

# FINAL NOTICE



**VAN  
FLEISHER**



# **FINAL NOTICE,**

**A Novel By VAN FLEISHER**

“The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is unfortunate.”

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## **CHAPTER 1 - IN THE BEGINNING ...**

**Pasadena, California.** It was an extremely unnerved Vince Fuller who returned to his comfortable home in Pasadena's historic Highlands. His hands were still shaking as he fumbled with the back-door key. Luckily, Trudi would not hear him, he thought with relief, as he caught the strains of his wife's guitar and voice coming from the den. She was caught up in one of her new folk songs. But Miles, their little corgi, certainly heard him come in and came running to greet him. Vince gave him a quick scratch between his oversized ears, and went quickly and quietly to their master suite, where he washed the dirt from his hands and changed out of his soiled clothes. He felt guilty for this act of stealth, although he had done nothing wrong.

Only then did he knock on the den door, out of courtesy, and Trudi shouted, "Hi, honey!" as she stopped playing and placed the guitar back in its stand. Folk music was a passion of Trudi's and she had been doing it for over 50 years, mostly for her own enjoyment, with friends at song circles, and the occasional low-profile, coffee house gig. She had even recorded a couple of CDs, which, despite favorable reviews, managed to gross just over \$500 ... total. Folk music, it often seemed, was yesterday's music and the only people who liked and appreciated it were, literally, a dying breed. Vince liked it though, and always enjoyed hearing her humming and strumming around the house.

Trudi gave Vince a quick hug and kiss. "I'm sorry, honey. I didn't realize what time it was. I think dinner will be a bit late ... and a lot

simpler. How was your day? Any luck with finding your ideal coffee maker?”

Vince was trying to be upbeat and calm. “No. Close, but not perfect.” He had been searching for a coffee maker that could make espresso, coffee, and lattes without using pre-packaged products. “I’ll take Miles around the block for a quick walk while you whip up a late and simple supper, as long as simple doesn’t mean without wine!”

Miles saw the leash in Vince’s hand and responded with a marked increase in the wag speed of his stump of a tail. Walks, head scratches and belly rubs were right up there with food, and that was saying something. Some people know corgis as the Queen’s dogs (as in Queen Elizabeth of England): jaunty little dogs that are “little” only in terms of their legs, which are almost shorter than their pointy ears. But Miles was something of a character – friendly and fearless, with enough speed, swagger and “attitude” to outstrip a dog twice his size. So, not surprisingly, he attracted a lot of attention.

It was late afternoon and there were a fair number of people out and enjoying the day. In the past, their reactions when they saw Miles always amused Vince, but today his head was in a different place altogether.

Vince had recently turned 70, and although he was physically fit, carried his 165 pounds well on his six-foot frame, and he didn’t feel 70, the reality was unavoidable and today was proof. Well, so were the reading glasses, thinning hair and stiffness in the morning. He was getting old, if not already there. He knew what he would have done to that hopped-up piece of shit who knocked him down at the Mall today had that happened even 20 years ago. And if it had

occurred when he was playing college football ... well, the truth is, it wouldn't have happened. It had happened today only because he was old, and that asshole knew he could get away with it. And that's what really ate at Vince. Being knocked down hadn't physically hurt him, but his pride and ego had suffered a blow. He still heard that menacing, mocking voice say, "Get the fuck out of my way, old man." And there was nothing he could do about it.

After dinner, Vince and Trudi cleaned up the aftermath of the quinoa-kale stir fry and retired to the living room to watch the evening news with a glass of red wine in hand, and Miles at their feet. It had become a ritual of sorts, one that had been adopted and refined after Vince's retirement from his job as an international management consultant, two years earlier.

