

# Animal Cruelty

By

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An alarm stirs Ralphie from sleep. Slamming his hand down on the alarm clock, he hears his dad yell from his bedroom. "Up an' at 'em boy! Big day today!" He's not wrong. Ralphie is fresh out of high school, now ready to join the family business. Showering, have to be presentable. Black dress shoes, black dress socks. Black dress pants, white button up shirt. Black tie, black jacket. Wristwatch and black sunglasses. Black handgun.

Zippering down the winding road, windows down, no radio, just peace. Ralphie and his dad both with their arms out the windows, feeling the breeze on their fingers and palms. Evergreens line the road, clinging tight to the sides of the steep hills. Pulling up to the gate Ralphie's dad pulls out his keycard and swipes it. The gate beeps and opens. "Here we go." Ralphie's dad says as they begin the descent down a curvy gravel road. "Jesus Christ, how long is this road?" Ralphie asks. "Couple miles at least, not sure, just enjoy the nature. Soak it in. Sometimes there's moose and shit running around. Don't fuck with them! They don't fuck around. They'll fuck your ass up." Ralphie's dad chuckles, "This one fuck worked here for like a day. Turned off his radio to take a shit while out on patrol, moose straight fucked him up. Nice fella, now he's shitting in a bag. Don't fuck wit a moose."

Suddenly the forest opens up to a large clearing. In the middle, a giant mansion. Spanish looking, elegant, even out in the middle of nowhere. "Here we are, boy." Parking near the garage next to a few other fairly nice cars, they get out and stretch a little. "This is where you park when you come here. We'll

get you a nicer car, Boss ain't gonna want that hunk of shit you drive fucking up his view." The gravel crackles under foot as they head to the main house. Ralphie looks around, trying to get acquainted with his surroundings. "What's that up there?" He asks, while pointing to a small grey building way up on the hill. "That's the radio room. See that path at the edge of the woods, take that all the way up. Ain't shit for cell service out here. Boss put that in so we wouldn't be stranded, you know, case of moose attack!"

Approaching the front door, it opens and a man slinks out. "Hey! There he is! Ralphie, this is Matsu. If I'm not here, he's in charge. If he talks, you shut the fuck up. This is a good man, you listen to him." Matsu chuckles as they half hug. "Lil Ralphie Jr. I've been hearing about you for years. Nice to meet you. But, you're dad's right. Do what I tell ya, and we won't have any problems. Go it?" Ralphie shakes his head yes. "Where you going?" Ralph Sr. asks. "I gotta go up to the tower. Stupid fuckin' blinky light's out again." Matsu says, pointing at the tower atop of the radio room. Ralph Sr. switches into work mode. "Take someone else with ya, can't have you falling off and then just rotting away 'til someone finds ya." Matsu reaches in his pocket and puts on his black standard issue sunglasses. "Yeah, I got Turtle up there already to unlock the door. That fat fuck needed the walk. I'm taking the golf cart though. I'll catch up with you before I leave." Gravel, dirt, and dust shoots from side to side as the standard issue security golf cart zips up the trail.

Taking one last look at Ralphie, Ralph Sr. straightens his son's tie, wipes off his shoulders, and pats him on the cheek. "Okay, we're going in the house now. These people are not only my employers, but they're like family. Everything you've ever had has come from them. For the last 20 years, they've paid for everything. We owe them everything, even our lives. This isn't some restaurant job. This isn't some fucking convenient store. They pay well, they expect loyalty and commitment. We keep them safe, we keep them alive. Got it?" Ralphie nods his head, as Ralph Sr. opens the door to the out of place mansion. Inside, two guards stand on either side of the main living room. The rear of the room is lined with windows, revealing an astonishing view of the valley below. Only thing ruining the view is a mildly long path leading to a

