



**PETER KIM**

**THE  
REVOLVER**

A SHORT STORY

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By  
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The nameless man found Lester Keats beaten and bloodied in some back alley, tossed out with the trash. Lester wished he could say it was his worst moment, but those kinds of nights happened more often than not. This time, the bar staff at Doug's Tavern, on the corner of Richmond and Kingston streets, kicked him out for getting into a fight. They had no sympathy for him for losing. He was shoved out of the door and stumbled, falling face-first onto the ground. Outside, a warm summer rain poured down. It was a hot night. He could hear the wet footsteps approaching. Through a swollen eye, Lester could see the two-tone wing tips coming closer, steadily advancing until the owner of those shoes stood directly over him ... and offered his hand.

Lester Keats got to his feet and looked up. The man was in his late thirties, but appeared to be from a different era. He had a warm smile and kind, green eyes. His hair was styled in a respectable side part in such a way that suggested pomade and a straight comb were never too far away. His hair looked soft to the touch, and hazel in color with sun-stroked blond highlights. Lester imagined him to be a golf player or to own a yacht; perhaps the man spent considerable time on the beach and lived a leisurely lifestyle. His suit was the color of fresh cream, finished off with a yellow tie and matching yellow pocket square. When he smiled at Lester, it was a wide, honest smile.

The man took Lester to a twenty-four-hour diner, where they sat down at a booth in the corner. The man ordered nothing, but offered to pay for Lester's meal. So, Lester ordered himself the Grand Breakfast—four strips of bacon, four links of sausage, two pieces of toast, hash browns, and two eggs over easy. And, since the man was paying, a side of pancakes with butter and maple syrup. Lester hung his head low, cutting into his meal with the edge of his fork and scooping big bites into his mouth. At

one point, Lester reached into his pocket and withdrew a flask, unscrewed the cap, and poured a generous amount of whiskey into his coffee mug. He tightened the cap on the flask and returned it to his pocket. Still chewing, he picked up the coffee in front of him, took a sip, and winced, the hot liquid stinging his split lip.

“Enjoying your meal?” the man asked.

Lester paused and thought about it. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d eaten this well. “Yeah,” he grunted, and then continued eating.

“Good. Enjoy. It’s a true honor just to be in your presence. I’ve been wanting to get acquainted with you for some time.”

Lester lifted his head, but didn’t make eye contact with the man. “You don’t even know me,” he said, and again lowered his head to the trough.

“Oh, but I do,” the man replied defiantly. “I know everything about you, Lester. I know about your daughter, Abigail.”

Lester Keats winced when he heard his daughter’s name. Abigail. He stopped chewing. A flood of emotions hit him first. Then the memories came, like a film projector throwing images onto the screen inside his head. Images of when she was seven years old, sliding down the stairs while sitting in a laundry basket. Her proud smile when she got to the bottom. Or twelve years old, when she discovered that sticking a playing card in the spokes of her bicycle wheel made it sound like a motorcycle. Or high school graduation, in her cap and gown, comically blowing at the tassel in front of her face while waiting in line to receive her diploma. Those memories. They hit him flush, battered him worse than any man in the ring ever could.

Lester continued eating, but the food had lost its taste. It was more of an escape now. He pushed the food around

his plate idly, pushed the hash browns into the runny egg yolk—his appetite vanishing.

“I know what happened to her,” the man continued.

“What that boy did to her.”

Lester gritted his teeth. “Shut up.”

“And the trial must have been even more difficult, learning about every detail of that night—July eighth, wasn’t it?—the night that would forever change your family’s lives.”

“I said shut your mouth,” Lester snapped. “What don’t you understand about that?”

“She wouldn’t have even remembered what happened during those six hours if she hadn’t seen the photos.”

Lester lifted the mug up to his mouth, his hand trembling. He looked straight ahead at nothing. He found himself being drawn into the man’s words. Hypnotized.

“You saw those photos, too. I wonder which was the most damaging. The one where she was being carted away by her arms and legs like a dead animal. Or the one where she was passed out on the floor, bodily fluids on her face—which was, later clarified by her attacker, not urine but semen. That’s what pushed her over the edge, wasn’t it? Made her slip that rope around her neck that night?”

