

A THOUSAND DEATHS

By K.S. Anthony



INT. 21 CLUB NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The barroom is full with the after-work crowd seated at the small tables that dot the restaurant's dim interior. Flames glow in fireplace just off to the side of the bar where TOM GOODWIN and KARL SANDERS have just sat down. Both men are lean and tall in stark contrast to the worn-out anemic bankers, lawyers, and other pampered urbanites in various stages of inebriation, seduction, or other avenues leading to tomorrow's shame and embarrassment.

TOM GOODWIN is 45, a short-selling hedge fund legend known and feared for destroying entire companies with a nearly supernatural ability to detect accounting errors, mismanagement, and other weaknesses. He is a psychopathic contrarian investor instinctively skeptical of whatever his colleagues esteem: socially, economically and otherwise. He is a shark: sleepless, tireless, and predatory. When he shorts a company, his aim to destroy it entirely.

KARL SANDERS is 35, a haunted-looking man who made his money funding companies without any regard to anything but profit. His face is cold: he has long stopped caring about success or competition: his mind is elsewhere tonight.

A WAITER in black tie approaches the men with their order, and sets down two drinks after a silver tiered dish of nuts and pretzels and bar napkins.

WAITER

Two Sapphire martinis, dry, no olives.

The waiter departs. TOM lights a cigar, indifferent to the patrons around him who get up and, waving away the smoke, leave. He does as he pleases. He exhales, exulting in the petty display of power.

TOM raises his glass.

TOM

Well. Here's to crime.

TOM smiles thinly, waiting for KARL to return the gesture. KARL slowly raises his glass, staring at TOM. We see the reflection of the FIREPLACE glittering in the crystalline condensation of the glasses.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - NIGHT

BRIGHT LIGHTS OF ONCOMING TRAFFIC.

DRIVERS POV: We see a WOMAN's neatly manicured hands gripping a steering wheel. She wears a wedding and engagement ring on her left hand. Through the windshield we see she is speeding erratically down a dark country road, highbeams blazing. An empty vodka bottle rattles on the dashboard.

We get a glimpse of her in the rear-view mirror. She is beautiful, 30s, her eyes bloodshot from too much liquor and too many tears.

CUT TO:

INT. 21 CLUB NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The glasses CLINK...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BMW - NIGHT

The windshield SHATTERS as the BMW slams into a tree, the woman's head smashing into the glass, killing her instantly, the front of the vehicle in flames. The violence of the sequence should be approximately one second.

CUT TO:

INT. 21 CLUB NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The flames from the car crash scene fade into the fireplace as KARL fiddles with his wedding ring.

KARL

Mm. Indeed.

The men drink, TOM swallowing half his martini before setting the glass down and KARL taking a sip, keeping his eyes on TOM as he does.

TOM

Thought you quit.

KARL

Thought you did too. CNBC.

TOM

(scoffs) Don't believe everything you see on television.

KARL

Don't believe everything you read  
in the Post.

TOM

Wasn't the Post. It was the  
Journal. Maybe The Times.

KARL

Had no idea you were so cultured.

TOM bristles at the backhanded insult, smiling and exhaling a cloud of smoke at KARL, who takes another pull of his drink, staring at TOM, unblinking. He shifts gears, changing the subject, hoping to rattle KARL.

TOM

It's been what, a year?

KARL puts his drink down and stares right through him.

KARL

You know it's been *exactly* a year.

TOM

You always were too sentimental for  
your own good. Morbid anniversaries  
aside, to what do I owe the  
pleasure of your company, Karl?

KARL

Who wouldn't want to bask in the  
presence of a short-selling shark  
like Tom Goodwin?

TOM

How about you just cut the  
bullshit? We both know my father  
and Liz were cooking the books.  
What happened wasn't --

KARL

Your fault?

TOM

Goddamn right it wasn't my fault!

TOM, realizing he's lost his composure, leans back in his chair, taking a long draw from his cigar as KARL takes another sip of his drink and smiles coldly.

TOM (CONT'D)

Don't look so self-righteous. Guys like you prop up bullshit companies like my father's and guys like me short them into the fucking ground when you don't dot your I's and cross your T's. Fucking spare me.

KARL

That right? Even when it's family?

TOM

Yeah, that's right. Even when it's family.

KARL continues to stare at TOM, his face betraying nothing but a slight hint of amusement, maybe irony, at his enemy's sudden emotion.

TOM (CONT'D)

You want a fucking apology? I'm sorry you married into a family of criminals, but don't pretend I didn't fucking warn you. Take up the rest with the SEC.

KARL shows no emotion as he stares at his the man who destroyed his world. He simply sits, legs crossed, examining TOM for some hint of remorse.

TOM (CONT'D)

He would've done a year - at most - at Club Fed. Liz would've walked if she had cooperated, if she hadn't...

KARL

You've had blood on your hands before, Tom.

TOM

He had a *heart attack*, for Chrissakes!

The lights flicker. TOM flinches as they sputter, closing his eyes hard. KARL is unfazed.

KARL

And Liz?

