

Juice

Written By: Dale A. Grove

Curiosity

Twenty four year old Lance Duke pried open a locked window and entered the Juice Man's manufacturing lair to survey his equipment. He took careful note of approximate vat sizes, agitators, motor horsepower, drive system, heating oil system, aeration purification apparatus, and inventory levels. There really wasn't much to his machinery, second rate at best with the exception for his patented aeration refinement device which purified Juice Man's concoctions.

This snooping was Lance's chance to prove his worth to his father. Duke Juices was losing market share to this impudent new comer. Lance had already guessed where the secret resided: in Juice Man's recipes.

Lance scaled a spiral, raggedy staircase that circled the main enormous mixing vat and walked across an upper cat walk which stood on an observation deck looking directly down into the hundred thousand gallon tank. He observed what ingredients entered and their timings. Three rectangular side baffles prevented a vortex from forming and minimized foam until the aeration machinery started. He glanced around the platform. It was all wrong. Homeless cats, dogs, raccoons, and squirrels, occupied cages perched near the main vat. Their cages would be dumped into the mix which homogenized the poor animals. Shivers ran up his spine as death's touch lightly stroked his right arm.

With his body quaking, he took pictures to capture the evidence realizing that if nothing else he could blackmail the Juice Man brand. The mixture was almost complete when the observation deck gave way and Lance tumbled into the main mixing chamber as the agitation intensity roared even harder. Kicking, clawing, swimming, and screaming he reached for any surface, but the smooth walls offered no support. Fear consumed him as he desperately swam on the surface before an undertow overwhelmed him forcing his right foot against a moving agitator blade. Lance screamed when his foot was severed, but the fluid just muted his sound as bubbles floated to the surface. Eddies and currents tossed his body from side to side. Blood gushed forth. The currents threw him to a side baffle. He reached for the sturdy rectangular baffle and managed to hold on because of a gap between the baffles and the mixing walls. A late blood orange juice addition masked his blood.

A tormented and wounded Lance held on for dear life when he spied the Juice Man looking down upon him. An unreadable, stoic expression appeared across Juice Man's face. Lance reached out towards him with his broken wrist hand as his good hand and arm gripped a side baffle.

“Help me. Please help me!”

The Juice Man examined him without showing any semblance of emotion on his face. He grabbed a long wooden paddle and lowered it towards young Lance who let go of the baffle and held on to the paddle for dear life.

The Juice Man moved the paddle away from the baffle and slowly lowered into the juice concentrate. Shock appeared across Lance's face. “What are you doing?”

“Not done yet.” A smirk appeared across the Juice Man’s worn face as he continued lowering the wooden paddle into the mix.

“My father will ruin you! Burn in hell Juice Man!”

Lance reached back towards the side baffle with his shaky left hand, but it was too late. He took a final breath when a strong eddy grabbed him and carried his body below the surface again. His screams went unheard under the viscous sounds of the mixing fluids. The undertow turned his head towards the blender agitator and it unmercifully decapitated him. The rest of him soon blended into the mix as the sturdy bundle of blades shredded and pureed his remains.

Observing a final few bubbles emerging from the surface, the Juice Man stopped peering into the vat and prepared his inventory checks. He thought, *That mix will have extra fiber in it. I hope his belt buckle and shoes don’t ruin my equipment!*

Juice Man Beginnings --- Twenty Years Earlier

Elizabeth pleaded with her husband, “Joe, unless we can come up with ten grand, the hospital won’t continue our daughter’s treatments.” Normally her beautiful face caused Joe Sanguis to stare into her eyes and take in every moment of her presence, but today was different. He couldn’t bear to tell her---they couldn’t afford their daughter’s health care bills anymore. Their insurance had run out, and Kate’s last operation drained their savings account. Even if they both worked twenty four hours a day with the highest paying blue collar jobs, their financials wouldn’t add up.

Elizabeth let out a quick breath and held her open hand over her mouth. She looked into the living room and watched their daughter use a coffee table to stabilize herself as she stood. Joe turned to see what stirred such emotion in his wife.

Three year old Kate struggled to get to her feet and began walking toward her parents. She giggled when she knew that she had their attention. One step. . .two steps. . .she had it; she was walking again. Then her right hip went out, and she cried as loud as her lungs could bellow.

Joe rushed to his child and picked her off of the floor.

“Daddy, Daddy it hurts. Make it stop!” She clutched her right hip.