“I said shut up!” Lester brought the porcelain down with fury. It crashed onto the table, black liquid contents splashing out. He felt the eyes of people in the diner watching him.

“Don’t you fucking mention my daughter’s name, you hear me? Don’t you say her name!” Lester said, defeated. He didn’t know if he was threatening the man or pleading with him.

Lester took the flask out of his pocket, unscrewed the cap, and took a deep pull. The whiskey burned the back of his throat. He set the flask down on the table, didn’t bother

to put the cap back on. Maybe people saw him. He didn't care. He took another swig.

The man sat back, relenting. He pulled several napkins from the dispenser and cleaned the mess on the table. "I apologize," he said, running the tissue along the sides of Lester's mug. "But there is a reason why I'm bringing all of this up."

Lester wiped the tears from his face. "Why? What are you even doing here?" he asked. "You a journalist or something? Want to follow up on the guy who lost his daughter?"

The man shook his head. "I don't work for a newspaper."

"Then who are you and what do you want?"

"Nothing," the man replied. "You can give me nothing that I want. In fact, I want to help you."

"Help me?" Lester replied. "Mister, nobody can help me."

"I know about your ... struggles. Let me assist you."

"Can't do that unless you got a time machine."

"I don't have a way to change what happened," the man admitted, "but I may be able to offer you the next best thing."

Lester Keats scoffed. "What could you possibly offer me?" he asked, not expecting an answer.

"Justice," the man replied. And then he unrolled his dinner cloth and set the cutlery down on the table. With his left hand, he placed the napkin over his right hand as it withdrew something from his pocket. The man then wrapped the cloth around the item and gently set it down heavy on the table.

Lester Keats looked at the white cloth, already knowing what was underneath it. Even with the cloth, the way it hit the table with a thud—it was the unmistakable sound of

metal. He reached over and lifted the corner of the napkin just enough to expose the steel barrel of a revolver. He covered it back up.

“What the hell is this?”

“A chance to solve things.”

“That doesn’t solve anything. Something like that only causes more problems.”

“Of course. Every action has consequences, but what if you could use this without any repercussions? If you could be certain of it?”

“There’s no guarantees in this world.”

“But what if you could?”

“You can’t. So, might as well not think about it.”

“Listen to what I’m saying.” The man leaned in close.

“What if you could kill someone and get away with it?”

“Careful. You’ll waste your life on what-ifs.”

“Humor me. For conversation’s sake.”

“I don’t like thinking about those things. It’s brought me nothing but feelings of regret.”

“But haven’t you thought of it before?” the man asked.

“You already bought the gun, made the plan. You even set the day. But you couldn’t go through with it. You cursed yourself for being so weak. And now that weapon still sits in the right corner of your sock drawer, doesn’t it?”

Lester felt his eyes go wide. He had never told a living soul about his decision to kill the man who raped his daughter. Lester looked around him, overcome by the eerie sensation of being watched. “How did you know that? Are you a cop?”

“Like I said, Lester. I know everything about you.”

Lester frowned, stared at the man. “Who are you?”

“Who I am is not of importance. Only what I can provide. I’m giving you an opportunity.”

“This guy owe you money or something? You want me

to off this guy and then take the blame, right? What's in it for you?"

The man leaned back into the leather cushion of the booth, rested his elbows on the table's edge, and clasped his hands together as if he were praying or begging. "Let's just say that I'm something of a businessman, and I always charge a price. A small price to make things right."

"By trying to convince me to kill another man?"

"Nobody would ever know."

Lester shook his head. "You're out of your goddamned mind. Is this a joke or something?"

"A more important question to ask would be, How is the man who raped your daughter still free? Doesn't every breath he takes stab you like a thousand knives? How can you let this man walk free after what he did?"

Lester took another sip from his flask, contemplating the man's argument, feeling the resentment start to bubble up inside him.

"Think about your wife," the man started to say, but stopped himself short. "Sorry," he corrected, "I meant ex-wife."

Lester leveled his eyes at the man. The man seemed to know everything else about his life—how could he get a detail like that wrong?