TOM

People make choices, Karl! I made mine. She made hers. She was always unstable.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

You were just too much of a coward to admit it. You might want to think about whose blood is on whose hands.

KARL

Your hands, Tom. Her blood is on your hands. That's what you're too much of a coward to admit.

The lights flicker again. KARL suddenly closes his eyes in pain, shaking his head to clear it, taking a long draw from his cigar.

TOM

Wait... what? What did you say?

KARL stares calmly at his enemy.

KARL

Tell me, it is any different when the blood belongs to your father and sister? Betting against the market is one thing, but orchestrating the destruction of your own family?

TOM pulls the cigar from his mouth, his hands and voice trembling.

TOM

Hold on. You don't know the first goddamn thing about my family, Karl, don't you dare lect--

KARL smiles and shakes his head slowly with mock admiration.

KARL

Now *that*, Tom, *that* is the mark of a true contrarian.

TOM

And how about you, you fucking chickenshit? How about your role...

KARL

I think CNBC said you made \$11 million on that short.

TOM

You of all people have no fucking right...

KARL

I'm guessing it was less. "Don't believe everything you see on television," right?

TOM leans forward, his eyes accusatory slits as he jabs the air with his cigar.

TOM

You could've stopped it, you fucking coward. I told you I was coming for them. I told you what it would cost for me to look away. So what did you do? Nothing. You. Did. Nothing.

KARL

You're right. I did nothing. I hoped that it - that you - would just go away, that there was no way someone would intentionally destroy his own family.

TOM leans back, finishing his martini. The smug look has returned to his face.

TOM

I told you when you proposed to Liz. Clinging to anything breeds cowardice, Karl: the inability to face the world and see things as they really are.

KARL

I'm glad you understand that.

KARL smiles and leans forward. The room darkens. The fire has suddenly been reduced to embers.

KARL (CONT'D)

Do you know where you are, Tom?

TOM

What?

KARL

(slowly) Do you know where you are?

TOM

What the fuck are you asking me? We're at the 21 Club, you fucking idiot.

KARL

No. The 21 Club closed down, Tom.  
After a shooting. Bad stuff. All  
over the papers. Even the Journal.

TOM stands up, not noticing that the chairs and furniture are covered in dusty sheets, the fireplace cold and dormant, the glasses missing.

TOM

Are you having some kind of  
episode? Jesus Christ you and Liz  
were perfect for...

KARL

Look around.

TOM looks around, the emptiness of the space leaving him stunned, silent, choked with fear. He runs to the locked door, pulling on it, staring at the passers-by on the lit streets outside, who neither see nor hear him. He turns back to where he and KARL were sitting. There's no one there. He turns again

JUMP SCARE

KARL is standing next to him.

TOM is sick with horror and fear, backing away from KARL

TOM

You fucking drugged me... what...  
you... what did you...

KARL

You said it yourself. Morbid  
anniversary.

TOM

I need a doctor. I'm going to sue  
you into the fucking --

KARL

What, the ground? We're already in  
the ground, Tom. Don't you  
remember?

TOM

Remember what? What the fuck did  
you do to me?

KARL

Take a look.

KARL gestures to the table that they were sitting at. We see the two men sitting just as they were earlier, wearing exactly the same thing, the barroom suddenly alive with people and light.

PAST TOM

She was always unstable. You were just too much of a coward to admit it.

PAST KARL

Your hands, Tom. Her blood is on your hands. That's what you're too much of a coward to admit. You know what they say about cowards, Tom?

PAST TOM

No. How about you tell me?

PAST KARL

They die a thousand deaths.

PAST KARL stands up, pulling a .38 REVOLVER from his jacket pocket. He puts the muzzle to PAST TOM's head and shoots him as people SCREAM and run for cover. He then calmly puts the gun into his mouth and pulls the trigger.

BOOM

The darkness returns and KARL and TOM stand in the silence.

KARL

A thousand deaths, Tom.

TOM

This isn't real. (Screaming) THIS ISN'T REAL! THIS IS A DREAM THIS IS A DREAM THIS IS A DREAM THIS IS A DREAM...

TOM keeps screaming, his eyes shut as the darkness swallows him.

CUT TO:

INT. 21 CLUB NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The barroom is full with the after-work crowd seated at the small tables that dot the restaurant's dark interior. Flames glow in one of the fireplaces just off to the side of the bar where TOM GOODWIN and KARL SANDERS are in the middle of a heated conversation.

TOM opens his eyes, in obvious pain. Something tells him that something isn't quite right.

TOM

People... make choices, Karl. I made mine. She made hers. She was always unstable. You were just too much of a coward to admit it. You might want to think about whose blood is on whose hands...

TOM closes his eyes again. The lights flicker.

TOM (CONT'D)

Something's not right. Wait, wait, wait, there's something...

KARL

Your hands, Tom. Her blood is on your hands. That's what you're too much of a coward to admit. You know what they say about cowards, Tom?

TOM

Wait... wait, Karl, hang on...

KARL stands up.

KARL

A thousand deaths, Tom.

CUT TO BLACK.