

## Summerset

Jacob entered the building. The reception floor was vast, taking up far more space than was really needed for what little actually happened there. Large glass panes held together by an iron grid made up two walls, with another wall containing the reception desk, elevator, and stairs. The fourth and final wall held the supply closet, bathrooms, and water cooler. A carefully controlled forest filled up most of the room, with wide paths marking the way to anywhere of importance. The reception desk was a large blue semi circle with a light green counter.

Jacob walked up to the reception desk, where a male receptionist put on a fake smile. His teeth were perfectly white.

“Good afternoon sir, welcome to Eve Industries, how can I help you?” The receptionist's hair was a thick black mat, matching his suit. There was the beginning of a tattoo poorly hidden under his sleeve.

“Hello, I need to meet with Claire Lemoy,” Jacob said.

“Do you have an appointment?” The receptionist spoke with a high pitched voice, carefully pronouncing each syllable properly.

“No, but it is very important.”

“What is your name?”

“Jacob Summers.”

“One moment please.” The receptionist hit a button and picked up a phone on the desk. “Please, make yourself comfortable while you wait.”

Jacob found a nearby bench and sat down.

The receptionist began speaking in a hushed tone. The smile left his face. He put the phone down. He turned his head and looked Jacob in the eyes. The receptionist's hands went under the desk. When his hands came back up, they were holding a shotgun.

Jacob grabbed the top of the bench with both hands, brought his feet up to the seat, and back-flipped over the bench as the first shot sounded off. Jacob turned around and ran into the forest. He heard the gun reload. The man proceeded to spray the flora with shotgun pellets. However, the vegetation was thick enough that Jacob was hidden, and the shots had no focus. He crawled around the forest, moving towards the stairway door. The final loaded shell was unleashed, and the receptionist began to reload.

Jacob ran for the stairs. The receptionist now had a clear line of vision. Jacob grabbed the handle and yanked. It was locked.

“Over here,” the receptionist said, pulling a key from his pocket. “Looking for this?” He put the key back into his pocket and smiled. “Come and get it.”

Jacob charged the receptionist, who had managed to put three shells in the gun.

The receptionist took aim and fired.

Jacob ran up the wall and flipped over the receptionist's head as he fired again. He landed a few feet from the receptionist's back. The receptionist turned to fire, but it was too late. Jacob grabbed the gun, reversed it.

“Don't do this to me.”

“You did this to yourself.”

Jacob fired. The receptionist flew back, a large hole in his chest.

\* \* \*

Jacob Summers discovered to great dismay that the elevator was shut down. He took the stairs. The stairs ended on the second floor. He opened the door.

Before him was a large conference room with no furniture except a large obsidian table in the middle surrounded by roughly thirty black wooden chairs. The polished marble floor was wet. Several small yellow signs were propped near all the exits reading "Caution, Wet Floors." A janitor stared at him.

"Can I help you sir?" the janitor asked. He wore blue overalls with a white undershirt. His face needed shaving and in his hand was a mop. A radio and several keys hung out of his pockets.

"Yes. I need to get to the fifth floor. I have an appointment up there." Jacob played his lie with a straight face.

The janitor pointed at a door, "The stairs for the third floor are right there, and from them you can get to the fourth and fifth. Here, let me unlock the door for you."

Jacob gave a small smile. "Thank you."

"Marvin, you there?" The radio crackled to life. "You there, Marvin?"

The janitor picked up the radio, "I'm here."

"There's somebody coming your way. About six feet tall, short red hair, blue eyes, and wearing a vest. Kill him."

Marvin the janitor froze and looked Jacob in the eyes.

"Oh, come on," Jacob lamented.

Marvin dropped the radio and twisted the mop, causing its head to fall off. The janitor now wielded a Bo staff. He rushed towards Jacob. Jacob started running towards the janitor, but slipped on the wet floor and fell. Marvin jumped into the air and slammed the staff down where Jacob's head had been a half a second earlier. Marvin now stood over Jacob with his feet at both of Jacob's sides. Jacob grabbed the end of the staff and the janitor's right foot. His opposition kicked him in the head with his left foot. As he did this, Jacob pushed the Bo staff toward Marvin and Marvin's right foot outward. Marvin fell to Jacob's left side, head first.

Both men laid there for a moment recovering from their wounds. Marvin pulled his staff away from Jacob's grip and got up. He waited for Jacob to get up. The wall was a few feet behind Marvin, and Jacob was four feet farther in than the janitor, about ten feet from the massive table in the center.

