

# **The Harp of Heaven**

**By Nicholas Stillman**

A sample chapter

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Angelo wished for his cellphone to ring so he wouldn't have to break in. But it lied silent on the passenger seat, leaving him no choice but to look out the van window again. In the yard of the target house, the preteen babysitter still played with the toddler. She had a whole playground set for distracting the child who usually wanted to try everything. The rich parents had taken their other two kids somewhere in the SUV, as they did every weekday morning at nine. That left two solid hours to sneak in without worrying about burglar alarms.

But if an alarm did sound, Angelo's van sat parked across the street a short sprint away from the front door. And the black gym bag, empty for now, would not slow the retreat. It rested on his lap, its strap slung over one shoulder like the seatbelt he just took off. One leash or another always held him down in this rotten city. Angelo stared once more at the cellphone on the passenger seat. It held its breath forever.

Angelo got laid-off two months ago. He applied for 48 delivery jobs and got zero calls. His resume spelled out exactly why those retards should hire him, how he'd save their companies money, work any hours, take the tougher deliveries, and practically smile for dog-faced receptionists. But these days, any one thing could kill an application. Maybe they only hire minorities, or too many credentials warns them of wage-bartering. Or, a decent resume signals that the employee might quit for a better position. Or, the cover letter looks deceptive. Or worse, any overqualification reeks of bullshit. Who has time to fact-check all those glowing claims and credentials? And do you send a resume or use the company's application form? Would sending both irritate employers with redundancy? Or does it impress? Should applicants write gushy cover letters or sound robotic? Do resumes in email attachment files look lazy, or do the lazy higher-ups appreciate leaving their envelope openers in the drawer? Should resumes omit the barely relatable shit jobs from 10 years ago from companies that sank in the desert? Or would chronological gaps raise suspicion? Do managers automatically toss applications that lack references? Who could expect their references to answer 48 phone calls? Why put so much effort into a shitty-wage driving job?

Angelo only knew that some of his tax money trickled into these porksters' house. And he'd need it back soon. He pulled his cap down, left the van, and crossed the street.

He ascended the steps and opened the front door with his coat sleeve pulled over one hand. The extra light door moved with the ease that pansy homeowners wanted these days. Just inside, a bulky but silent alarm system blinked here and there. Maybe it shuffled electric cards when not in use. Maybe it wanted a voice authentication. Angelo didn't know.

To compensate, a few straightforward strategies would save him time, one of them called *metal detector eyes*. He snatched all the pewter picture frames off the hallway wall, bagged them, and moved on. The family had enough fat to spread to their kids' eyelids. In every photo, their dimples

went deep. Getting caught this early would make Angelo look like a particularly weird pedophile. So another strategy sprung in his mind: take the plastic frames of grandparents too.

A row of the gift shop frames led him to the living room. The flat screen TV there had grown huge in the entertainment arms race. Angelo would have to bulldoze a wall to slip it outside fast. In an opposite corner stood a corner-shaped table with a big circular hamster cage. Somehow, it contained over twenty female hamsters with their heads jammed through the bars as if eating something on the outside. But the ring of females never moved. They all stayed poised in lordosis.

Angelo looked harder and discerned them as fakes, maybe even works of taxidermy. His eyes then found the one live furball among the wood shavings and shit pellets. A male humped the hell out of one of the dummies. The hamster quickly dismounted, or withdrew, or whatever the heck the hamster experts call it, and scurried to the neighboring female. He jumped on her hindquarters and thrust away like arthritis would set in tomorrow.

The hamster soon detached himself from the fur wall and hobbled across the cage. He wanted something identical and sweet on the other side. This one pet probably resented having the extra pen space to traverse. Angelo quickly saw why the creature could hardly run. Its massive, genetically engineered erection bled. Inflamed and swollen, the shaft doubled in diameter where it left the underbelly fur hole. After one look at the bloodstains on the fakes' rears, Angelo's innards tightened where they could.

The blood had caked and browned on each of the females. Some became clear favorites. This hamster screwed a merry-go-round 24-7. Frowning, Angelo picked up a carton left open on the table. The label read Poundin' Pops in balloon letters. The front showed a hamster giving four thumbs-up with all of his paws, and a black rectangle censoring a three inch wang. A glance at the instructions on the back revealed that the tablets dissolve in the cage's water bottle. Viagra for hamsters.

“What kind of sick bastard would think of this?” Angelo mumbled, setting down the rattly carton of Poundin' Pops.

*Christ, Angelo thought. They have this hamster harem set up in the living room for the kids to watch. That hamster sure likes to live. Well too bad.*