

Dead Deer

by Ethan Marek

ROADKILL

It was a cold and stale day. Teddy watched the overcast clouds as they blanketed the hills of Duluth, trapping the winter daylight in its natural dungeon. The snow cast its blinding white in the air, mimicking a mirror while reflecting the light from the hidden sun into the atmosphere. The entire city surrounded itself in a globe of snow. A snow globe, where everything is trapped on the inside. Teddy felt trapped more than ever in his glass globe, although his globe was smudged.

Teddy's struggling with this new case that he has been assigned that involved a manipulative killer, persuading his suicidal subjects to commit the ultimate price. Death. The psychopath needed the deaths to make his experiment work. While studying at the school of Bulldogs in Duluth, Nick Fogg created something that impressed his professor and fellow

classmates. Nick said, “If we could predict deaths like a satellite can predict natural disasters before they even happen, we can save millions of people around the world.” Nick was aiming for his Doctorate Degree in Experimental and Clinical Pharmacology, but his passion also dove into religious and clinical studies. He suffered from narcissistic personality disorder. Nick always thought he was always doing what was right, but Officer Falls knew he suffered from his stubbornness.

Teddy cruised on the wet road in a black SUV with the investigator. As he drove around the cliffside turn that overlooked the city of Duluth, the investigator decided to crank the heat down inside.

“You know,” the detective said. “Being bundled up in all these clothes, I feel like I’m wearing an impenetrable vest.” Teddy kept his blank face frozen on the road. “Officer Falls. What’s going through your mind?”

Teddy found the famous Duluth drawbridge crossing over the frozen waters of Lake Superior and into the state of Wisconsin, but his attention faded to the west where darker clouds would pour a flood of snow later in the day. “Something feels off.”

“What do you mean?” the investigator said.

“We know where our killer’s gonna be. We know where the next death’s gonna take place.”

“That’s called a successful investigation, Officer. We cracked the can.”

“We predicted a possible death,” Teddy said nervously. “We predicted it.”

“We didn’t predict it.”

“No. You’re right. We found it.” Teddy’s eyes glued on a devastating figure pushed into the snowbank near the guard rails. A dead deer laid in its strawberry snow coat. Fresh roadkill. As they passed it, Teddy could feel the warmth from the dead deer sink into his blood.

“Teddy,” the investigator said. He pointed his finger. “Don’t let him slush up your brain. He’s trying to melt onto you. You can’t let him in.”

“But what if he’s right? What if his device actually works?” The investigator chuckled at Teddy’s question. “We found Nick and his next patient in a matter of short time. What makes you think he hasn’t found the prediction of death?”

“We base things off facts, Officer Falls.”

“He does too. He’s a wise man.”

“He’s a wise but crazy man. His studies of religion and clinical experiments are in deep water. All that stuff, it’s—” He stopped the word from slipping off the ice. “Sorry. I just remembered you’re Catholic.”

“Nah. It’s okay. It’s just some of the things he’s studied . . . the unanticipated lightning storms being a sign of an angry God, a swarm of locust destroying plants signaling the beginning of a disease outbreak . . . Science finds a way to sneak in the signs of what’s to come.”

Silence filled the vehicle. The detective recognized Teddy’s quietness. “How’s home, Teddy?”

“What about it?” Teddy slid his grump on.

“Geezes, Teddy. I’ve told you this before. You can’t isolate yourself from them.” Teddy angled his face toward the middle of the road like a gesture of turning his back to the detective. “Your family. Your wife, your son; they’ve been calling me every night, wondering when you’ll speak to them again.”

“What do I have to say to them? Nothing.”

“This isn’t you.” Another gust of silence sat between them. “This case is sinking into your emotions. But you surely don’t know when to put a boot in the wood.”