He brushed her hair from her eyes. “Princess, I’ll do whatever it takes. I promise.” He hugged her upper torso. Joe turned and looked toward Elizabeth who had dialed 911. An ambulance would arrive in minutes.

Kate cried into Joe’s left shoulder, but at least she found comfort in knowing that her parents cared for her. Their daughter, Kate, meant everything to them. There must be a way to save her. If they failed, Amyoplasia would cripple her for the rest of her life, a thought Joe could not shake from his conscious mind. Her joints had become snarled and restricted in fibers from her lack of movement in the womb, and each operation sought to increase her flexibility. He joined Kate on the ambulance and allowed her to grip his hand as hard as she wanted to transfer some of her pain away. Tears fell to the ambulance’s floor as Joe wept for his daughter.

Days later it came upon him that the only way he could make money fast was to either rob someone or get money from the mob. He had possible inroads from his youth, but steered clear from them since he wanted to live his life on his own terms.

Joe left out a long despairing sigh and sought out Roy. They kept in loose contact through a church softball league. He walked several blocks to Roy's opulent home and rang the doorbell. Roy opened the door and tilted his head to the left at the sight of his childhood friend across the door sill.

"Roy, I need your help. My daughter is sick, and I have to get ten grand to pay for her treatments. How can I make that kind of money?"

Roy motioned him inside. "Don't ever say that in public. If the wrong person heard you, it would create trouble for me and the organization. Come inside and I'll see what I can do." Roy gestured to a sofa.

Joe took a seat and watched Roy pull out a rolling chair and sit before a computer. Roy began typing away at a fervent rate. Coded mob language flashed across his eyes until he stumbled upon something.

He turned to face Joe with his fingers intertwined in each other, "I've got a job that that pays fifteen grand, but I'm not sure you're the right man for it."

"Tell me."

"The organization wants to remove Tom Collins who goes by Talking Tom" Roy looked over his old friend to read his body language.

"Couldn't you just loan me the money? You know that I'm good for it." Joe changed his position several times trying to find a more appealing spot on the sofa. No matter how he twisted and contorted his body, the sofa offered no comfortable spot. Murdering a stranger to improve his daughter's health went against his conscience.

"You would never be able to pay it back with the interest rates we charge, and I'm sorry to say that I'm not in the loan business. If I gave you the money and the firm found out about it, I would be in trouble." Roy pointed his right thumb towards himself and then tried to look more relaxed after letting go a long sigh. "Even if you borrowed the firm's money, you would be twice as deep in the hole as you already are."

Roy stood and put his hand on Joe's shoulder. "My friend, maybe you should find another way. Once your hands get dirty, they never come clean again."

Joe rose and turned toward Roy. He had no choice. It was either a disloyal stranger or his sick daughter. His daughter's life was more important than a mob informant's life. The world wouldn't care if there was one less mobster in it. "I'll take it. What's the address?"

Roy turned, scribbled the name and address on a piece of paper, folded it, and then slipped the note to his friend. "I'll keep you informed of other opportunities."

After two days of justifying and convincing himself that this was the only way of raising the money, Joe worked up the courage to visit Talking Tom. Any more time would have allowed someone else to swoop in and finish the job, so Joe knew he had to strike now. Talking Tom lived in a quiet apartment with nosy neighbors. Joe developed a ploy to get into the complex and discretely remove his hit by pretending to be a pizza delivery man. Free pizza got him inside of Tom's apartment. When Tom turned away carrying the pizza box with both his two hands, Joe slipped a piano wire over his throat and pulled as hard as he could.

Joe whispered into his left ear, "I'm sorry Tom. My daughter means too much to me."

Tom tried to scream, but the wire held against his throat made his screams sound like garbled gas escaping. Struggling to and fro, Tom slipped on the pizza which became exposed and tried to push Joe backwards to dislodge him. But in the end, the lack of oxygen asphyxiated him. When Joe was sure that Tom had passed, he loosened his grip and put a pair of rubber gloves on his hands. His fingers ached and bled from the strain of holding the wire that long

against Tom's throat. Joe thought, *What's done is done. Kate will have a full life. Even if I burn in hell for this, she'll have the life that I've dreamt for her.*

What now? he thought to himself. Disassembling the body in the kitchen would spill blood across the floor, so he dragged the body to the bathroom, placed it into a tub, and then tore it to pieces with Talking Tom's best meat cleaver and knives. Joe's amateur status caused him to cut longer and pull harder on the limbs, but with effort he separated the limbs and took the remains out to his car trunk. The tub needed a thorough bleach cleaning. The pizza also needed to be cleaned off the floor which pointed to a scuffle with footprints and smear marks. It felt rude to Joe to use Talking Tom's knives and trash bags, but who the hell was going to complain about it now? If Joe ever needed to support Kate's health care again, he'd come better prepared next time.

