground, run for cover," he shouted. And he jumped.

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