Trudi was poised on the couch, petite, fit, auburn hair (with some help from her hairdresser), green-framed glasses assisting her 65-year-old green eyes, with one leg curled up beneath her and the other on the magazine-strewn coffee table, while Vince shifted in his overstuffed chair, navigating the thousand channels with practiced expertise. Vince and Trudi bought this house and much of its furniture 40 years ago. The furniture had been recovered and re-upholstered a few times, and they loved the comfort that comes with good quality and age.

They had watched their neighborhood change over time as families moved in and out, generally white middle-class leaving and ethnic upper-middle-class moving in; but Vince couldn't figure out how anyone could afford to buy a house at today's prices.

Surfing the channels, he stopped at Fox News – an occasional practice to "see how the other half thinks."

The TV spokesman said, “We’re going to take a short break and when we come back, Fox News will present another real life, true story about a grave threat – no pun intended – (laughing) to senior citizens.”

Vince cringed and was tempted to switch channels but instead just muted it as a commercial began. Ignoring the muted commercial, Trudi said, “Wow, they really know their audience, don’t they?”

He tried to smile but this wasn’t helping his mood.

Perhaps Trudi sensed his low spirits and added, “I spoke with Alma today, and she is going to check dates with Ahmed to have us over for dinner.”

The ploy worked and Vince smiled, genuinely, for the first time. Alma Khan was a great cook and she and her husband, Ahmed, were good friends of theirs. “What’s the occasion?”

“Nothing. We were just catching up on stuff and realized it had been too long.”

Vince had met Ahmed Khan almost 20 years ago when he was doing a consulting project at Cal Tech, where Ahmed worked. Vince recognized the unique qualities in Ahmed that enabled him to see the bigger picture instead of being solely focused on the technical issues. They stayed in touch over the years and then the Khans moved to Pasadena, not far from the Fullers, and their connection turned into a friendship.

Vince’s significant time working in over 30 countries around the world made him more than comfortable with people from different cultures.



He also had great admiration for the degree of openness and generosity in most cultures as compared with his own country. He knew that there were good and bad people everywhere, but his experience made him realize that the good in other cultures was every bit as deep, if not deeper, than the good in his own.

Vince was getting pretty adept at recognizing the end of commercials and was about to un-mute when another commercial started. “I hope she’s cooking her lamb recipe. That has to be the best dish I’ve ever had.”

“Better than my quinoa-kale stir fry?”

Vince was finally relaxing, and his usual good humor returned as he danced around Trudi’s question until the Fox News host returned.

“Our guest this evening is Dwayne LaPlant, Executive Vice President of Marketing for the NRA, the National Rifle Association. Good evening, Dwayne, and thank you for joining us.”

“Thank you, Sean, for having me.”

“As you know, Dwayne, we’ve been running a series of segments about the random acts of violence that seem to have spread from racial and ethnic attacks to attacks on the elderly and women. What’s your take on this phenomenon?”

Vince squirmed in his chair.

“Well, Sean, it’s clearly opportunistic. Older people and women are less able to fight back and defend themselves so naturally they’re more vulnerable to these physical attacks. Same with children.

That's why we advocate being able to protect yourself through responsible gun ownership."

"But in the case of the elderly, aren't you concerned about an increase of accidental shootings? You know, forgetting to use the safety mechanism or not seeing clearly?"

"We get some of that, even with younger people," LaPlant replied with a laugh. "Our studies have shown that with adequate training, almost anyone can be a responsible gun owner. That's why we introduced the NRA Armed Seniors Discount Program. If more old timers packed heat, it might make thugs think twice before bullying them."

Vince felt a weight on his chest, as if they were talking directly to and about him. He was overcome with guilt, embarrassment and rage ... but guns?

Sean agreed. "Good point. How's that program going, by the way?"

"Pretty amazing. We've sold more guns under that program than Obama sold health policies. (He laughed again.) In fact, we're planning a big event to celebrate our millionth sale."

"A million guns? Just to seniors?"

"Yep."

"And have there been any repercussions?"

"Nothing unusual. A few isolated incidents."