Joe examined his surroundings and considered means of disposing the body. With all of the time he spent justifying the deed to himself, he never pondered over the final body disposal details. *Dig a hole*, he thought. But he didn't know where he could go to create such a hole without traveling 50 miles in any direction from Hagerstown Maryland. *Ditch him in a quarry or work sight*, he thought. No, that would lead to an investigation. *The best way would be to cut him up to such small shreds that no one could piece the body together again. Juice him!*

During his next few night shifts, Joe slipped Talking Tom's remains into a five thousand gallon orange juice machine. It crushed and blended Talking Tom's remains into small fibrous bits. The non-baffled vessel created foam which led to a natural way to float contaminants to the surface which could then be skimmed off the surface. It was something that he noted for the future. Extra heat killed off any unwanted germs, and he applied a final sieving step to remove foreign debris. Joe returned to Roy and collected his money.

Roy shook his hand. "Thanks for doing this Joe. I may have other jobs for you." Roy handed over the money. "If you don't mind my asking, how did you dispose of the body?"

Joe confidently replied, "Let's just say that people will be getting extra iron, calcium, and protein in their juice this week. The heat treatment process after mixing will kills the germs and the entrained air removed many of the contaminants."

Roy twitched. He grasped his collar and breathed hard. "Clever, but his DNA is still there. We've been looking for a better way to make bodies disappear which avoids subsequent investigation. Gas costs are too high and finding new deserted places takes too much time and effort. If I were to put you in contact with one of our chemists, do you think you could work in other disposal jobs for us?"

"This was a onetime deal, Roy. I'm doing this for my daughter's medical condition. Thanks for the money." Joe held up the money and winked at his friend.

Despite his claim, Kate's illness demanded more funding and with the ability to make money fast, his wife devoured it by gambling it away. She believed that one big jackpot would rescue them all. Instead, she became addicted to gambling, and Joe soon found himself doing more and more work as the organization's chief disposal man, the Juice Man as they called him. Getting caught was the least of his fears; the masking agent developed by the mob's chemist concealed the evidence. No one would know.

What did surprise him was the public's increased demand for his juice batches. It seemed that every time a customer compliment came into his juice factory, the timing always corresponded to his blends. Soon he realized that he could go into business by himself by promising a deal with the organization. Not long thereafter, the Juice Man brand was launched.

Joe had irrevocably changed. At first he thought that he was doing it all for his daughter's health, but as his wife's gambling debts grew, he reasoned that since his soul was slipping to hell anyway, he might as well live comfortably. In his mind he felt his juicing had been justified as it transformed him into a more callous and ruthless individual. A once good man had drowned within the sins of his juice batches.

Debriefing --- Present Time

“So have you uncovered the Juice Man's secret or not?” Mr. Duke's face turned red as he stomped his fist on his company desk and demanded an answer from his private detective, Mick Hunter. The new Juice Man brand had stolen a significant share of his Eastern Coast business. His son Lance had been missing for days leading to his higher than usual anxiety.

“Sir, I'm not even sure I want to stay on this case.” Mick sighed. His old business suit needed repairs again. A button fell off causing him to reach down, pick it up, and place it in a vest pocket. He saved money wherever he could and sewing a button was an easy fix from his army days. Flipping open his small note pad Mick said, “That guy is a creepy nut. He spends most of his time tending to his fruit imports, repairing juice machines around town, except for the one where his estranged daughter works, and preparing his own juice batches on the first floor of a factory which he rents. His free time is devoted to viewing porn, observing wrestling, hiring local call girls, and watching the movie Blood Sport multiple times. He prepares his baked bean and burrito combination meals without flourish often letting the flatulence fly to the musical beat of Eye of the Tiger by Survivor. And he completes his fashion ensemble by wearing his favorite holey t-shirt as he occupies the second refurbished floor of the original factory. About the only thing that gives me empathy for him is his need to mend his relationship with his daughter Kate. She wants nothing to do with him, but he still manages to see her by not properly repairing the juice machine at the Community Market where she works. At least I think he's sabotaging it.”

