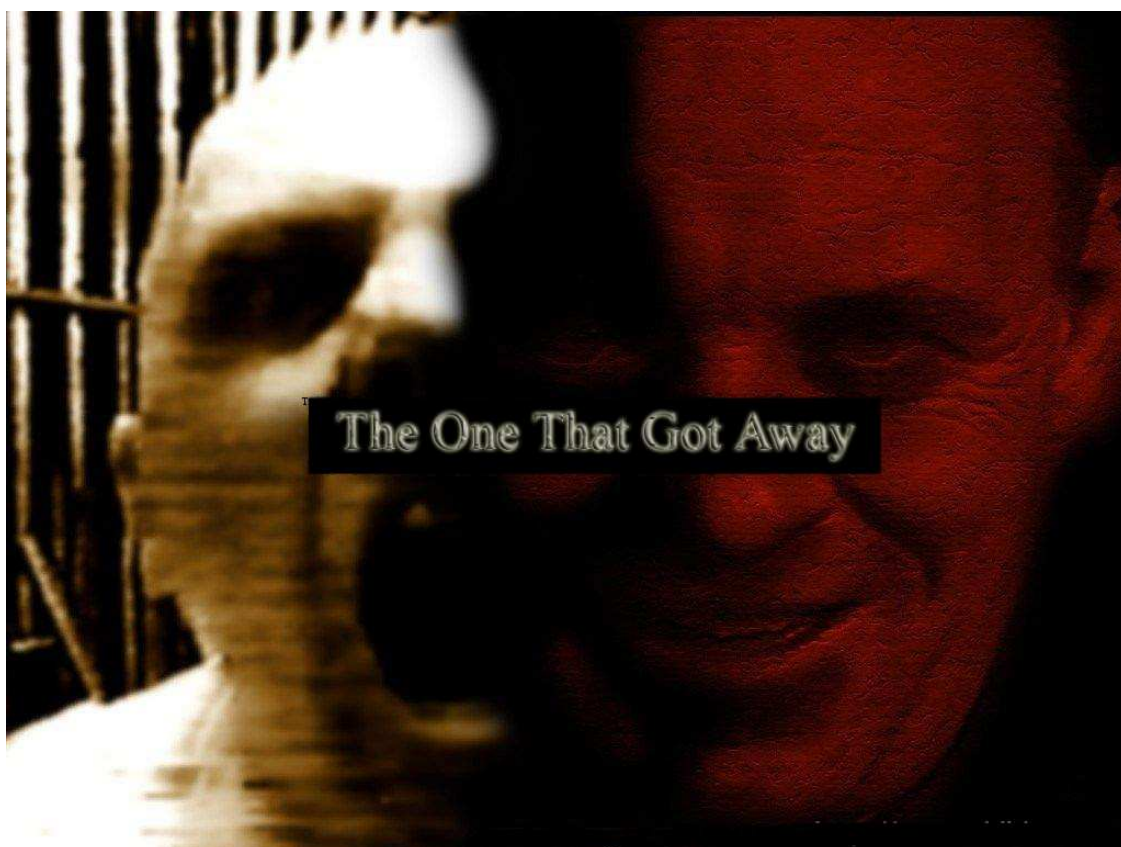


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The One That Got Away

Denny Johnson



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The One That Got Away

by Denny Johnson

Jeffrey Dahmer certainly went down in history.

As usual, for a few short days, the Tabloid newspapers had the edge. The regular news media filed stories daily - the Tabs' worked on a weekly deadline. With a story moving this fast there was no time to look back. The body count was growing each day as police pieced together Dahmer's ten-year rampage - with the bones and flesh that remained.

Terrified Traci Edwards was nearly the twelfth victim. Only he escaped a hideous death at the hands of the cannibal killer Dahmer, who confessed to the mutilation-murders of at least eleven men and boys. Traci was held prisoner in Dahmer's apartment of horrors - an apartment littered with human skulls and body parts. Finally after hours at the knife-edge of death, he fled half-stripped, bleeding and handcuffed into the street, where he flagged down a passing police car.