helipad. “Marco! Have you seen my Fluffkins?!” Mrs. Scaramucci shouts as she enters the room, dressed in her cliché white robe, and oddly wearing sunglasses. Marco shakes his head no, as Mrs. Scaramucci notices Ralph standing in the atrium. “Ralph! So good to see you!” She remarks in a half tired, half high on Prozac tone. “Ahh Vossignoria! How are you?” Ralph opens his arms, vaguely hugs her and kisses her cheeks. “Have you seen my Fluffkins? I can’t find him anywhere.” Luckily, Ralphie is wearing his sunglasses, undoubtedly his facial expression would give away his confusion. “I’m sure he’s just out chasing squirrels or something, I’ll radio and tell everyone to keep an eye out.” Removing her robe and dropping it on the floor to reveal a skin tight expensive looking swimsuit, Mrs. Scaramucci exits a sliding door under all the spotless windows. “I’ll be in the hot tub, please bring him to me when he’s found. Mmm, thanks you Ralph.”

Pulling the radio from his pocket Ralph Sr. puts his arm around Ralphie’s shoulder and guides him towards a large double door. “She’s a wonderful lady, she acts high and mighty, but trust me, she has a huge heart.” Pushing the call button in his radio, Ralph Sr. makes his announcement. “Okay, boys. Matsu’s officially off duty. Ralph taking over. Let’s have a good shift. Stay vigilant. Oh, and someone find that fucking dog.” The two guards in the room look at each other, and Ralph looks at them. “Hands on your pistols boys. Eyes on Mama Bear, no need to alarm her. Stay ready until you get the all clear.” Using his radio once more, “Matsu, come back...” Ralph pauses a moment, hoping to hear from Matsu, but the radio stays silent. “What’s going on?” Ralphie asks. Ralph Sr. pulls his gun out, taps Ralphie’s gun in an attempt to let him know to unholster his. “Radios are down. Shoulda heard me through theirs, but nothing. Might be nothing, but we don’t get paid to assume. Gun, out!” Ralph and Ralphie head out the front door and cross the yard towards the radio room trail. “I don’t see Matsu climbing the tower. Maybe he’s working on the radio, but, maybe something’s wrong. Lets’ go. Quietly, pay attention and learn. If this is a bogus alarm, you can still see how to handle yourself.”

Quietly meandering up the path to the radio room the father and son duo stop and crouch behind a few bushes. "Doors open. That's not protocol. Stay behind me, I'll clear the room, you come in after." Ralph Sr. whispers. Stealthily they creep up to the doorway, inside they hear some rustling. Ralph Sr. peeks in, it's dark, lights flickering. He enters and motions for Ralphie to follow. Entering the main room from the short hall, they are startled by their finding. Twisting, squirming, giant pile of squirrels, chipmunks, mice and rats. Easily a three foot high pile of rodents. Ralph turns and fires a round out into the forest. The gun shot echoes, scaring the rabid vermin. They scamper out the door and disperse into the bushes and trees. Left behind, a man. Dead, very dead. Torn to shreds. Some parts cleaned to the bone. Blood and guts everywhere. Face, all but gone. "It's Matsu." Ralph says, covering his mouth with his shirt.

Suddenly, a clunk from a nearby storage closet. Pointing their guns, Ralph announces a warning. "Come out! You have like two fucking seconds. One...!" From inside the closet a voice trimbles. "It's me! Turtle! don't shoot! My guns on the fucking radio table, look 'n see!" Ralph looks and sure enough Turtle's gun is on the table. "Turtle, get the fuck out here! What the fuck happened!" Turtle pokes his head out, looks around to make sure it's safe. "I shit myself. Oh! Fuck! Is that Matsu? Oh fuck oh, man, what the fuck!" Ralph Sr. grabs him and tosses him into the middle of the room, he lands next to Matsu's fucked up nasty ass chewed through corpse. Ralphie gets a whiff of Turtle's, now for sure, shit in pants. Turtle scurries to his feet. Ralph losing his patience asks again, "What. The. Fuck. Happened, Turtle?" With a thump, Turtle is bowled over by a giant moose. Slammed into the radio table and wall. Smoke and sparks fly as the moose gores Turtle. "Ah! A fuckin' moose, I tol' ya boy! Shoot that fucker!" Father and son unload as the moose turns to face its' attackers. It shakes its' head and runs out the door, leaving Turtle with a dead but surprised look on his face, and even more shit in his pants.