“Enough already. None of this helps. If I tripled your fees, could you get me Juice Man's secret recipes and manufacturing equipment? I need to know what's in his juice concentrates. He's ruining my business.”

Mick shook his head. His salt and pepper beard and mustache had seen better days. “He brings in blood oranges, oranges, bananas, kiwi, raspberry, grapefruit, star fruit, coconuts, and other imports. I just know that's what enters his factory. I can't see what he's doing on the first floor. Blinders cover every window and he avoids throwing recipe information into his trash. He sets traps for animals around the place. He brought one of the trapped raccoons to the second floor of the complex where I could watch him. The raccoon bit him, and he tortured that poor animal by starving it, poking it with a stick, and then decapitating it. He seemed to be turned on when he watched the animal bleed out. I don't know what he does with the remains. Are you sure your chemist just can't get the secret from analytical chemistry methods?”

Mr. Duke's large eyebrows furrowed. His face took on a shade of red before he breathed out several times to calm himself. “If I could learn this from my chemists, I wouldn't need you. He's using a masking agent to smear out analytical scans. That proves he's smarter than we thought. Get the information, or I will find someone else who will. I don't care what it takes.”

Mr. Duke paused. He rubbed his eyes, massaged his face, and tilted backwards in his chair. In a clear change of tactics, he softened his voice and demeanor. “Mick, I selected you for this task after researching your combat background. Taking a bullet to the leg and managing

to pull yourself and a buddy back to a medical unit shows me that you're exceptionally tough. You can take this guy." Duke leaned forward to accent his next statement. "When you're finished with this assignment, I want you to join the other detectives and find my son. Lance has been missing for several days. I don't know whether he's just having fun or is in trouble."

Community Market

Meanwhile at the Community Market, the Juice Man, a. k. a. Joe Sanguis repaired the juice machine in the refreshment area of the supermarket. His first repair aligned the drive system from the motor to the juice grinder, and then Joe misaligned the drive train by two degrees to ensure he'd be back in another month or so. It was just barely off, not enough for anyone to notice. It was the only way for Joe to bump into his daughter without her getting wise to it. To compensate the store for the trouble they had with the juice machine, Joe gave the Community Market discounts on his juice offering. That was enough for the manager to keep the Juice Man brand under his roof. The store manager didn't care about the racket the juice machine made or how disruptive it was towards any group that met at his establishment. Get them in and get them out was his slogan.

Joe spotted his daughter and made his way towards her. He wore his dark blue Juice Man fatigues with a name tag. His "investors" demanded that he wear such clothing when he ventured outside of his factory home.

"How are you today, Princess?" He forced a smile across his thin lips. His face hadn't smiled for several weeks as his smile muscles had atrophied. His heart warmed in the presence of his daughter. With her operations long behind her, she had become an attractive young woman. It was no wonder why boys sought her out with her great attitude, beautiful smile, and thin athletic body molded from teenage ballet training.

Dancing prowess came with difficulty, but with her toughness and extra practice, she excelled at it. Joe remembered a time when she wanted to quit her lessons because several other girls were teasing and bullying her. He told her that they were jealous of her and arranged extra sessions. In no time, she had struck back and had become the best dancer causing her enemies to accept her or in one case to leave the dance squad.

Joe hated seeing her hanging out with a young man who had tattoos, body piercings, low drooping pants with the obligatory underwear peek, and a sideways hat.

"Why do you keep harassing me, Mr. Sanguis?" She folded her arms and bit her lip indicating her judgment and nervousness of having her estranged father around. She wore the normal store apron over a relaxed jean and t-shirt. Her father had once again showed up at the worst time: right after her boyfriend had gone to the backroom, and always when she was busy. Although Kate dearly loved her father as a young child and early teenager, her parent's divorce and his unpleasant style had chilled their relationship.

Kate didn't know what had torn her parents apart, and Joe was not about to tell her the intimate details for fear of diminishing her perception of her mother. He had spent enormous hours trying to start another business that could get him out from under the mob's influence, just to discover that his absence and lack of attention had caused his wife to find another man's arms.

He could never forgive her, and they soon began to cheat on each other as their vows degraded and shattered to bits.