When freelance reporter Denny Johnson was assigned to the Dahmer story the tabloid M.O. ran true to its peculiar form. Johnson was thinking front page, not tomorrow and local, but next week and national. To perform this magic Denny would prospect for any small nugget the gold-rush-media-frenzy had overlooked the first day. That nugget which would still be news seven days later. News even to the media that covered the story from the start.

The first day after the story rocked the world, the Journal ran a small page one article on Traci Edwards and his escape - here was Johnson's nugget. The account of Traci's getaway was short and shallow. It was dwarfed by the huge headlines and photos of Dahmer's arrest and victims' IDs. Other reporters pursued grim body counts, grieving relatives and daily news conferences. There was no information about Traci's experience inside the apartment with the murderer - no inside story. Denny's assignment was to find the one that got away.

It would be a week before the media would turn back its collective attention to Edwards. By then Traci was on a plane home to Texas and, ultimately, jail. Johnson had them scooped.

The Journal article mentioned that Traci Edwards lived in the same neighborhood that the bodies were discovered. Denny headed to a saloon in the vicinity. He ordered a bottle of beer and lit a Marlboro. He made small talk about the murders with the bartender and a few of the lunchtime customers from the block. He didn't learn too much new until a man in uniform at the end of the bar, piped in his two cents worth - the needed information. "I know where the guy lives," said the postman on a break. And, after a few well-placed beers, the mailman agreed to deliver Denny to Edwards's apartment.

The neighborhood was declining ethnic. Bungalows mixed with apartment buildings and the occasional two-flat wood frame house. Traci lived in one of these, a brown two-story in need of repair. Paint was chipped, wood was peeling, and a few broken windows were visible from the street. Paint flaked from the railing as they climbed the deteriorated front stairs of the house and the postman pointed out Edwards's name on the rusty mailbox. He said with a slight slur, "Edwards lives upstairs. Good luck. I deliver your magazines each week to every old lady on my route. We'll be looking forward to your story." He winked. "I usually read them before I deliver them."

Edwards didn't answer when Denny rang his door bell. A quick search up the back stairs of the house and a peek through the rear windows indicated that no one was home in his apartment. The downstairs' neighbor confirmed he hadn't seen Traci in awhile.

Denny parked his rental car out in front of the house, switched the ignition to accessories, tuned the radio to the local news channel - and waited. Sitting the stakeout isn't romantic, it's cruddy. Every time a metro cop passed him by, they eyed him suspiciously. They knew who lived there and they knew Johnson was a reporter. He just looked like one. Denny was hot and hungry. There was no bathroom available, and he was running out of cigarettes. The bad characters in the neighborhood knew he was there in ten minutes. They figured he was a cop. Hours later, Traci still wasn't home. He was obviously lying low somewhere else. But by that time, Denny was familiar with everybody in the neighborhood, hooking, selling drugs, or beating their wives. He noticed over time a middle-aged fellow carrying a bucket who seemed to be the janitor at the building across the street. Denny approached him with a \$50 bill outstretched.

The man was standing in the courtyard of one of the larger red brick buildings on the block. He wore blue jeans and a dago-t that displayed an ample beer belly. He was nearly bald, what hair he did have was matted and dirty. He was sweating profusely. The janitor eyed the \$50 closely and told Denny that he knew Traci from around the neighborhood. "Yeah," said the man. "And I seen you sitting over there. I figured you was something like a reporter, or a FED maybe. I

know most the local cops. Didn't think you were a new guy - your hair's too gray."

Denny wondered aloud if many reporters had been in the neighborhood. He himself had seen very little action that day around Edwards's apartment. "Not hardly any reporters today," the janitor said, "but you know that yesterday they was all over the place like maggots for dinner at Jeffrey Dahmer's." He laughed; it was a nasty sound.

Johnson grinned. The black humor mill was already to work. "Do you know if any of the reporters talked to Traci," asked Denny.

"No. The little creep was doing his best Houdini," said the janitor. "What about that fifty?"

"Do you know Traci well?" asked Denny.

"What about that fifty?" said the janitor again, wiping the sweat from his face with his arm. Denny handed the \$50 over and the man snatched it away and stuck it in his Levis. He wet his lips - the pump had been primed. "I'm the maintenance engineer for this here building," the man said using his thumb to point out the fact. "I been working here a long time. I got plenty of stories. Seen some crazy shit around here."