"Think about what it would mean to her," the man reasoned.

Lester tried to suppress the memory of his wife leaving him. Lester stared ahead of him. He took a swig. "When we got married, I told her that I would always protect the family. When that boy walked out of the courtroom with just a slap on the wrist, something changed in her. She never looked at me the same way again. She looked at me like I was a failure."

Lester was quiet for a long moment. Finally, he said:

“All right, what’s your plan, then?” He couldn’t believe he was entertaining the man.

“I have no plan.”

“No plan?” Lester scoffed. “You haven’t thought of anything? No plan and for all I know, you could be a cop setting this whole thing up?”

The man gestured to his dapper suit. “Look at me. Do I look like a cop to you?”

Lester thought he looked like the furthest thing from a police officer. “No,” he admitted. “Okay, I’ll confess. I thought about it. Walking into that bar on Tenth Street and doing what the justice system failed to do. But I couldn’t. I backed out. I knew that as soon as I put a bullet in his head, they’d come for me. Can’t hide anything these days. They’ll get what they need, and I’ll be spending the rest of my life surrounded by concrete walls and steel bars.”

“But I have a way.”

“How?”

“You’re going to walk straight up to the man and shoot him in the head. Or chest. It doesn’t really matter where you place the shot, actually.”

Lester laughed. “You’re a psychopath, pal. That’s what this is. You read my story in the paper. You found me. Came up with this ridiculous story just to fuck with my head.”

“You already know where the man works. At the Broadview Tavern. You already know his schedule: every Tuesday, Friday, and weekend.”

Lester’s face fell in shock. He had paid a part-time worker twenty bucks to get him a copy of the staff schedule. How did this man know about it? It was as if the man had been watching him. He suddenly felt scared. “Who are you?” Lester asked again. “What are you?” The man continued. “Six-shot revolver. But only one kill. You can only take one life. That’s the rule.”

Lester shook his head, as if shaking away the thought. "I'm not listening to you anymore. Thanks for the breakfast. I heard what you had to say. I don't owe you a thing." Lester began to slide out from the booth.

"All right," the man sighed in resignation. "You don't have to do it. But I would like to show you one last thing. Would you mind going somewhere with me?"

"Where?" Lester asked.

"Just a little trip to the train station."

Lester regarded the man with contempt. "I'm not going anywhere with you."

The nameless man studied Lester's face. "Okay," he said. The man fixed his tie and smoothed out his hair.

"Name your price."

"For what?"

"For less than an hour of your time."

Lester thought about it, about the food sitting in his belly and how a nice stiff drink would top things off just swell. "Fifty dollars," he said, suddenly worried he had said such a high figure. But the self-proclaimed businessman reached into his breast pocket, took out a wallet, and plucked out a single fifty-dollar bill. He slid it across the table to Lester, who pocketed the money as soon as it reached him.



The pair arrived at 30th Street Station about half an hour later. Ten minutes after that, Lester saw the nameless man walk up to a complete stranger and murder him in broad daylight. And nobody so much as batted an eyelid.

Lester was right there when it happened. He only saw the victim from behind—a middle-aged man with male-pattern baldness in an oversized trench coat. He was standing in front of the departure board in the middle of the concourse.

And the last thing he heard was the unmistakable sound of a hammer cocking back.

The gun in question was a nineteenth-century revolver. The nameless man aimed it at the back of the man's skull. The hand holding the gun had a gold zodiac ring on the fourth digit—engraved with a centaur shooting a bow and arrow. But it was the index finger that Lester Keats was focused on. He watched in dismay as the digit slowly snaked around the trigger until ... bang.

Without much ceremony, the man dropped to the ground in a heap—dead. Lester Keats tried to scream, but no sound came out. He stumbled backward into a young couple. His heart raced. Eyes wide, he looked around him. Scores of commuters hustled through the main waiting room. Some carried out conversations on their cell phones. Some dragged luggage behind them. Some carried coffee in take-out cups. None of them noticed the murder that had occurred seconds ago.

No one noticed, Lester thought to himself. How was this possible?

Lester tried to talk but was choked by disbelief. He rubbed at his eyes and tried to blink away his hazy vision. He was still intoxicated, and the room around him was spinning.