“Don’t be that way, Kate. Call me Dad.” Joe paused. “You could do better than him. Hell, you could do better than this whole damn place.” Joe’s hands and arms opened wide as if to emphasize his last claim. He forced a smile that he had trouble holding.

“Okay, Dad.” She accented the Dad part. “Is there anything urgent, or can I get back to work?” She turned away from him in the hopes that her pesky father would leave.

Kneeling before the produce stand, she removed oranges and apples from boxes and placed them on the lowest shelves. It wasn’t the kind of work that attracted her. What she wanted to become was an artist or writer; her no frills job paid the bills and gave her ample time to perfect her crafts. Her father’s presence embarrassed her and made her uncomfortable. The hatred between her parents had never diminished. Her father would scarcely come home, while her mother had made them all broke with her addictive gambling habits. Whenever they got near each other, they kept an uneasy truce.

Joe left out a disheartening sigh. He turned, took one step towards the door, and then turned back to say, “Tigress, I have terminal cancer. My hair is falling out from the treatments, and I won’t be able to keep up with my orders soon.” Joe removed his hat to unveil his balding head.

She paused for several seconds and turned to see his receding scalp with a concerned look before focusing again on the produce before her.

After placing his company hat back on, Joe continued. “I’ve amassed a fortune, Kate, and I’ve willed it all to you, but for you to get any of it, you have to spend time with me. There’s no one else that I want to take over my business.”

Kate stopped shelving the produce. She stood and brushed off organic debris from her outfit. “I didn’t know, Dad. I’m so sorry.” She hugged him. Even if her father was a total ogre, Kate would have acted differently towards him if she realized he was sick. Memories of her own illness and how her father managed to get enough funding drew her towards him.

“You’re just like your mother. Mention money and she’s all lovey-dovey too.” Joe patted the back of her head like he did when she was a little girl.

Kate retracted from the hug and backed one step away. Her head shook in disgust as his last stinging comment unnerved her. “You say the sweetest things, Dad. When do we start?”

“Right now, quit and come to work for me today.”

She walked with him towards her manager. Exchanging one blue collar job for another with higher pay attracted her, even if it meant working with her father. She turned her head towards her father and said, “There was a reporter asking about your juice today.”

Joe turned to her as he continued walking. His nose wrinkled as he tilted his head to the left. Someone else was after his formulas.

Training

Kate transitioned to her new position with ease. Running the warehouse and accounting operations came effortlessly for her. Where she had trouble was in repairing juice concentrate machines. Despite Joe’s best training, she struggled with the repair portion of the job until he guided her step by step through the entire procedure. It reminded her of her youth as her father

always helped her through difficult tasks; he was a wizard at science projects. The only part of the job that she had not learned was her father's recipes.

It was a good job transition for Kate. She worked similar hours as before, mastered new skills, and even had time to devote to her work hobbies. Her first novel was nearing completion. After a few payments to an editor and getting her manuscript reviewed, she'd be ready to pitch it to several publishers. Dealing with her father was easier than she anticipated. She grew accustomed to him again, and she soon realized that beneath his tough exterior, he loved her.

As for the Juice Man, his daughter's presence had affected him as well. He no longer trapped and held caged animals above his juice mixer. When he saw himself in his daughter's eyes, it took him back to a more peaceful time, a time before his mob regrets, a time before his mirror reflected the image of a beast.

The Juice Man continued to make his special batches during "second shift" albeit he had cut back. Only under the firm's strong prodding would he do those batches now. Joe mentioned that he was making extra money by working evenings, but Kate didn't grasp what he meant by that. The Community Market made out well with the transition as their juice machine began to run flawlessly. It was the first time that their juicing machine operated correctly.

Two months had passed. Kate's aptitude for the repair part of the job had improved to the point that she wanted to be let in on Joe's secrets. "Dad, when are you going to share your secret recipes with me?" There was a twinkle in her eye as she asked this question.

Joe sighed. "When the time is right, you'll know. Besides, you may want to start making your own recipes on the smaller capacity machine. We can trade mark it as your energy or health product line."

Kate smiled. She always wanted to create her own products, and her father just gave her an opportunity to use her creative side.

Shift End

Kate had just finished her second batch of a skinny Pina Colighta fruit blend. Her first batch met with rave reviews. It was a taste that everyone wanted without the extra calories. She was on to something. Give the public low calorie fruit combinations combined with artificial sweeteners, and they'd flock to her juices. Women liked the new offering as a less fattening drink mixer. Kate felt intoxicated with her new juice brand. The Juice Man was even prouder of his daughter than he was before.