"I'm sure you'd make a good book," said Denny, "but right now I need to know where I can find Traci Edwards."

"Yeah, yeah, slow down, I'm getting to that. We all know him around here, he's lived here a couple of years already. That's a long time in this neighborhood. We seen his picture in the paper yesterday, and on T.V. Before he was just a punk, now he's a big squeaking deal. Everybody's looking for him, because he almost gets himself killed and eaten by some freak. All I can say is, Duh."

Denny promised to quote him. And another \$50 bill to match if he could get to Edwards - and let him know that he would pay \$1,000 for his exclusive story. He gave the janitor his phone number and went back to his hotel. Three hours later his phone rang. Cash money gets everybody talking.

Traci agreed to meet the next morning at Denny's hotel; he wanted all the money up front. Denny told him it would be \$500 when he showed up, the remainder when the interview was over. Traci reluctantly agreed. He was anxious to tell his

story, as long as he was well-paid.

Denny contacted his office and by dawn the next day a photographer from Chicago was on the scene. He and Denny made their plan in the early morning light over room service coffee. The story would be a first-person account of Traci's experience. The photog would shoot candid photos of Edwards. At 10:15 a.m. everything was ready.

Traci was about 5'5" but sturdily built - a real fireplug. Denny guessed he might tip the scales at 160 pounds. When he showed up that morning at the hotel he was wearing a white t-shirt, pants, Nikes, and a blue "Georgetown" sweatshirt with matching baseball cap. He told Denny that he was 22, and an army brat. He arrived with another young man whom he introduced as his friend Jeremy. Breakfast, packs of Kool cigarettes and pots of coffee were perks Traci demanded for his story. On the other side of the room, the photographer discretely snapped images of the scene with a telephoto lens.

Edwards was well-mannered and surprisingly articulate. They sat around the coffee table in the living room of the spacious suite the paper had provided for the interview. The table was littered with coffee cups, half-full ashtrays, the daily papers and a tape recorder. Another table nearby held the spent, spotless breakfast plates that Traci and Jeremy had cleaned with their fingers and the last bit of toast. In one corner of the room a large color TV, muted, was tuned to CNN.

Denny's tape recorder was running. He handed Traci five crisp \$100 bills. "Just start from the beginning," said Denny. "Tell us all you can remember, and then we'll ask a few questions to clear anything up later."

Traci rolled the bills, stuffed them in his pants pocket and sat back nervously in his chair. With a cigarette shaking in his hand, he closed his eyes and concentrated. The vivid memories flooded into words. "I haven't slept in two days," he began. I can't believe that this happened to me. There was no clue. I looked into the eyes of the devil and saw death.

"Believe me, God delivered me from Satan. I'm still in shock. I can't trust people. And when I do try to sleep, I wake up in a bolt, sitting straight up in bed - wet with sweat. I'm still scared to death. I'm constantly looking over my shoulder." Traci paused, taking a few rapid puffs off his cigarette.

"I was in the mall when Jeffrey Dahmer showed up and asked if I wanted to have a party," Traci said, exhaling a cloud of smoke. "We all knew him from around the neighborhood. There was no way to guess he was a maniac. He was just an ordinary guy. I didn't think too much about him either way.

"We never thought he was gay or anything out of the ordinary, because the people on the block where he lived just never would have tolerated him. They don't like gays in that part of town. If they had thought that he was gay the guys in his neighborhood would have messed him up. They jump guys like that over on his block. It's just not accepted.

"The whole area is loaded with gangs and stuff so I guess nobody really knew that he was gay, or into that kind of lifestyle. He just couldn't have survived if anybody knew about him," Traci emphasized that last sentence with another nervous glance at the camera. Denny wondered if he spoke from experience.

"Let's get some girls and all go down to the lake and have a party,' Dahmer said, 'I got a hundred bucks, I'll buy the beer.'

"I was broke," said Traci, shrugging. "It sounded like a fine idea to me. It was hot and sticky and a party at the lake would be good. We walked to the liquor store and he got the beer. Dahmer said he had to stop by his apartment to change clothes. He was still in his blue work suit with his name 'Jeffrey' embroidered over his pocket."