Teddy whipped through the city streets of Duluth. They arrived at a formation of police cars blocking the road so traffic can’t go in nor out. Teddy and the investigator hopped out of the heated car and into the blasting cold. The wind slapped the feeling of frostbite on their faces. It’s like the chilling sensation of mint to the skin. Teddy spoke with a few of the younger police officials. He was the best officer for this case, and the investigator knew it. He had been through a lot in his life, and his psychological performance in helping people was astonishing to many. Teddy Falls knew how to work with people. And he was about to help another. Nick Fogg stood in the middle of the road with his death radar, waiting for Officer Falls’ arrival.

FROSTBITE

There he stood. In the middle of a quiet street, surrounded by tall red-brick apartments, a modern hotel, and a building that poked out a clock tower, was the man Teddy Falls had chased for over a month. Teddy’s lips clenched while his emotions were locked inside about this man. Nick Fogg killed many innocent children, many who deserved none of this. Nick thought he was saving everyone with his death predictor, but it really didn’t help anyone. He manipulated kids who had been in depressions for years. They didn’t need persuasion to end their lives. They needed a helping hand to lead them through the suffering, and Teddy understood that. But Nick Fogg got inside of Teddy’s thoughts.

“What an exciting day!” Nick said. “Isn’t it, Officer Falls?” Teddy felt controlled by this manipulative maniac. He didn’t want to give in, so fought he did. “You’re not much of a talker.”

“Words can hurt,” Teddy said. “I need to make sure I use the right ones.”

“Nothing can hurt me. I’ve got nothing to live for.”

“Besides your dinky little machine.”

“You mean my Lifesaver.”

“Is that what you call it?”

“Yes. It’s a lifesaving machine, Officer Falls.”

“That machine has caused more deaths than any other serial killer in the state of Minnesota.”

“To save lives, you risk lives. Isn’t that so?” Nick paced back and forth on the street. “You know, as an officer, I thought you would understand the concept of risking lives to save others. The Lifesaver can save several if not millions of people, and I would think the country would give me some respect. But instead, I get Officer Falls and his rats wanting to put my lifesaving experiment to a halt.” Teddy kept his lips sealed. “Show your community you care for your duty to save lives. If you shut me down, you let your people drown.”

The dark wall cloud of snow covered the street in a blizzard. In a matter of seconds, Duluth brightened into a whiteout. Teddy had trouble spotting Nick Fogg in the snow, but he was going nowhere with the surrounding officers. One thing was for certain. This would make for a tougher search with the suicidal subject on the run.

“Where’s the kid, Nick?” the investigator said. He stood with the younger officers well behind the cop cars. Teddy kept his eyes peeled on Nick.

“And why would I tell you, investigator?” Nick said.

“Because you want to save lives,” Teddy said.

“I am saving lives.”

“You’re manipulating kids to give up their lives for your experiment.”

“These kids wanted to give their lives up! It was their choice. I had nothing to do with their decision. They were given a choice to run, but they didn’t want to. That’s one reason why I love kids, Officer Falls. They understand what a true hero is.”

Teddy ran out of words. His feet froze in black ice. Nick Fogg shut him down to freeze in the bitter wind. He’s running out of options while time ticks away on the nearby clock tower. The street was in a standstill while the blizzard whistled between the buildings like fishing line screaming in the wind. All the other officers stared at each other, bouncing looks from one to the next while in the midst of dead silence. While the icicles grew their saber teeth on the nearby buildings, the snow packed up on the ground, covering the road between Teddy and Nick.

The investigator can’t handle the cold anymore, but the only one who’d be able to release the answer from Nick was Teddy. Everyone always said, “Officer Falls is the only one who can bond fire with ice.” He’d be the only one to accomplish the impossible within a flash of a second, but this case has drug him for a long time now. Difficulties with sleeping, eating, resting, breathing, communicating, family; it all wore him out to the point of his own depression. He was lost within his own blizzard. There was no clear path through the prickly forest for him. Even face to face with his killer, nothing could make this case crack. It just sat there, cold and forbidden, but something sparked a flame in the windy whiteout.