Cautiously moving down the trail back towards the main house, Ralphie's face says it all. Dumbfounded at what he's just witnessed. One man eaten alive by a hodgepodge or rodents. Another, gored and walloped into goo by a giant deranged moose. "We need to get back to the house, lock up,

until we figure out what the fuck is happening.” Ralph states, while simultaneously trying to calm his nerves. “Ralphie, focus. Stay calm.” Some birds scatter as gun shots ring out. “Let’s go!” Father and son traipse down the trail at full speed. Limbs smacking them in the face, dust kicking up behind their speedy footsteps.

Entering the clearing, the gunshots have stopped. Still hustling towards the house, Ralph Sr. spots some of his colleagues. Dead, apparently, or close enough. Blood everywhere. A pack of wolves chews them to bits. “Who is that Dad?” Ralphie whispers in fear. “Arthur, probably Mitchell. Good men. What the fuck....c’mon...” Then, popping from among the wolves, Fluffkins. Covered in blood, the once pure white Pomeranian sticks its’ tongue out, as if to send a fuck you to the onlooking men.

Guns drawn, entering the front door, they see the two guards still standing steady behind Ms. Scaramucci. “She’s still safe, we need to get her and get the fuck outta here.” Ralph Sr. clears the room as if he were playing a video game. “Stand behind me, off to the left. When we get outside you look...” Suddenly both guards are ripped away. “What...the fuck...” Ralphie slinks in fear. Ralph Sr. charges the sliding door and quickly points both directions, looking for whoever, or whatever just basically ripped the two men from their shoes. Bears, one from each side of the house. Both men are dead. The bears stand tall, Ralph fires one shot in the air, hoping the noise will scare them off. Surprisingly, the bears retreat and Ralph Sr. shuffles to the side of Ms. Scaramucci who is still in the hot tub.

Approaching from behind, Ralph whispers. “Chiara...Chiara!” No response. Thinking the worst, Ralph puts his hand on her shoulder, she jumps, knocking over the half empty bottle of wine and pulling the headphones from her ears. “Jesus fucking Christ, Chiara, we need to get you out of here...” Rubbing her eyes, “Now now Ralph, I was having a great dream. Come back later, mmm...with more wine...” Ralph, loosing his patience, “Chiara, everyone is dead!” Turning to actually face Ralph, Mrs. Scaramucci does not look impressed. “Ralph, what are you...Fluffkins! Oh, there you are you naughty puppers! Come here,

come for a swim with Mommy!” Prancing over like a good little furball, Fluffkins jumps up on the hot tub and into Chiara’s arms. “Fluffkins, what have you been into...” Chiara says while letting the evil little fucker lick inside her mouth. Both Ralphs cringe. With a hatred filled growl, Fluffkins takes a bite out of Mrs. Scaramucci’s tongue. Pulling the dog close by mistake so she can hold her tongue with her free hand, Chiara shouts in pain. Fluffkins rares back and plunges into Chiara’s neck. Growling, biting, twisting and tearing. Ralph grabs the dog, poetically plunges it into the water and drowns it. Too late, Mrs. Scaramucci is bleeding everywhere. Holding her neck, not ever caring about her half bitten off tongue, she reaches for what’s left of the wine. It had fallen to the ground in the commotion. Now, out of reach. Much like the rest of her life. She slinks into the water as Fluffkins’ dead body floats by. She dies. Dead lady and dead dog soup.

Astonished with what has happened in the last hour, Ralphie is beside himself. Not sure if he should be scared to death, or simply amused. Shock may be the best word. “Dad, what the fuck are we doing.” Ralph turns to face his son. “Honestly...” He pauses, his eyes wide. “I guess, let’s get the fuck out of here.”