The interview was interrupted momentarily when a loud knock on the door announced room service - more pots of coffee, and another pack of Kool's.

Denny now believed Edwards was lying about his motives. He guessed as he walked around the hotel room stretching his legs that Traci knew what was happening when he accepted Dahmer's invitation to the apartment. At least Traci thought he knew what was happening. He didn't know about the eleven that had proceeded him to Dahmer's for a visit. As it turned out, Denny's instincts rang true.

At the time he met Dahmer in the mall, Traci was a street-wise punk fleeing a Texas arrest warrant on charges of raping a teenage girl. Traci had been around, he was aware. But that day in the mall neither of the two men knew what they were up against. It was Cannibal Killer versus A Clockwork Orange. But at the moment Denny's suspicion was that Traci was of the bi-sexual persuasion and that he knew full well that Dahmer's offer of free beer and a party didn't include the company of women.

Settling back into his chair, Denny eyed Traci and Jeremy as they poured themselves fresh cups of coffee, adding lots of sugar and cream, and clinking their mugs with their spoons as they stirred. Denny suspected that Edwards probably went to the apartment to earn or steal money - by whatever means necessary. Knowing, or at least thinking he knew what Dahmer was up to. After all Traci was broke and he knew Dahmer wasn't. Dahmer's M.O. was to offer his victims money so he could take sexy photos of them. Most agreed to the bargain. And money was the major motivator with Traci. He lived pretty much from day-to-day. Denny believed Traci went to that apartment to play Dahmer for a sucker and, boy, was he surprised.

"It was really hot," Traci said lighting a cigarette from the recently-delivered pack, which now nestled in the neck of his t-shirt. "Everything seemed pretty normal, I had never seen where he lived and when we first got there it looked like a pretty nice place. We went in the back exit of the two-story apartment building and the stench hit me right away," said Traci.

"Damn, what's that STINK? I asked.

"Dahmer just brushed it off. He said there was a problem with the sewer in the building. As we walked down the hall, the stench made me want to gag." Traci wrinkled up his face. "I said let's just grab a beer and get out of there, and he said: 'That sounds good. I can barely stand the smell myself.' He said it was the sewer, and I've smelled some pretty raunchy sewers before, so I just assumed he was telling the truth."

Traci leaned forward in his chair, his voice lowered dramatically. The droning monologue was hypnotic. Denny concentrated, realized that they were on the portal, the point of no return. The photographer had stopped taking pictures and listened quietly from the edge of the bed. "His living room was tiny, but air conditioned. A small unit buzzed in the window. The dark colored drapes were drawn and the intense sun outside locked out. We sat down on his couch and popped open the beers. He had a beautiful fish aquarium and the colors of the fish were stunning in the darkened room." Traci let out a sigh.

"As I looked around and my eyes began to adjust I could see the living room walls were covered with photos and drawings of guys working out." Traci's demeanor suddenly changed. He became impatient, almost brisk. "I hoped Dahmer would hurry and change his clothes and we would get out of there. It really stunk, and it was creepy somehow. I didn't feel right.

"Dahmer told me he had all the drawings because he was a member of a health club. He was in pretty good shape, his arms were muscular and toned; he

was wiry. We were sitting on opposite sides of the couch, but it was a fairly small couch and there really wasn't much space between us. He said some of the fish were piranha, and he told me how they like to eat each other. We sat there for awhile, making small talk about when he was in the Army and stuff," Traci said, his voice falling again into that hypnotic drone and, again, abruptly breaking off, as if he were trying to shake off a fatal sleepiness.

"He was pretty boring and if it wasn't for that beer, I would have beat it. In fact that's what I was thinking," Traci said, his voice angry and hard. "But this guy was such a professional. He was way ahead of me. Before I knew what hit me, he had a handcuff on my wrist and a big-ass machete sticking me up in my armpit. Right up under my heart!" Traci clasped his hands over his heart and twisted his body wildly in the chair.

"He said, 'If you don't do what I say, I'm going to kill you.' He said, 'I've done this before. Don't make a move because I can kill you,' he snapped his fingers, 'just like that!'