Lester started to back up in fear as the man approached him. "Who was he?" Lester yelled.

"A nobody. He had a wife who cheated on him and no kids to carry on his name. In two generations, he will be forgotten."

Lester swallowed dryly. "Was he a bad man?"

"Would it make you feel better if he was?"

"Get away from me." Lester started to walk away as fast as he could.

But the nameless man stopped him. Handed him a business card with a number on it.

Told Lester that when he was ready, he should give him a call.



Lester waited exactly one week before ringing the man. And for that entire week, he didn't know what to do with the card. Should he have thrown it in the trash? Or think of it as a winning lottery ticket? Ultimately, it was the words of his ex-wife, spoken to him after his daughter's rapist walked free, that made up Lester's mind. "A real man," she told him, "would have done something." Finally, Lester gave in to temptation. He rang the phone and the man picked up on the very first ring. Over the phone, Lester asked every question he could. A hundred questions. "Who are you?" "How does it work?" "Why me?"

The nameless man had answered each question as evasively as he had in the diner that first night they met. He only gave a few details about the gun. The revolver had history. It was a nineteenth-century Civil War-era pistol, owned by a Confederate officer, that had claimed more lives than the military man could count. The gun had been used by many people before Lester, and it was the only one of its kind. When he felt like he had heard enough, Lester said, "All right. I want it. I want to use it."

And almost instantly, there was a knock at his apartment door. When Lester opened the door, the man was standing outside, holding the gun by the barrel. Lester took the cold handle into his hands, felt the weight of it. He stared at the weapon, transfixed now, like a jeweler looking at a precious gem.

The nameless man sensed that no more needed to be said, and started walking down the sidewalk. But he stopped, and called out to Lester one more time. "Oh, Lester?" the man said. "One more thing about the gun.

Before you use it, you need to know. It costs. Remember that.” And then the man walked down the sidewalk and out of Lester Keats’ life.



At two fifteen in the morning on a Tuesday, Lester Keats walked through the front door of Broadview Tavern with the intention of ending a man’s life.

The bar was a run-down establishment located in Center City specializing in three-dollar lagers and cheesesteak sandwiches. A man stood behind the bar—Cody Bennington, twenty-four—drying a pint glass with a white cloth. He was athletic, with a jarlike head and a stocky, muscular build from his days on the football team.

As soon as he stepped inside, Lester closed the front entrance door and turned the dead bolt. He adjusted the white dust mask that covered the lower half of his face. “We’re closed,” Cody Bennington announced, not taking his eyes off the glass. It wasn’t the first time a drunk had walked into the bar after hours.

There were three doors in the bar. One for the front entrance, one for the side entrance, and a door that led into the kitchen. Lester walked to the kitchen and pushed the swinging door open. He looked inside. No one was there. Good, he thought to himself.

“This your bar?” Lester asked, as he walked to the side entrance door. He grabbed the handle on the lock and turned it. The dead bolt slid into place with a click.

Cody lifted his gaze and looked at the man who’d entered his bar. He could see him only from behind. “No,” Cody said. “I just work here. And I said we’re closed now,” he replied, more assertive now.

Lester seemed to be oblivious; he walked around the bar like a patron at an art museum. Fascinated by the

decorations on the walls. He ran his fingers over the cheap vinyl upholstery. He looked up at the corners for any cameras. He spotted none. A smile crossed his face. He stood in front of Cody and removed his mask.

Cody Bennington's face drained of its color. He recognized Lester Keats instantly.

"Do you remember me?" Lester asked.

"Hey, man," Cody said, looking around. "What is this? What are you doing here?" Cody put the glass and cloth down on the counter.

Lester didn't say a word. Only took a single threatening step toward the bartender.

"N-n-now wait a minute!" Cody said, arrogance draining from his voice. "Don't come near me, you hear me—I'll call the police." Cody reached into his pocket and held up a cell phone, fumbling with the device. He froze when he heard the distinct click of a hammer cocking back. Cody looked up.

Lester Keats had the revolver pointed at Cody's face. Lester took another step. "I had a daughter. Her name was Abigail. And you took her from me."