"See you tomorrow Dad. Do you want me to lock up?"

"I'll take care of it. See you tomorrow Tigress." The Juice Man made the necessary preparation for a master batch. It was at such an angle that his daughter couldn't see his mixes. He had forbidden her to ever climb up the spiral staircase.

Kate left the factory by opening a sturdy metal door with diagonal locking bars. It was locked by a timer that connected to an entering keypad that allowed access after punching in the right code. After she exited, the same reporter that she had run into earlier stuck his foot into the closing door, used his arm to push the massive door open, entered the factory, and swung the door closed which locked it. In reality the persistent reporter was none other than Mick Hunter. Mick felt it was safe enough to use his full name since nobody checked reporters' backgrounds. No one remembers a reporter's name unless they break the big story or become familiar with the public through an ongoing column.

“Hey, you’re not allowed in there!” Kate pounded on the outer locked factory doors. She didn’t remember his name, just as Mick had expected. As she tried to open the door, Mick tied the door off to a nearby beam and stacked containers in front of the door to block her re-entrance. Kate entered the code lock several times, but despite her best efforts, she was unable to reenter through the side entrance door. The sound of her pounding on the door reverberated through the factory.

The intruder’s presence unnerved the Juice Man who turned off the lights and kept the equipment running. He could maneuver around the factory without any lighting because of the time he spent there.

Mick took his chances with his borrowed persona. He opened a flip pad and prepared to take notes. “You’re a tough man to track down, Joe Sanguis. How long have you owned the Juice Man brand?”

“Leave now. There will be consequences if you choose to stay.” Joe hunched down and listened to triangulate in on the intruder’s location. He breathed in short little breaths to allow his ears to triangulate in on the intruder’s position.

The factory’s darkness got on Mick’s nerves. Corners of the room seemed to press down upon him taking his breath away fearing that something would reach out and touch him. He undid his Colt 45 gun holster in preparation for trouble and placed a small flashlight into his right front pocket.

“Mr. Sanguis, I’m Mick Hunter. I want to interview you. I’ve tried to reach you by phone, but you never returned my calls or responded to my messages. You didn’t reply to my email or letter correspondence either.”

A long pause followed as Mick’s eyes acclimated to the dark environment. A full moon peered into a set of side windows offered minimal light. Mick strolled over to the smaller batch mixer, got out his flashlight, and scribbled down equipment specifications.

During the pause, the Juice Man reviewed some on-line information. “I don’t see a Mick Hunter on the staff at the Frederick Gazette or News-Post, but I did find a private detective with that name. You’re trespassing, Detective Hunter.”

Police had escorted Mick away on many occasions. Trespassing was a minor offense, just a fine, maybe a day or two in the slammer. Nothing he couldn’t handle. With the amount of money he would pull down for this deal, it was worth it. Mick pointed his flashlight beam at the side of an agitator, bent over, and jotted down the side motor agitator details when he felt something slash the back of his right leg.

“Ouch!”

In attempt to sever his Achilles tendon, his right back calf had been sliced open. Blood trickled to the factory floor. “You’ll pay for that, Juice Man.”

Mick removed his tie and wrapped it around his lower right leg to apply pressure and slow the bleeding. At this point he pulled out his gun and fired a shot in the air. “I’m taking my tour, Mr. Sanguis.” He gathered his dropped flashlight and shined in different directions in the hopes of catching Juice Man’s movement. The sound of a bouncing bamboo stick caught his attention as he cast the light on a long stick with a knife on the end of it laying on the floor covered in his own blood splatter.

After observing the larger mixer, Mick strove towards it. Before stepping up the spiral staircase, he guessed the size of the vessel and wrote down the agitator motor requirements. Without formal food preparation or engineering training, he just recorded the vessel size, agitator type, and the hefty four horsepower motor. There was something to remove metal fragments

from the large tank and a compressor pulled in air. He would document everything and let Mr. Duke decipher what was important. Time was running out. If the Juice Man had called the police, they would arrive in minutes. Since he hadn't threatened the Juice Man, he might even win a lawsuit against him.