Denny was concerned for Traci's well-being. The boys breathing was labored, his eyes watered. He noticed Traci's fingertips were stained yellow from the tobacco, and he also noticed how his hands shook. He suggested they take a break, but Traci waved him off with a better-to-get-this-over-with look.

"The machete was army issue - heavy and effective. Black handled with a long silver, double-edged blade." Denny was amazed at Traci's recall and his descriptive powers; it would make his job all the easier. "It felt as if it had been sharpened to a point that would split hairs. I'll never forget what that blade looked or felt like." Denny guessed he would remember, too.

"It was all so quick, he was experienced, and he had practice. It was all in one motion. I had the beer in my hand, and I'm talking about fish, and in an eyelash - boom! - the handcuff was on my wrist. And the tip of the blade was stuck in me. I looked down and I could see through my shirt. I was bleeding." Traci caressed the bandage under his t-shirt.

"Then his eyes changed," Traci said. "Maybe the sight of red blood did it."

The room came to attention. Denny glanced quickly at the tape recorder; he didn't want to miss a word of this. The photographer rose from the bed, thinking of picture possibilities. Even Jeremy held still, looking interested.

"At first I couldn't face him," Traci said, fervently, "but God made me look right into his eyes. It was like confronting the devil. Pure and simple. Dahmer

looked nothing like when we first met in the mall. He had changed completely. He had transformed somehow into evil. I could tell by the look in his eyes that he had killed.

"Damn! I knew I was in trouble. A chill ran down my spine when I realized that the rankness in that apartment wasn't coming from any sewer - it was the smell of death!" Traci's eyes were wide and Denny looked over his shoulder just to make sure Dahmer wasn't standing behind him.

"He kept telling me that he was going to kill me. For an instant I felt incredibly stupid," Traci said, spitting out the last word. "Then I realized I had no time to retrace my steps. I knew I'd been smelling death all along. And it was sitting right next to me.

"I've had martial arts training, and I know how to take care of myself. I'm a strong man, but he was just as strong. It was so surreal. He couldn't quite force me to get my other arm around so that he could handcuff me. He didn't hit me. He kept telling me, 'C'mon, c'mon, let me get your other arm.' But I kept resisting, wrestling it away." Traci mimicked his panicked movements, twisting and pulling his arm close to his body. He stopped as a new, more macabre thought dawned on him. "Dahmer was trying to sweet talk me into my own murder."

Two short rings on the hotel telephone shook everyone back to the present in the hotel suite. Denny reached the phone just as it rang a second time. It was his editor checking on the progress of the story. In a few moments Denny briefed him on the situation, and told him that he would be filing his story later that day. Traci and the others politely ignored the conversation.

Turning back to the group, Denny interrupted their small talk with a question to Traci. "Through all this time, you never once yelled for help? It was a pretty well-populated building," Denny went on, "didn't you ever consider screaming for your life?"

Traci turned sullen. "I was already bleeding from the cuts in my underarm," he said. "That knife seemed as sharp as a razor. They put eighteen stitches where he cut me. There was no doubt in my mind that if I had raised my voice he would have stuck me dead right then.

"Dahmer told me to stand up and he led me across the room by the handcuff. The knife was firmly stuck in my armpit. I told him, 'you don't have to try and hurt me, I'm not going to fight with you.' I tried to reason with him as he pulled me through the door into a scary scene." Give me details, Denny prayed silently.

Traci didn't disappoint him. "The bedroom, just off the living room, was gloomy and foreboding. The dingy gray walls were plastered with nude pictures of men in all types of disgusting sexual poses. I'd never seen anything like it before.

"But I didn't look for very long," Traci said. "I couldn't take my mind off of the knife. The blade felt hot as fire. Every time I'd catch a glance of it, it was looking bigger and meaner. Meanwhile, Dahmer was going through these wide mood swings. He'd whine a low moan over and over. One minute he'd be as cool as a cucumber and the next minute his face was screwed into the devil's mask telling me how he would kill me and eat me. He kept telling me that you just can't trust anybody anymore, you can't believe people. I told him, man you can trust me. If I didn't trust you, I wouldn't have come here with you. 'You'll never leave here,' Dahmer said. 'It won't be long, I'll show you. I'll show you things you won't believe. You'll stay here with me.'"