A female officer hopped from her car and next to the investigator. “Officer Wheat.”

“We found him,” she said. “We got a call from the hotel at the end of the street. An anxious boy with a backpack entering the elevator.”

“Go.” That was the firmest statement Officer Wheat has heard from him in a long time. The investigator focused back on Teddy. “Officer Falls. Your second-at-hand found the boy.”

Teddy's grump faded into relief when his eyes widened, and his chest rose with oxygen. "You need to talk to Nick Fogg into arrest. We can't be certain he's not armed with a weapon."

Teddy rolled his shoulders and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and flushed the gusty winds from his ears. When he opened his eyes, everything around him turned into background static. "Nick Fogg. I want to talk—"

An ominous sound blared in the gusty storm. Nick Fogg picked up his bulky laptop he called a "Lifesaver." His mouth grew into an upside-down rainbow. Teddy got the chills trickling down his spine. His shoulders tensed as the ominous sound eased his ears. It was unpleasant like an amber alert or a national weather warning on the radio. The Lifesaver warned him about the ticking of time for the next death. Teddy Falls realized the Lifesaver may actually be working. At any moment, the newest boy in this case, would fall off the grid to his ultimate death.

FROZEN GROUND

Officer Wheat stormed through the doors of the hotel with three other officers. The warmth was nice to crash into, but the sweat storm built under their jackets and bulletproof vests. It may have been faster taking the elevator, but Officer Wheat didn't like the idea. She always trusted the stairs, and if the boy was present in the elevator, spooking him could flip the sheets.

Through Officer Wheat's earpiece, a voice flipped on. "Officer Wheat?" Teddy said. "Status."

"Running past the third-floor door, sir." She held her breath in. "It's great to hear your voice again." Teddy sighed. He gained hope from Officer Wheat, and that drove him to do his job; negotiation with a bullet of psychology.

"Nick Fogg," Teddy hollered in the wind. "You want to tell me what's going on?"

“It’s working,” he said. The alarm continued to stab in the street.

“Do you mind turning that alarm off, Mr. Fogg?” Nick flicked a switch on the Lifesaver.

“Thank you, Nick. Can we talk about what we’re doing here today?”

“Saving lives, Officer Falls. We’re saving lives.”

“That’s right. We’re here to save lives. Not just in the present, but the future.”

Nick Fogg grew the happiest smile. His dimples softened his young face. “So, you agree with me? You think I’m doing what’s right.”

“Yes. I do, Nick. That’s why I’m a police officer. That’s why I’ve been in the force for over thirty years.”

“Do you have kids, Officer?” Teddy’s face froze.

“Yes,” Teddy said. “I have a son.”

The investigator tapped his earpiece to listen to Officer Wheat. “We’re almost there.”

Teddy heard everything in his earpiece, but he couldn’t break his current connection with Nick. The investigator took over for him. “Are you sure he’s on the roof?”

“Most suicidal subjects aim for heights, investigator.”

“Copy that.”

A train whistle echoed in the streets of Duluth. “Big Boy,” Nick Fogg said.

“You know trains better than a dictionary knows its words,” Teddy said.

“You know trains?”

“No. Personally, I don’t, but I know you love trains. When we broke into your house, you had a whole collectible vintage village with a variety of train sets placed in them.”

“Trains. They keep on track. No matter what gets in their way, they keep chugging.”

“Nick. You asked if I had kids, and I know you’re young and have a lot of life to live, but have you thought about having kids?”

“Thought about it. Yes. Want? No.” Nick set his Lifesaver in the fresh snow. “Do you know what my mother and father named me after?” Teddy shook his head. “My family resides from Norse Tradition. They never wanted a kid. They made me by accident. My parents saw me as the devil. Nuckelavee, the spreader of disease and filth. That’s what they named me after, and I don’t think it’s the greatest idea for the devil to have his own children.”