Cody put the phone down and his hands up slowly. As he set the phone down, his eyes went to the 9mm handgun tucked beneath the cash register. He'd seen enough surveillance videos of robberies to know that he needed to protect himself. If he could just keep Lester talking, maybe he could distract him. "Let's just talk a second, all right?" Cody asked. "We don't need to do anything yet. I made a mistake," Cody went on. "I didn't know the girl would kill herself."

"You say her name, you piece of shit!" Lester snapped. He felt the tears already streaming down his face.

"Okay, okay, Abigail. I'm sorry, man." Cody watched Lester's eyes carefully. They were still locked on him. If he

went for the gun now, he'd be shot before he could get a single round off. Cody took a deep breath. "I was seventeen when that happened and I paid the price. I lost my scholarship. I did therapy. I'm a changed man now. I turned myself around, I swear."

Lester wiped the tears from his face with the sleeve of his shirt. "You expect me to have pity for you?"

"Please, I got a wife. I got kids."

For a moment, Lester felt a small pang of compassion. But he shook it away. "I had a wife, too," Lester replied. "But I lost her after what happened. She couldn't bear to look at me. I reminded her too much of our daughter. All because of you. You want to know where she lives? Eight forty-four Olive Street. In the house that I bought for the whole family. She still lives there, with a new man. You know, I still love her. Did you know that?" Lester raised the gun back up to the man's chest. "After I do this—who knows?—maybe she'll take me back. She's the only thing I have left."

"Your wife doesn't want you to do this," Cody countered. "Just put the gun down. And let's talk."

"I have to do this," Lester replied.

"I don't know you well," Cody said, "but I'm sure you still have people that love you. If you kill me, do you know what that will do to them?"

Lester lowered the gun a few inches, doubt flooding his mind. He blinked twice, then brought the revolver back up.

Cody lowered his hands just a little. He looked at the revolver in Lester's grip, then at the handgun near the register. Then he looked at the revolver again.

Cody continued. "Nothing you do to me will bring your daughter back. I'm so sorry, man. But this won't make you better. If you do this, you'll hurt yourself just as bad. You'll see. Like me. I wake up every day wishing I could take

things back, but I can't. I can't, and I'm so, so sorry."

Lester burst into tears at the thought, breaking down right in front of Cody's eyes. He sobbed uncontrollably. He closed his eyes to blink away the tears. He lowered the revolver to his side.

Then Cody leapt for the handgun, taking it up in his hands and aiming it directly at Lester Keats' chest. Lester saw the man diving for the register and coming up with his own handgun. Lester raised his revolver again, but it was too late.

Cody fired the first shot. It went high and missed Lester near the shoulder and hit the wall behind him. Lester fired next, clipping Cody in the right shoulder, and the younger man's shooting arm went dead. Lester adjusted his aim and put the next bullet directly in Cody Bennington's chest.



Lester Keats walked down the street, only moments away from reaching his destination of 844 Olive Street. It was a hot night and the air was thick, stifling almost. The faint smell of burnt wood was in the air and the sound of sirens echoed through the night.

Lester walked down Elkhart Street, passing a crowd of people gathered on the sidewalk. But he didn't notice them. He was busy in thought, practicing what he would tell his ex-wife. Knew that her new boyfriend, Patrick, would probably answer the door. He knew what he'd say to him, too. She'd think he was crazy, but Lester would explain everything—the man, the gun, the magic. And he'd tell her that at last he had made things right. Did right by their daughter. And they could be a family again.

And finally, he thought of the gun, sitting at the bottom of the Delaware River.

Lester could see his old street sign. Marching down the

sidewalk, he saw people standing on the stoops outside their doors. Some left their houses—wearing slippers and pajamas or shorts—and started walking down the sidewalk in the same direction. They turned right down Olive Street, which was aglow in flashing red lights.

Lester turned the corner onto his old street. That was when he saw the fire engine in the middle of the road. And saw his former house ablaze.

## **BIO**

Peter Kim is an emerging author writing in the thriller genre. He plans to write ten short stories before releasing his debut novel. He currently lives in Seoul.

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