Gregory A. Julian moved into the mansion on 481 Cayuga Dr. Soon, angry letters from the bank began to pour into his mail slot, threatening foreclosure unless he began to pay off his sizable loan. Three months later, the requisite amount of time had passed and an eviction notice was printed by my boss. And that’s the asshole that sent me, late Friday evening, just before I left for the weekend, to deliver the letter in person to the absent Mr. Julian. I ground my teeth as I wound my way through the suburbs looking for Cayuga Drive. Somehow, this man I had never knew or met had unwittingly conspired with my boss to ruin my evening plans.

481 stood at the end of the block, its windows dark, its flanks shaded by oaks twisting into the reddening sky. I parked the car next to a dusty BMW and walked up the short stone path to his (now the bank’s) front door. It seemed odd that the expensive car would be sitting unprotected outside of his spacious garage, an even layer of pollen coating the outside and a stack of moving boxes piled within. Also, it was bizarre that the heavy front door stood halfway open, a mountain of letters and bills spilling out the doorway and onto the walk. I rapped the brass knocker against the door, “Mr. Gregory Julian?” I called inside, “I’m from the bank; I have some important papers to give to you.” No reply.

I ventured a little further into the hallway and repeated myself louder. Still no reply. But squinting, I saw the soft glow of a light spilling down a staircase at the end of the hallway. A glance at the hour hand on my watch was all it took to send me inside the house in search of my quarry.

The antique mansion was completely paneled in oak and a thick red carpet covered the floor. Mr. Julian was apparently trying to remodel, as several feet of the wall had been pulled off and large patches of carpet had been torn up. His method of removal was in poor taste considering the age of the place; many of the holes appeared to have been simply smashed through, as though with a sledgehammer. Or maybe he was just trying to wreck the house before the bank could get its hands on it.

Continuing down the hall and reaching the top of the stairs I realized that the light was coming from a room on the other side of the second story landing. I picked my way around cardboard boxes piled along the floor, wondering what kind of man buys a mansion, neglects to pay his debt, and never bothers to unpack. The door stood slightly ajar, light shooting out around the edges.

Through the gap I glimpsed bookshelves and sofas; it appeared to be a small study. I knocked on the door, “Mr. Julian, I apologize for the intrusion, but I have papers that I need to hand you in person.” No reply.

I grabbed the doorknob and strode in.

The desiccated corpse of Mr. Julian lay flat on the carpet.

In one hand he clasped a pen; on the wrist of the other ran a jagged gash. I gagged – it didn’t take a doctor to determine that he had been dead for weeks. Well, that explained why his bills went unpaid.

A harsh lamp gleamed from the corner, coloring the room in sharp contrasts. A thin object, sitting on a desk in front of the late Mr. Julian, glimmered in the light. Curiosity got the best of me and I carefully skirted around the body, a dried pool of blood crunching into the carpet underneath.

A dagger lay on the table surrounded by a spatter of thick droplets. Its edge was encrusted in a thin red film; having been plunged into the flesh of its owner. Next to it sat a torn piece of paper with a scribble of black ink scrawled across. I grabbed it and held it up to the lamp, squinting to make out the barely legible writing;

“Dear Kate and Daniel and everybody else, There is no escape. This is the only way out. I’m so sorry. Destroy the house.

Greg J.”

A chill shot down my spine. With a shock it hit me that I was standing in a pool of blood next to a corpse in a dark house at night. I raced out of the room and down the stairs with a cold sweat breaking out on my face. I ran towards the front door, a wind blowing into the house and down the hall, whipping letters through the air, slamming the door shut. I grab the doorknob and pull. A bolt crunches against its lock. Confused, I run my hands across the handle searching for the latch.

There’s no latch – there’s not even a keyhole.

As my heart pounds, an image flashes across my scattered mind: the back door.

I sprint down the hallway, opening doors and racing through dark rooms, working my way across the house. Finally, I stumble across a moonlit alcove, where the light streams from a tiny window set into a metal door. I grab the immense handle, but again the door is bolted shut; no way to unlock it. I pound my fists against its heavy steel, but the frame doesn’t even budge. Stepping back, I realize that it resembles a bank vault; thick metal panels secured by hinges thicker than my hand, the safety glass inches thick, repelling all of my efforts to crack it.

A small piece of paper is taped onto it. I tear it off and hold it up to the window. Scratched in pencil it reads;

“There is no escape”

Something falls against the window, blotting out the light.

My feet fly back down through the house, back to the front door. The doors I had opened have all closed; I bash my way through them, their bolts bursting from the rotten walls as I charge towards the exit, lowering my shoulder, gritting my teeth.