Detective Hunter made his way up a set of rickety old steps. Around he went as the steps scaled around the large heat jacketed, master batch mixer. Slowly and agonizingly he climbed as his cut right leg hindered his progress. With shortness in his breath, he arrived at the top. He flashed his flashlights around the top and saw nothing but a notebook whereupon he took a few snapshots which indicated the secret recipe.

He read the final two entries, smiled, and snapped a few shots with his i-Phone. They had him. What was that? A footstep sounded behind him. He turned, flashed his light, and saw nothing. His body began to shiver from the loss of blood. He needed medical attention soon. As tough as he was, Mick realized he would be unconscious in another twenty minutes. A cold hand touched his shoulder as he swiveled with his Colt six shot and fired. Another bamboo stick holding a rubber hand rattled on the metal grating. Curiosity caused him to look into the giant vat from an observation deck as he watched the viscous agitation currents churn the juice mix with his flashlight.

Another noise to his right, he turned his flashlight into the face of the Juice Man! The Juice Man pushed a button causing the observation deck where the detective stood to slant towards the vessel. Mick initially stumbled backwards before grabbing the sides of the railing with his left hand and blindly opening fire towards the Juice Man. Three blind shots missed, but the others found their mark. Mick held on and started to pull himself to the main platform when a blunt object struck his face.

WHAM!

Kate slammed the wooden paddle into Mick's face causing him to tumble backwards into the mixing vessel. Mick's legs were severed. With the remaining ounces of his life force, he clung to a side baffle. With revenge in her heart, Kate nudged him free of the baffle as the cutting blades smeared his body into small fibrous bits.

She turned on the factory lights and jolted to her father's side.

Joe glanced at his daughter and with heavy gasp said, "I didn't want you to get dirty." The Juice Man breathed in gasps and let out a long sigh. "It's too late for me, Kate." Her father coughed up blood from the lung puncture wound he had sustained. "When I pass, I want you to feed me into the juice machine. If the police or health inspector ever caught wind about this place, they'll shut us down. My gunshot wounds would lead to an unwanted. . ." Joe took a breath. "Investigation." He reached with his right hand to fondle his daughter's hair. "I always liked your hair Kate. It reminded me of your mother's hair when we dated."

"But Dad, we should get you to the hospital. With the money that you've made you could bribe a doctor to look the other way." Tears rippled down her cheeks as she clutched his left hand. His left hand stayed open as her father answered her with a dry last breath, his extended right index finger pointing towards the juice machine.

The roaring of the machine subsided as the lights turned up to full intensity. She paused and thought for a moment, and then let out a long disparaging exhale before following her father's last request. She reprogrammed the machine to do one last thorough mix and guided her dead father's body into the juice machine as it cut, battered, and shredded him like the rest of his victims.

Aftermath

Kate emptied the main mixer into saleable drums and totes and sanitized Mick Hunter's blood stains from the factory. The masking agent, foam purification, and post heating step occurred automatically from her father's initial programming. She strained the mixture just to be sure that there were no large contaminants left. It was midnight when she ventured back up the spiral stairs and examined her father's secret books. The secret ingredients were human flesh and a masking agent from the Onyx Chemical Company. It was something that vegetarians unwearingly devoured and lusted over. They would get hooked on the taste even though it was so dilute that they could not recognize it. Deep down all humanity's roots could be traced to an era when man barely survived an ice age by committing cannibalism. She paged through the formulation book until a small note dropped out.

Dear Kate, if you're reading this, it means that I've passed on. I want you to continue producing juice under the Juice Man brand name, it's your choice whether you continue to use my recipes or develop your own. If you chose to follow my recipes, use the masking ingredient from the Onyx Chemical Company, and keep your batch notes under lock and key. The inspectors will want to examine a log book, so you'll have to keep a false duplicate. But if you decide to venture out with your own juices, burn the old paperwork. Keep in mind that if the public ever discovered my secret, the resulting lawsuits will bankrupt the Juice Man brand.

Whatever you choose to do, just remember I always loved you Kate. These past weeks were the happiest of my life. I couldn't be prouder of you.

Your Father, the Juice Man

PS --- Sorry about lying to you about my cancer, I needed that stunt to sway your opinion of me.

Kate folded her father's note and placed it between her shirt and heart for safe keeping. She realized that he had tricked her once again, but when she looked back across her life and remembered everything her father sacrificed for her, she forgave him. Tomorrow she'd expand her new product line and test the publication waters with her edited manuscript. The Juice Man brand name would with her new recipes in memory of her father.