



# Playing Games

By

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He'd been in a lot of rooms like this before, and this one was no different than any of the others. The walls had that dingy yellow color that could only be attributed to the thousands, or perhaps millions, of cigarettes that had been smoked in here before. The door was solid steel, no little window for anyone to look through. The table was about six by three, solid steel.

The chairs were the uncomfortable kind, almost certainly manufactured to make people want to get out of them as soon as they sat down. And of course there was the one way glass on one side of the room, where "big brother" could listen to what was said and see every expression on the face of the person being interrogated. Jase Riza had been in a lot of these rooms in his 52 years, and every time it had been for a good reason, but not this time. This time he was innocent, and by God he wasn't going to admit to anything, no matter how hard they leaned on him.

The twenty-four years of total prison time he had served in his life had been enough for him, and for the last two years since he'd gotten out, he had been living straight for the first time in his miserable life. He'd been sent up for armed robbery

three times, and the last stint he'd spent in prison was enough for him. And now they were trying to pin a murder on him. How quaint he thought.

The solid steel door opened, and a well-dressed man wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses walked in. His face was expressionless, his hair was slicked back, and his suit was extremely well kept, no wrinkles at all. He had in his hand what Jase could only guess was his file, which contained everything Jase had ever done that had landed him in police custody. "Mr. Well Dressed Guy" shut the door, and then stood there and stared at Jase. Jase couldn't see "Mr. Well Dressed Guy's" eyes, but he could sense something bad emanating from them.

Finally, he walked to the chair opposite Jase, and sat down. The file he had in his hand was placed on the table in front of him, and "Mr. Well Dressed Guy" slowly unwound the string that was holding the file closed. Jase chose to break the silence first.

"So, are we gonna sit here forever while you flip through my file, or are we gonna get this over with?"

The man looked up from the file, and took his sunglasses off to reveal the most chilling pair of eyes Jase had ever seen. The look coming from those eyes was one that said, "I will kill you if you so much as look at me in a way that pisses me off." He folded the sunglasses up and slipped them into the front pocket of his coat.

"I'm Detective Thompson, and I'll be handling this case today. I'm done flipping through your file, so yes, we can get this over with." Thompson cracked a smile. This made Jase feel as though he was enjoying his job, and maybe actually looked forward to coming to work every day and busting scumbags like him.

"I'm not going to lie to you Mr. Riza," Thompson continued, "you're in a lot of trouble this time. It seems you've graduated from armed robbery and decided to go all the way to murder. I'd like to know why, if you don't mind."

"I didn't kill that lady. I've never seen her before in my life. All I know is, I got picked up when I was walking home from the gas station on the corner. The cops who picked me up said I killed a lady named Carol Dyson. It was news to me."

Thompson didn't look satisfied. "Mr. Riza, I'm not here to play games. All I want is for you to own up to what you did. I'm looking for one answer from you. If you sit here and deny everything, we're both going to be here a very long time. I know you killed this woman. We've got two witnesses who claim that a man matching your description attempted to rob the station, and in the course of that robbery shot and killed Mrs. Dyson. If you'll just confess to what we both know you did, you may get a life sentence instead of the death penalty. I can have a talk with the D.A. and arrange that for you. What do you say to that, Mr. Riza?"

Jase was not intimidated. Every interrogator he'd ever dealt with was an asshole, and this guy was playing the part like a pro.

“Well, Mr. Thompson, I got all the time in the world. You got no evidence to convict me of anything. Yeah, I was at the station, but all I did was buy some cigs, and---“

Thompson slammed his hand down on the table...hard. It was so sudden and so loud that Jase let a small cry escape his mouth.

“Mr. Riza, I told you I’m not here to play games, but it seems you *insist* on playing games. So I’ve got one for you. It’s called Russian Roulette.”

Jase thought he was kidding until the bastard produced a .38 revolver from his ankle holster and began removing all the bullets except one. He put the bullets in his right coat pocket. Thompson gave the cylinder a good spin and snapped it shut, just like in the movies. Except this wasn’t a damn movie.

“Detective Thompson, I don’t think---,” Jase began, but Thompson already had the gun to his own head and pulled the trigger. A dry ‘click’ sound followed no shot. Thank God. Jase had an idea this guy had some serious mental problems.

Thompson gave the cylinder a spin again and placed the gun in front of Jase. “It’s your turn now. You wanted to play games, you got your wish,” said Thompson.

“If you think I’m gonna put that gun to my head and pull the trigger, you’re crazy!” said Jase.

“Maybe I’m crazy, maybe I’m not. It really doesn’t matter, Mr. Riza. What matters is that you are going to put that gun to your head and pull the trigger. You’ll do it, because if you don’t, I’ll just blow your head off anyway.” With that said, Thompson pulled what looked like a .45 caliber semi-automatic pistol from his shoulder holster.

“Play the game, or I finish it right now,” said Thompson.

Jase slowly reached for the gun, trying to think of something he could do to get out of the mess he was in. It was obvious Thompson was mental, and probably wanted to kill him anyway. It was even more obvious that no one was behind the one way glass. If someone had been behind there, they’d have stopped this thing as soon as Thompson pulled his gun. If he screamed, it was a sure thing he’d be shot. Yes, something was wrong here, and if somebody didn’t do something quick, things were going to get messy. He thought to himself *You’re all by yourself, old buddy. Just you and Mr. Happy Crappy.*

The gun was in Jase’s hands now, and the cold grip sent a chill up his spine. He thought of turning the gun on Thompson and taking a chance that the bullet was in the right chamber, but he thought better of it. If he wasn’t quick enough Thompson would just shoot him where he sat. Plus, there was a very low chance, one in six that the bullet would be in the right place. He put the gun to his head, said a prayer to the God he never paid attention to, and pulled the trigger. The dry ‘click’ sound again and he had a thought in the back of his mind *Oh, can you say thankya Gawd, can I get praise Jeezus!*

Thompson smiled and grabbed the gun from Jase. With the cylinder spun again, he put the gun to his own head again, and pulled the trigger. He lucked out again, but he was frowning. "This could take forever," he said. "I think we need to make this more challenging." He then reached into his coat pocket and retrieved two more bullets. Jase could see that he was putting the bullets in every other chamber. Not good.