As I round the last turn at top speed, the front door comes into view. Thick boards, pounded haphazardly into the wall, stretch across the doorway. Nails and broken glass embedded into the wood, the jagged tips jutting into the air. Barbed wire, strung like a net across the entrance, bits of flesh hanging off the rusty points.

Words burnt deep into the wood,

“There is no escape”

…shit…

I can’t stop myself fast enough; the barbed wire pierces into my guts and slashes across my face, but it also saves me, knocking me backwards onto the floor before I impale myself on the door. In pain, bleeding, I stumble away from the entrance, knocking my way through another door and stumbling into the dark. Suddenly, a step; the floor disappears and I fly head first onto hard ground, fireworks bursting before my eyes.

As the pain begins to fade I grope in the darkness for the walls. A chain falls into my hand. Instinctively, I pull it, and the garage lights up. I turn around just as the door behind me slams shut again. Whatever has me trapped in this house is closing in.

But next to the shut door a wire trails down the wall, ending in a familiar button. I slap the garage door switch.

It opens slowly, the wooden planks clanking upwards to reveal not the driveway but a dark onyx barrier - a wall of solid obsidian, glinting with malevolence. Etched into its surface that same awful epitaph;

“There is no escape”

My hope drains out of me like the red stain across my chest. I stagger backwards, collapsing across the tool shelves. Trapped…

Trapped. There is no escape. I realize I’m doomed; forever trapped inside the house until I grab the knife upstairs and plunge it into my veins. I slide down the wall, pulling the shelves down with me until I lie in a heap, surrounded by rusted tools.

As visions of suicide drift past my eyes, something cuts across the back of my hand. My imprisoned mind is captivated by the sight of what lies next to me.

It sits on the ground shiny and oiled, short blades glinting maliciously. A chainsaw. A goddamn chainsaw. Despite myself, I can’t stop laughing at the thought of revving it up and plunging it into my stomach, a red spray painting the walls of this fucking house, bone and guts grinding into a paste that splatters into the carpet. Crying with mirth I imagine the poor soul who’ll wander across my body weeks from now, recoiling in horror before making a futile dash for the closing door.

The door.

A new thought bubbles into consciousness, slowly pushing away my morbid thoughts.

The door.

My ears begin to pulse, my face feels hot. A new sensation wells up deep within me - the primal fury of a cornered animal. A fountain of energy flows through my veins and I stand up, rage slowly throbbing above the hopelessness. I grab the chainsaw with both hands. Flipping the choke, I rip the starting cord. put. put. VROOOOOWWMMMMM. The engine kicks into life and I swing it off the ground, revving the chains into a deafening harmony.

A grimace, a grin, almost, spreads across my face.

Back at the door. . The barbed wire hums with malice, but my fear is long gone. I swing the chainsaw high over my head, bringing it growling down onto the metal wires. With a shriek they split under the churning blades, snapping and twisting through the air like serpents. Ignoring the slashing wires I press forward, dicing the steel web into bits, the ends retreating before my crushing blows. I reach the door and with seething bloodlust plunge the chainsaw deep into the gap in the frame. I wrench downwards, the saw howling as it tears the wood apart, spitting shrapnel across the hallway. I hit the first hinge and gun the engine. A river of sparks flows from the disintegrating metal, landing on the broken planks of wood and catching them on fire. The chainsaw claws the frame to pieces as I press it downwards, another flurry of cinders spraying from the second hinge.

As fire crawls across the door and eats at the walls I wrench the saw out. With a roar I stab the deadbolt, smoke and flames spitting from the tip of the chainsaw. A shrieking cry shakes the mansion as the bolt shears. I plant my foot into the middle of the door and kick it out into the night, a shower of embers trailing behind it.

Wreathed in smoke I stumble out of the house. I drive home first. I need to see it, someplace familiar and safe, before being hauled off to the emergency room or the police station. Back in my living room, I pick up the phone and call the cops and the fire department, telling them to rush over to 481 Cayuga Drive. Then, looking in the bathroom mirror at my shredded face, I call an ambulance.

I stand over the sink, running water over the gouges and burns along my arms; the sweat and blood mixing with shredded fibers of wood that run down the drain. Grabbing some bandages, I patch myself up good enough to stop my bleeding to death. Closing my eyes I sit on the bathroom counter and rest my head in my hands. A gentle trickle of blood flows down my scalp. Blinking, I grab a towel off the rack and wipe the blood out. I open my eyes. And freeze. Beneath where the towel had hung, written in dripping, scarlet letters:

“There is no escape”

The door slams shut.