Teddy got caught in confusion. “So, you want to prove your parents wrong by doing what’s right? Nick, these children have families of their own. They’re sacrificing their lives for your experiment. What they really need is someone to be there for them, someone who’s gonna lend them a hand to fight through the pain. That’s who you are. A fighter.”

A voice protruded in Teddy’s earpiece. “Investigator,” Officer Wheat said. “We’re at the roof’s door.”

“Alright,” the investigator said.

“Team,” Teddy said in a quieter tone. “This boy needs someone to be there for him. Don’t put the pressure on him. He needs to know we’re here to put him back on track.”

“Copy,” Officer Wheat said.

Teddy moved a step forward, inching closer to Nick.

Nick ripped out a gun from under his jacket. “Stay back!”

Teddy halted. He rose his hands in the air while the investigator pointed his gun at Nick.

“Nick. Why the gun?”

“I know what happens next.”

“What’s going to happen, Nick?”

“You guys detain me, destroy the Lifesaver I’ve been working on my whole life. These children need me.”

“These children need peace, not violence. There have been enough deaths this month, Nick. Christmas is around the corner. Don’t make a family get the gift of their son’s remains today. We’re here to help you. I’m here to help you.”

“I don’t need help.”

Officer Wheat spoke, “Stealth entry . . . Go!” Officer Wheat stood back from the door as an officer opened it. The squad pushed out on the roof. They scavenged the area. All they found was an empty roof packed in thick snow. “He’s not here!”

“Check the hotel,” Teddy responded. “He’s in there. Check the upper floors.” Teddy gained his attention back to Nick. “Nick. You know what happens if you don’t put that gun down. Your life will have been for nothing. Your experiment you’ve worked for will vanish.”

“My life is nothing! No one loves me. No one cares for me. I have no one to go to!”

“You’re young, Nick. I mean, geezes, look at me! I’m balder than a stone.” Nick chuckled. “Your youngest years are the toughest, and it’ll never get easier. But you’re a fighter. You’ve made it this far doing what you think is best and that’s all that matters.” Nick broke into tears. “Put the gun down, Nick.” Teddy inched closer and closer to Nick.

“Officer Falls,” the investigator said.

“Put it down, Nick.”

“What’s going on?” Officer Wheat radioed.

“He’s too close,” the investigator responded. “Back away, Teddy.”

“Put the gun down, Nick.” Nick lowered his weapon as his arm limped to the side. A gunshot banged in the blowing snow. Red blood coated the white fluff on the street.

“Shots fired!” Officer Wheat yelled. “Eleventh Floor. Which window, investigator?”

“Fifth window from my left,” the investigator said. He sprinted into the crime scene where Teddy kneeled in the snow. He leaned over Nick Fogg’s still bloody body. The investigator stood by Teddy’s side, watching as the red dot on the Lifesaver (which marked the spot of death) disappear.

The investigator received information from Officer Wheat. “It’s the boy. He shot with a caliber rifle.” Officer Wheat and her officers took him down. The discovery of the boy took Wheat’s breath away. “It’s a student from Fogg’s master class. We have him detained.”

“This was a setup,” the investigator said.

“Not Fogg’s setup. The boy set Nick up.”

“Confirmed.” The investigator knelt next to Teddy and laid a hand on his shoulder.

“I had him,” Teddy said. “He lowered his weapon! I had him! I had him!”

Teddy bursted with emotions on that cold morning, and the investigator had plans to destroy the Lifesaver. Many people didn’t want to remember the device. The investigator grabbed it himself and traveled to the pier in Canal Park later that day. The storm blew itself away, and a full moon rose over Lake Superior. The investigator invited Teddy, Officer Wheat, and the rest of his team for a ceremonial bonfire in destroying the device. Teddy did the honor and tossed the machine to burn to its ashes.

“What now?” Teddy asked the investigator.

“We’ll setup some therapy appointments for you. But in the meantime, it’s time for you to go home and spend time with your family.” Teddy nodded.