“It seems that we’ve been hearing about more than just a few. Do you have any statistics?”

“No. We don’t track that, but it stands to reason that if the normal accident rate is applied to a million more guns and users, there could be an increase. But seniors are not exactly an aggressive group, so it is probably even less than normal.

“We just think that if we armed all seniors, people would think twice about taking advantage of them.”

“Like having armed guards in all schools?”

“Exactly.”

“Do you have any advice for seniors about how to avoid problems?”

“Good question, Sean. There are over 40 million seniors over 65 in the United States. So, even a million new gun users won’t make that much of an impact. So, first of all, we plan to continue the discount so that more responsible seniors can protect themselves and enjoy the lives they’ve worked so hard for. We are also planning a series of training videos that will be promoted on our website that will help seniors avoid problems.”

“Can you give me an example, Dwayne?”

“Sure. Most seniors with guns will probably be open carrying, and we suggest that they make the weapon as visible as possible. Even if you are licensed for concealed carry, make your gun visible from time to time, especially in situations where there are a lot of people around, to make the most impact. Ladies can take their guns out of their purses and put them on the counter when checking out. When

that piece of steel hits the counter top, everyone around will know that this is someone you don't want to mess with.

“In addition to the visibility aspect, over 30 states have passed ‘Stand Your Ground’ laws, allowing people feeling threatened to brandish or even use their guns, in public, in cars, and at home. These laws vary from state to state so we urge you to become familiar with the laws in your state to see when you are within your rights to defend yourself.”

“Thanks for those tips, Dwayne. I'll bear all this in mind the next time I have the urge to knock down an old lady.” (Sean and Dwayne laugh.)

Vince was angry, upset and confused as he replayed the afternoon incident over and over in his mind. *“If I had been carrying a gun that wouldn't have happened, would it?” Or, “If it happened and I had a gun, would I have used it? Could I stand my ground?”* Then he mentally re-enacted the scene where the guy knocked him down, but this time with him pulling out a gun and saying, “OK, asshole, so now how tough do you feel?”

Vince muted the TV. “I've had enough of this. And what kind of a name is Dwayne? ‘What's your name? Duh ... Wayne.’ A million, armed senior citizens? God help us all!”

Trudi countered by saying that a number of her friends talk about incidents they have seen or experienced, and that some are even thinking about getting a gun.

“But that's crazy! A bunch of armed geriatrics who can't see or hold their hands steady?” It was almost as if Vince was arguing with

himself.

Surprised by the intensity of Vince's reaction, Trudi asked, "Want some more wine?"

"Sure, just a bit," he said, as he switched to CNN with the remote.

Trudi poured the dark red wine. "But you know, if some tattooed skinhead asshole knocked me down, and then sneered at me, he'd have one more hole to sneer from if I had a gun."

Vince quickly looked at her to see if she knew what happened to him. "What? Where is that coming from?"

Trudi laughed. "Flashbacks from my sixties' Berkeley days, I guess. But I'm kidding. I don't want a gun." And then, laughing at the news anchor's name on the screen, added, "Well at least you found someone with a normal name: Wolf Blitzer!" (Both laughed.)

TV: "This just in from Arizona. As many as 12 residents at a senior citizen home outside of Tucson have been shot. Authorities are saying it was not an act of terrorism. I repeat, it was NOT an act of terrorism. Reports coming in say that an 89-year-old resident of the home wheeled himself into the dining room and just started shooting the other residents as they sat at their tables. The facility's armed security guard shot and killed the gunman. Details have not yet been released pending notification of next of kin. So far, there is no apparent motive. Four of the 12 shot are dead, and six are in critical condition. A spokesman for the NRA praised the security guard's action and pointed out that this validated the policy of deploying armed guards in schools and healthcare facilities.

“In other news, the President’s relationship with Russia ... ”

Vince hit the mute button, “Twelve people? Must have had two guns or big clips. Sounds like a good shot though, getting 12.”