"Surrender, it may spare your life. You are unarmed and not accustomed to moving on wet floors, and this situation can only end in your demise." Marvin spoke with a gentle voice, poorly articulated but understandable.

"I can't," was Jacob's only reply.

Marvin brought up his staff and thrust it towards Jacob's head. Jacob caught it in both hands and let the force of the blow push him across the wet floor. Having distanced himself from his opponent, Jacob turned and jumped onto the table. The surface was dry. Marvin jumped on the other side of the table. Jacob pulled one of the chairs up and put it between Marvin and himself. Marvin paused a moment. Jacob pulled up another chair and put it beside the other. There was still open space between Marvin and Jacob on the table, but not enough to walk through.

Marvin lunged with the staff, but Jacob knocked the blow away. The janitor paused. Jacob waited, keeping his face in a calm expression that showed neither excitement nor frustration. The attack came as a flurry of blows, but Jacob easily deflected and dodged until Marvin changed his tactic. He tried a leg sweep, and Jacob took his opportunity. The staff hit against the chair on their right. He jumped over the chairs and hit the janitor with a flying kick in

the face. Marvin shot backward, landing at the far end of the table. Jacob ran over as Marvin got up. He tried a right swing, but Jacob was too close. Jacob ducked and smashed his opponent's hands together. The staff's momentum sent it flying across the room. The janitor resorted to a few futile jabs, but Jacob broke Marvin's wrists as the fists came at him.

"You're a janitor, Marvin. Janitors don't fight assassins." With that, Jacob snapped his neck.

*"Will you take me from here?"*

*"Where do you want to go?"*

*"I... I don't know, but I can't do this anymore."*

*"This is all we know."*

*"I want to know more."*

Marvin's keys were all neatly labeled, and it didn't take long to find the keys that would take him through to the fifth floor. Jacob walked up the stairs to the third floor. Upon opening the door, he saw row upon row of cubicles. Standing in each cubicle was somebody, and those somebodies were looking back at Jacob. Jacob looked for the stairs to the fourth floor. They were on the other side of the room, behind all the workers who now came at him with sharp objects, ranging anywhere from a woman with a claymore to a short bald guy wielding dual staplers. He recognized some of them.

"Do we really have to?" Jacob inquired.

"Yes," came a familiar voice over the speaker system.

"So be it."

The office workers were nowhere near his level of expertise, but there were still a couple hundred of them. He grabbed the woman's claymore, impaled her with the huge sword, pulled it out and went to town. He had to keep constantly moving in order to avoid being overwhelmed. Inch by inch, though the amount of running equaled a couple of miles; he got closer and closer to the fourth floor. The man who gave him the most trouble was some guy in the back lobbing grenades at him. Grenade-lobber was doing his side more harm than good, but the amount of effort it took to dodge explosives exhausted Jacob. He made his way over to the man and casually lopped his head off as he continued his fight. He finally made his way to the door and got through it.

He prepared himself to let his opponents funnel through the door, but as soon as he left the room, they all just headed back to their cubicles to clean up the mess. Apparently she hadn't fixed the defense clause in their job description yet.

*"I love you,"*

*"We've established that, I also love you. Why do you look distressed?"*

*"I'm leaving."*

*"Are you sure?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Where will you go?"*

*"It is not about a destination. I cannot stay."*

*"Don't walk out on me."*

*"But then I'll never leave."*

Jacob rested a few minutes before continuing to the fourth floor, keeping the claymore. The fourth floor did not look like a building at all, but a garden. The lights overhead imitated the sun, allowing a plethora of flowers to grow. But, unlike the forest on the first floor, these were allowed to grow wild, and had partially taken over the path. A gazebo made of thousands of jewels held together with gold stood in the middle of the garden with two opposite paths leading

up to it. Jacob stood at the end of one path, while another led to the only other door on the level and the elevator. In the gazebo stood a single man with two basket hilted broadswords in sheathes. Jacob walked up to the gazebo.

"I brought a second sword in case you were not armed, but that does not seem to be a problem. I've always wanted to have a true test of the two sword fighting style. I suppose this is as good a chance as any." The man was perhaps forty, his hair slicked back. He had a goatee that had been chiseled into a fine point. He wore a black shirt with gray pants.

"Hello, Darin, it has been a long time." Jacob had known who it was the instant he had stepped into the room. Darin would always stand right before Claire.

"You seem tired. Perhaps you should rest a moment. I have all day and would enjoy a short talk before the business gets ugly." Darin observed Jacob as he spoke. "I wish I could have fought you before all you have gone through today. Claire has no interest in me dying, so I had to wait until you were worn out."