Traci's monologue broke off with a cough. He sipped his coffee, grimacing at its lukewarm sweetness. Traci looked up and Denny noticed his eyes seemed out of focus. But as long as the story is clear, he thought.

"The bedroom was dark except for a lone light in the corner and a television set on the other end of his small single bed," Traci recited the details. "A video tape of *The Exorcist* was playing on the TV. Dahmer pointed at the television and told me, 'This was the best movie ever made.'"

"I almost laughed. This guy thinks he's a movie critic," Traci said.

"The windows of the bedroom were blocked and I could see that he had security alarms hooked to the window sills. Nobody could get in or out of the place without an alarm going off. I was trapped. There was no escape from this room. I looked at the bed. There was a huge stain on the bed sheet. I guessed it was a bloodstain, but it had turned to a tarnished brown color," Traci said, his face pale at the memory. "I was beginning to lose it. The smell. The sounds of the T.V., and Dahmer. It was all getting to me. I felt dizzy and disoriented.

"Then I saw it - a hand was sticking out from under the bed." Traci's eyes were clenched shut so he didn't see the excited grin Denny aimed at the photographer. "I could see the end of it. It was just a hand on the end of a small piece of arm. At first I couldn't convince myself that it was real. It looked like something you might buy in a trick shop. But it was real.

"I wanted to throw up, but I couldn't. Just a dry retch was all I could manage. 'Don't be sick,' Dahmer whispered wetly in my ear, 'I'll take care of you.' He pushed the knife harder and cut me with the blade a little deeper. He forced me

to sit down on the dingy bed - and he sat down next to me."

All eyes were riveted on Traci. "Next to the bed Dahmer had a small file cabinet. He reached over and pulled open one of the drawers. Inside the drawer was a human skull."

"Jesus," Jeremy said. It was the first time he'd spoken. He stubbed out his cigarette and walked across the room to the bathroom. "I don't want to hear anymore of this."

Denny ignored him. "Go on," he urged Traci.

Traci blinked and rubbed his eyes. "Dahmer rubbed the top of the skull while he stared into my eyes. He said that I looked a lot like the men on the wall, but that I had a better body." This was said almost proudly. "He kept telling me I was very beautiful, it was as if he were talking to a woman. I was freaked out, but I kept focused on his eyes, looking for a chance to bolt out of the hellhole. I knew the man was possessed.

"I'll let you go if you just let me put your other hand in the handcuff so that I can take some nude pictures of you," Dahmer told me. "Let me be more in control. Let me take some nude pictures of you, then I'll let you go." I guess I was in shock by this time. All the while he was stroking me slowly. My legs, my back, my head. I just kept talking - talking about anything to keep his mind off what he might have planned. He was holding on tight to the handcuff and once in a while he'd shove that huge knife further up into my armpit." Traci winced in memory of the blade.

"I said you've got to trust me, I'm not going to leave you, I'm going to stay with you. I tried to reason with him, but I could see that he was going to do what he had to do. He wasn't buying it. He said, 'you're persistent aren't you? You're real good - but you're going to stay with me forever.'"

"I knew right then this guy's going to kill me. He put the knife right in my groin, and pushed steadily on it."

In the hotel suite, Traci started to cry. He was phony all right, but the tears and shaking were real. He had experienced genuine terror. Even more horrifying was the realization of what he had escaped from - how close he had come to his own end.

"Every so often, Dahmer would open the file drawer and rub the skull, then he'd look back into my eyes," said Traci, his voice breaking again. "He was going

through some type of ritual. He had done this before. Then he pulled some Polaroid pictures of dead men out of the file cabinet.. The bodies in the photos were decomposed, and Dahmer told me, 'You'll look real good this way. You'll look better than they did.'

"Then he put the knife deeply back into my armpit and ordered me to lay down on the bed. The pain was searing," Traci said. "I laid down on my back and he lowered himself slowly down on top of me with his ear to my chest. He said he wanted to hear my heart beat. He told me he wanted to see how my heart looked. Then he said that he wanted to eat it."

Denny let out a little yip which startled everyone. He could see the headline: "Killer Wanted To Eat My Heart!"