“Are you praising him?”

“No, just thinking that he’s 89 and did that. I don’t even know how to load a gun, and I’m almost 20 years younger than he is.”

“How hard can it be? You hear some of these good ol’ boys talk and they don’t sound like the brightest sparks, but they sure know how to handle a gun. Excuse me, I need to go to the bathroom.”

Vince thought to himself, *I know nothing about guns ... what kind of guns there are, what they cost, how to load them and how to shoot them. If I had a gun, would I have used it today? A million, armed seniors? Am I that far out of the loop?*

Trudi returned. “Are you sleeping?”

“Not yet. I was just thinking that we seem to have fallen out of the loop, or at least I have. We watch the news most nights but then I hear about a million seniors getting guns and it shocks me. We’re seniors. Should we have guns?”

Trudi settled down on the couch, “Don’t be ridiculous, Vince! I was just kidding about blowing away the skinhead. Really. Guns are not the answer to anything! And just because a lot of people are going along with something doesn’t make it right.”

“Well, that’s true. I guess I just feel out of it. I’m not ready to get old but I’m afraid it might be too late.”

“You’re not old. 70 is the new 50, remember?”

“Yes, I do. Sometimes I forget how good a memory I have.” Vince looked squarely at Trudi. He knew she loved him, even if a big piece of shit knocked him down in the parking lot. He also knew that she was concerned about him, about his anger and distance that night. And he knew that he loved her and that together, things were good. “Thanks for your patience tonight. I had a rough day. But I know that you’re here for me and you make me happy.”

“That’s why you married me!”

“You got that right, Trudi James, although your dazzling smile and amazing voice helped.”

“Let’s go to bed while you’re still thinking of me in the past ... as in way past!”

Vince laughed. “OK. Come on, Miles, let’s get you outside for your evening business. See you in a minute, Hon.”

\* \* \*

**San Diego, California.** Stan Mason had just hung up the phone with police in Tucson, who had called him about his father. His mind was a sea of confusion with new questions that popped up like popcorn in a microwave. “*Why?*” was the one that came up over and over again. He had just spoken with his dad three days ago and all seemed good. Or was that what Stan wanted to hear? He said his health was good, but he always said that. *Was he perhaps a bit more maudlin, morose, even fatalistic?* He tried to remember the conversation but couldn’t.

He didn't think his dad mentioned any issues with the Home or people there. Stan knew he wasn't happy at Green Valley, never had been, and hadn't made any friends there; but given his loss of mobility, there weren't any real alternatives. Stan's place was too small and, with the stairs, impossible for his father to navigate.

Stan scrolled back in his mind and being honest, his father had not been happy since his wife died – 53 years together and then he was on his own. He'd had a successful career in banking, starting as a teller and rising to vice-president. But he had a difficult time adjusting to retirement. He didn't have any hobbies or special interests and the big change from being an important person in an organization to a “nobody” was hard. When his wife died, and along with her, the “honey-do” list, he felt completely irrelevant. As Stan thought about his father's mental state, suicide wouldn't have been so difficult to understand; but killing people?

And the guns! His dad had told him, about three weeks ago he thought, that the Home had planned a field trip to a nearby gun show because there was interest amongst the residents, in part, due to an NRA discount. But his father never mentioned it again. Then the police told him that his dad had two guns with extended magazines. That blew his mind. His dad had been in the Army but that was a long time ago. They never had guns while he was growing up. Ever! And the police report detailed that there was no apparent motive, pattern or specific targets. Just the closest and most accessible.

The police asked Stan if he could come to Green Valley and go through his father's possessions to help them find some possible trigger to the carnage. They would be interviewing witnesses and other residents in the meantime. Stan couldn't imagine what he'd



find, but he knew he'd just acquired two guns, although the police told him that he couldn't take them just yet. And then his mind exploded again with questions, disbelief, and confusion.

\* \* \*

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