"How is she?" Jacob took rest against the side of the gazebo.

"Depressed. Your leaving did take a toll on her." Darin's voice was hard.

"You should have left too."

Darin thought a moment. "I could have. But I didn't, and so here we are. Are you ready?"

Jacob stood up straight. "Do we have to?"

"Do I need to answer that?"

Darin walked to one end of the gazebo and Jacob walked to the other. Darin drew his swords. The two friends bowed deeply. Jacob brought his claymore up, and as they stepped toward each other, the fight began.

The fight was well matched. Jacob's claymore was slow, and he took a defensive stance. Darin brought his force to bear with each blow, a continuous string of swings he only interrupted occasionally to protect himself from the massive claymore. Jacob slowly moved backwards, letting Darin continue to push him back. The fight left the gazebo and went off the path and into the flowers. Jacob saw what he was waiting on. Sweat poured from Darin as he continued his assault. Jacob remained defensive, trying to conserve energy. Darin's attack faltered and Jacob took the opportunity to strike. He smacked the flat side of his claymore against Darin's head, overpowering the single sword Darin managed to raise in his defense. Darin spun and fell, unconscious among his flowers.

*"Do you see those flowers atop that cliff?"*

*"Yes."*

*"I'm going to pick one for you, everyday."*

*"That's sweet, but you know I hate flowers."*

*"It isn't because I love you. I will pick them so you remember that this world still has beauty. You just have to take initiative."*

*"Where will you put all those flowers?"*

*"I'll figure it out, but that isn't the point. I love you. I don't love the things we do, but I love you. Please, come with me. Let's make a new life. Darin can run the business just fine."*

*"But where will we go?"*

Jacob Summer left the claymore with Darin in the bed of flowers and continued to the fifth floor. As the door opened, he saw a plain hallway with a water cooler and three doors. The doors were marked Darin Finley, Claire Lemoy, and Jacob Summers. On his way to Claire's office, he stopped by the door with his name on it. He opened the door. There was his old office, exactly as he had left it, although it looked as if someone had recently dusted. He went in and

checked his desk drawers. Inside the first drawer was a .32 caliber pistol. Inscribed on the side was "TO MY BELOVED." He pocketed it and left the room.

His heart began to beat wildly in his chest as he came closer to the door. When he touched the handle, the frenzied beating stopped briefly. He opened the door. The room was a wreck. Papers had been scattered everywhere, the table was overturned, and tea had spilled on the gray carpet. The only thing left standing was the desk, which had a note scribbled in large letters. "The roof." Jacob walked back out into the hallway and found the final flight of stairs.

As he opened the door, he found his final target. The roof was plain concrete with a large satellite dish and the door from which he had come. Near the far edge was Claire, watching the sun set.

"It is quite beautiful." Her voice had a rich, indulgent way of speaking about it. It intoxicated him.

"Did I really have to kill all those people to get to you?" Jacob inquired, but knew the answer.

"I didn't really need to wear you out, true. I've always been your better. I did want to test your commitment and your commitment has shown," she said, turning to look at him. She wore a large black military jacket that went down to her ankles, where her black military boots clothed the final stretch of skin. Her brunette hair should have been graceful with wind, but instead sat limp. Her eyes were puffy, and old tears lingered on her cheeks. Had it been a better day, she would have been beautiful. Her green eyes mixed anger with pain.

"Did you find what you were looking for?" she said.

"Well enough. I found a life style without guilt and that was good enough." Jacob bit his lip.

"Why are you here then?" her words bit with a coldness Jacob had not known in a long time.

"I realized that guilt would follow me as long as you still walked." He said as his heart skipped a beat. *It finally ends.*

"I loved you."

His eyes ran with tears, but he stood his ground. She grabbed a gun from her holster. He took his from his pocket. They drew and fired. They fired until their clips were empty. Claire fell over. Jacob limped to her. Two shots had hit him. The rest either hit his Kevlar vest or missed. He took her body in his arms and held her tight. Claire did not speak, only looked at him.

"I love you."

Jacob held her until she died.

*"How long have you been in the business?"*

*"Four years."*

*"Impressive. Most die within a few jobs."*

*"I am the best."*

*"Oh really? How about this. We both take the same job, same time. I win, and we go on a date."*

*"If I win, you invest in my Eve project?"*

*"Eve? What is that?"*

*"Win the date and I'll tell you."*

*"Deal."*

Bio: Andrew McDonald is a college student with a variety of creative interests, including writing stories of loss.