Denny apologized and made a pretense of checking the tape. Traci resumed. "I told Dahmer that I had to go to the bathroom. And, if he let me, I'd come back and take off all my clothes so he could take photos. I was trying to buy time, but I was already beginning to feel like a dead man.

"While I was going to the bathroom he stood right there with me watching and keeping that knife in my armpit. When I finished, I unbuttoned my shirt all the way down, you know, to make him think I was going along with him. I said, let's have another beer. He went to the refrigerator and got two, dragging me with him by the end of the handcuff. The kitchen was filthy. There were pots and pans with disgusting gunk in them everywhere. He wanted to go back in the bedroom. But I said, it's cooler in the living room, let's have the beer in there. I noticed that he wasn't sticking the knife so close to me and I thought he might be getting drunk," Traci sounded hopeful for the first time in his narrative. "He just kept telling me how pretty I was and how I had such a nice body. But he never tried anything sexual with me. I guess that came later. He told me he liked to keep bodies around. He said he liked it when they didn't move or struggle.

"We went back to the couch and I sat down real comfortable-like. I made him think I was right at home, but I was watching his eyes every second," Traci said. He sat forward in the chair, his hands resting on his knees, and talked into the tape recorder. "Dahmer said he'd soon show me things I'd never believe. He asked me if I was drunk, and then told me he'd been drinking all day. I told him I was woozy. Then he started weaving back and forth, not saying anything, just humming in a low tone. It was like he was in a trance.

"I finally decided that this guy was going to have to kill me. I wasn't going to give in to him. I thought to myself, he's going to have to stab me or whatever, but I'm going to try to get out of here. I figure I'm going to die either way.

"The fish tank was blocking the front window, and there was no window in the bathroom. I wasn't going back in that bedroom. I couldn't see how I could get out. I told him that I had to go to the bathroom again and this time he let me get up from the couch by myself. I thought to myself, now's your chance. In an instant I grabbed my bag and shot for the door. He reacted like in slow motion. I got to the door and turned the dead bolt. It clicked open.

"Just then, Dahmer grabbed hold of my arm. I turned and hit him flush in the face with my fist and kicked him backward. He reeled and I never looked back. He underestimated me, and it was his undoing." Traci grinned.

"I bounded at top speed down the hallway, whizzing past a few folks who were walking the other way. 'What's wrong?' they asked, but I never even slowed down. I flew through the front door of that building in a flash and at last took a deep breath of sweet, fresh air. I ran into the street with the handcuff still dangling from my wrist and immediately spotted a police cruiser.

"There's a guy in there trying to kill me! I gasped at the officers inside." Denny thought that was probably the first time Traci had actually sought out the police. "They led me back in the building and we went up to Dahmer's door. And he opened it like nothing had ever happened. Of course, after the cops took a quick look around, well, Dahmer was history."

Anything else was anticlimactic and Denny and the photographer fiddled impatiently with notes and film as Traci came to his conclusion.

"Later as I sat in the squad car, shaking with fear and thanking God that he had delivered me from a human devil, the whole impact of what had happened took me over. I started to cry and babble like a baby."

Traci attempted a pious mien as he moralized. "I thank God I'm alive, and I pray for all the poor souls that visited that apartment before me - and never left. I know that God sent me to get this guy. It was my destiny to put him away."

Denny didn't ask many questions during or after Traci's narrative. Sometimes you just need to let a story tell itself. Traci's retelling of the story had immersed the hotel suite for more than two hours. For a few minutes it was quiet in the room as each man digested what he had just heard.

Denny jotted down a few more notes and handed Traci the remaining five one-hundred dollar bills. He was officially paid-in-full for his contribution to journalism. Traci pocketed the money as he got up from his chair, and he and Jeremy gathered their things to leave.

"If I were you," Denny told Traci at the door of the suite "I would use that \$1,000 and get yourself a good therapist - you're going to need it." Denny knew he'd have trouble sleeping.

The following week, when Denny's front-page story broke, Traci's photo was plastered over the cover of the paper. In every supermarket and drug store across America the colorful headlines shouted for attention. And an off-duty cop in a Texas Wall-Mart spotted Traci's face in the paper instantly. The policeman had filed rape charges against Traci two years earlier, and had been looking for him since.

(He'd found his man in the check-out line.)

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