

Prose edition

# "Come in," he said...

by Tom Kalis

"Come in," he said and then continued into his office. I followed him, as many a student is wont to do. My first impression was one of warmth; he had taken the liberty of decorating the room with a few hanging plants and a pair of contemporary art prints, all of which blended beautifully with the mahogany furniture. He walked to a cabinet in the far corner where he placed the few files he had been carrying. He started the coffee maker and asked me if I would care for a cup. I graciously declined.

"Please, have a seat," he invited. I sat on the edge of a handsome but uncomfortable chair and dropped my knapsack on the carpet beside me. I discretely examined his desk while he organised the files he brought with him. It was meticulously arranged: a black desk lamp on the left-hand corner, a neatly piled stack of papers — examinations, no doubt — on the right, a small, black paper clip holder and a golden frame for a small portrait — of his wife or family,

I replaced the revolver in my knapsack... and chuckled as I walked out of the door.

I assumed. The ensemble was immaculately clean, as if one had just dusted.

He turned to face me once again. "Now, then, what exactly have you come to discuss?" he inquired, raising an eyebrow. I believe that he knew precisely the reason for my appointment: I had perhaps committed one of the gravest errors of my entire life in deciding to take Microbiology 293 as a science option for my degree. Our mid-term had been the previous week. If I did not receive the lowest of all marks, I surely came very close. How I managed to do so poorly I could not understand; however, I had an 88% average on my labs and had studied for a good two hours three days before the exam. And I really could not afford to fail another course.

"Well, sir, I would very much like to go over the mid-term exam with you, that is if you have the time. I didn't do extremely



well, and I thought perhaps I could turn this setback into a learning experience." The words were artificial; I had practised them for over 20 minutes on the way here. The fellow beside me on the bus peered at me from the corner of his eye and even shot me a glare or two, but I was nonetheless quite proud of my achievement.

"Yes, I noticed that you seem to have encountered a few difficulties with the material covered on the examination,"

He stopped, mid-sentence, when the first bullet burst into his chest...

came the answer from across the desk. He sipped quietly at his coffee and considered a file open on his desk. His eyes scanned a column of numbers and, if I heard correctly, he chuckled in between two sips from his cup.

He looked inquisitively at me. "What year of your program are you in?" he asked. Quite frankly, the question took me

by surprise. I stared intently at my knees and, with the confidence of a peon, muttered that this was indeed my first year at the University of Alberta.

He nodded sympathetically.

He flipped a few pages in the file, took a few sips from his coffee, nodded a few times, chuckled a few more, cleared his throat and raised his eyes to meet mine.

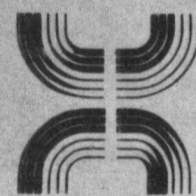
"Why don't you just get the hell out of my course and stop wasting our time?" he yelled from his cozy chair. "I don't know if you took my course because someone told you it was easier than most other science options, or maybe you just thought I would take pity on a poor, incompetent fool such as yourself and give you a passing grade, but it just isn't so, my young friend." He was standing now, and some of his coffee had spilt when he slammed the cup on the hard wood of his desk. Some of the papers in the file were stained a light

brown.

Fortunately, I was prepared for just such a situation. He continued to prattle about maintaining academic standards, about the University's real "brain drain" and about how tired he was of having to face the same "insufferable" group of spoiled brats from middle-class families who thought they owned the world. I gently lifted my knapsack off the floor and deftly unzipped the main compartment.

He stopped, mid-sentence, when the first bullet burst into his chest and sent a spray of red over his lovely potted plants. The second bullet pierced his left shoulder and continued through the shelving unit behind him. The third and fourth cut through his left and right legs, respectively, and the fifth caught his right hand as it reached towards his now crimson chest.

He crumpled to the ground like a used kleenex and gurgled up a few pints of the sticky red stuff before he stopped moving altogether. I replaced the revolver in my knapsack, closed up the zipper, and chuckled as I walked out of the door.



"Excuse me, are you all right?" he asked. He was still seated at his desk, but seemed to be examining me more intently than before. I shook myself into reality and assured him that I had simply had a long night. He smiled a wide grin and explained that he knew exactly how I felt. "Wish I were back here as a student myself sometimes," he added. He went on to tell me of the time he stayed up all night to finish an essay for his French 301 course. "Only did get a 5 on that thing anyway," he confessed.

In a moment he had regained his composure and insisted on returning to "the business at hand." He reassured me that the mid-term counted for only ten percent of my final mark, and that he was generally impressed with my lab work, so he did not foresee any problems as far as passing the course. He offered to arrange for an appointment with one of his T.A.'s to go over the exam, if I wished. I accepted and thanked him for his time.

"Who knows? If you work hard, you may even do as well as I did in French 301!" he announced as I got up to leave. Out of pure and insatiable curiosity, I asked him what he ended up with in that course.

"The first or second time around?" he chuckled in reply.

It was then that I unzipped my knapsack...

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