"Here ya go, Riza. Your turn," said Thompson. Jase had to think of something, and quick. The game just got a lot scarier.

"I don't think it's fair that I have to be the first one to try it with three bullets. I think---"

"I don't care what you think, Riza. You can either play the game, or I can win by forfeit, and I guess you know what that means." Jase didn't want to play anymore; he didn't want to play to begin with. He'd been lucky the first time, but the second time was likely to either kill him, or make him a vegetable. Maybe if he confessed it would end the game. It couldn't hurt to try. The confession obviously wasn't going to be witnessed by anyone, and so wouldn't be admissible in court. That much he knew.

"Mr. Thompson, I'd like to confess now. I really don't want to play games with you. I know how valuable your time is and you just want to do your job." Oh, he was sucking up the best he could now. "I really did kill that woman, and I deserve what the courts give me for the crime."

"That's lovely Mr. Riza, but I still want to play the game. I think it's quite amusing. Now take the gun and have your turn."

Jase took it reluctantly. He put it to his head and held it there for a moment. Thompson looked at him intensely. Jase's bladder let go and warm urine ran down his right leg. Thompson heard it running on the floor and smiled. Jase pulled the trigger and was still alive. The smile on Thompson's face faded to an angry sneer.

"You're pretty lucky, Riza," he said. "You're probably thinking I'll be the one to run out of luck first, but I've got a surprise for you. Since I'm the one in charge here, I get to change the rules whenever the hell I want to." Thompson opened the cylinder and took out the two bullets he had loaded into the gun earlier. He spun the cylinder, snapped it shut, and put the gun to his head again.

"Why are you even doing this?" Jase asked him. "You're still risking your life, even with one bullet. What makes you so sure you won't kill yourself the next time you pull that trigger?" Thompson lowered the gun and looked solemnly at Jase.

"Like I said, it doesn't matter. Whether you die or I die, it doesn't matter to me," said Thompson. Jase could see Thompson's face change as he said these words. He had gone from insane to somber in five seconds flat.

Thompson put the gun back to his head and pulled the trigger. This time, there wasn't a dry 'click'. This time, the gun went off and blew the opposite side of Thompson's head wide open. Blood sprayed onto the table in front of Jase. All he

could do was look at it, terrified. No words, no screams could escape his mouth. It was as if the world had suddenly run out of air and Jase felt suffocated.

The hand Thompson used to fire the gun, his right hand, flopped down and the gun hit the floor with a dull thunk. Thompson's eyes were filled with shock, or perhaps it wasn't shock. It could have been just a generic look people get when they shoot themselves in the head. Jase didn't really know. What Jase did know was that Thompson wasn't dead. He wasn't falling to the floor or slumping over the table like most head shot victims would. His left hand still held the other pistol, the one with a full clip, and that hand was slowly sliding the gun toward Jase. He couldn't pick it up, but he could slide it just fine, it seemed. Jase, frozen to his chair, frozen in time, could only watch.

He could hear voices outside the door screaming, "Shot fired! Shot fired! Check your weapons, check your prisoners! Where'd it come from?"

Blood was gushing from the massive wound on Thompson's head. *My brain is working, Jase thought, but I can't move. All I have to do is move. He isn't in the best shape now and he Can't catch me if I run. He can't even follow me with the gun very well. Just move, damnit. Move. Move. MOVE!*

Jase moved. He did the only thing that came to mind, he toppled his chair and himself onto one side, and found himself on the floor. As he fell, Thompson managed to squeeze off a shot. It hit the stone wall behind Jase and bits of the wall sprayed to the floor. *That could have been me, Jase thought.*

Before another shot was fired, a street cop and several plainclothes detectives burst through the door.

"FREEZE!" one of the detectives screamed. As they digested the scene before them, another detective blurted, "Christ, its Dyson! What the hell is he even doing here?" This one stepped forward and grabbed the gun away from Thompson, who was still sitting in his chair bleeding all over himself. The street cop yelled for someone to call an ambulance, but Jase was pretty sure it would end up hauling a dead body to the morgue.

Suddenly, things began making sense to Jase. Thompson was really Dyson, as in possibly the husband of one Carol Dyson. He was finally able to speak. "This guy almost killed me! He had me playing Russian Roulette with him! What the hell kind of police station are you guys running here, anyway?"

"We're terribly sorry Mr. Riza. I'm Detective Matson, and I want you to know this situation is now under control."

"That's nice to hear, Detective," Jase replied, as the two other detectives picked him up off the floor. "Could you fill me in on why the hell this guy tried to kill me? You called him Dyson, but he identified himself as Thompson when he came in here."

Matson began to explain, but two paramedics arrived and cut him short. Thompson/Dyson was pronounced dead at the scene. Matson began again,

“Apparently, Dyson suffered a breakdown this morning when his wife was shot and killed at the robbery you’re a suspect in. He wasn’t even supposed to be here; he was on bereavement leave. The detective assigned to your case was actually Detective Juarez, but we found him in a supply closet a few minutes ago. Dyson had knocked him silly with the butt of his gun. But as I said before, we’re terribly sorry about what happened. Now Mr. Riza, we still have the issue of your involvement in this morning’s robbery to discuss.”