Suddenly, a noise echoes in the valley. The trees sway slightly. “That’s the helicopter!” Ralph turns towards the landing pad. “Over there.” Sure enough the family helicopter descends from the sky. Ralph runs towards it, waving his arms for help. Looking down, the pilot leans over and says something to his lone passenger. The helicopter turns as Mr. Scaramucci scans the scene. In the front yard, the dead guards. On each side of the house the dead guards who would later be shit out by bears in the woods. In the hot tub. Oh, in the hot tub. Mrs. Scaramucci. His wife. His beloved partner in crime. Hard to tell with his sunglasses on, but one can assume his reaction was not pleasant. He leans to the pilot and the helicopter begins to ascend. “Wait! Frank! Wait!” Ralph shouts and waves.

Putting his hand on his dad's shoulder, Ralphie becomes the reasonable one. "Dad, he's leaving. We need to go." A thump. A loud thump. Then another, and another. Looking to the sky, geese. So many geese. Plummeting from above. Each crashing into the helicopter like Japanese zeros. An absolute onslaught of geese dive into the aircraft. Spinning and turning, rocking and shaking the engines smoke and explode.

Falling from the sky, the chopper falls passing the landing pad as Mr. Scaramucci lunges from the side door. Like something out of *Cliffhanger*, he grabs the scaffolding that secures the pad to the side of the canyon. Pulling himself up, Mr. Scaramucci runs towards Ralph, limping and bleeding from the scrapes on his arms and legs. Obviously angry, Ralph shouts at Frank Scaramucci. "You were gonna just leave us. I've been loyal to you for how long, and you were just gonna leave me. Leave me and my son..." Waving his hands and turning on his charm, Frank responds. "No no, Ralph, that was the pilot. He freaked. I told him to get you...Ralph come on, you're my guy..." Ralph looks at Ralphie with a look that they've shared many times. Ralph's not buying it, and Ralphie knows.

Inside the house, behind the glass doors a figure appears. A girl. The doors open and out comes Lilith. Frank and Chiara's daughter. One of two Scaramucci's still breathing. Frank sees his firstborn and shouts. "Cuore Mio! Daughter, come here. What are you doing home!?" From behind her, two mountain lions emerge from the house. "Lilith!" Frank shouts. "Run girl. Hurry! Ralph, shoot them. Protect my daughter!" Ralph brushes Ralphie aside and they both point their weapons at the twin lions. "No need Father, they won't hurt me. They do as I say." Perplexed the three men look at each other. Ralphie speaks up. "This was all you? All these men, your own mother?" Frank looks to his dead wife, bubbling in the hot tub. "Why have you done this, what's your game, Amore?" The lions crouch, ready to pounce. Lilith walks closer to the men. Lions in tow. "Father, don't worry, I'd never harm you. I love you." Ralph reaches towards Ralphie and pushes his pistol down, while also lowering his. Confused, Ralphie glances at his father, who is smiling. "I know sweetheart." Ralph says, while turning to face Frank. "I know."

The lions charge, jumping past Ralph and Ralphie, pouncing on the unarmed Frank. Ripping him to shreds, he screams, but only for a moment. "Okay, what the actual fuck." Ralphie shouts, pointing his gun at the lions. "Stop, son. They won't hurt you." Ralph says as Lilith hugs him. "Nice to finally meet you brother." With utter bewilderment, Ralphie puts his gun away. Ralph follows suit. "Son, there's something you should know." Ralphie puts his hands on his hips and shakes his head. "No dad. I get it. Mob boss dies, his alleged daughter takes over. We're her family, so...we're in charge." Ralph and Lilith chuckle. Ralphie continues, "but one thing I don't get. Why am I here?" Ralph grabs him by the shoulder and points around to the chaos. "Needed your help buying the bodies, Son."