

Every morning Joel Hardy was awoken by his alarm at precisely seven thirty-five. He would have a shower in the master bathroom on the third floor of his home. He would then eat a hearty breakfast, (prepared by his beautiful wife Joanne), with his daughter, Jennifer. Then he hopped cheerily into his new Mercedes, and started to work. Joel worked at Virtual Tech. Computers, a new computer company that specialized in virtual reality. Joel was the chief design editor and brought home a handsome one hundred and twenty thousand dollars per year. Joel had many friends, both at work and in the community.

Joel sounded his horn as he came to a stop in front of Kyle McNeil's apartment. Joel did this every morning as Kyle was a very close friend of his, and worked in the same company. Kyle however, was not as lucky as Joel, Kyle did not have the three story home that Joel did, nor the outrageous salary, nor the beautiful wife and daughter. He did not have the luck of being at the lab when the reality-cam was finished, the idea that gave Joel his claim to fame. If it would have been Kyle working that shift maybe things would be different. Kyle was a loner, and a struggling loner at that. "Good morning Kyle," said Joel.

"G' mornin'," mumbled Kyle in a saddened voice. Joel instantly sensed that something was wrong and upon further questioning found that Kyle had lost yet another one of his "bimbo" type girlfriends. Joel pretended to be sorry for him for a while, then they spoke of work.

Kyle never really envied Joel's success or his life until that day. Kyle was trying one of the new reality simulators called "American Dream", which was a program which enabled the user to have an ideal American life. Kyle experienced things that he had never before experienced; the love of a child, the security of your own home, and the devotion of a loving wife. Kyle eventually became obsessed with the simulator, using it for four and seven hours per day. He began watching happy situation comedies on television instead of violence filled action movies. He was captivated by the idea of having a family, love, and without knowing it, Joel's life. Kyle never told Joel about his new fixation, and continued to travel to and from work with him as if nothing had changed. Sometimes Kyle would stay all night in the simulator, and all of the next day, it was an obsession in

the true sense  
of the word.

Kyle didn't want to live his family life in a fantasy world anymore, he wanted to try and invent or create something that would give him a raise and the money to start building his dream. Joel was working on a new program that would revolutionize the computing industry. He kept it secret, only working on it at home. He didn't even tell Kyle about it. But one night, while watching a football game at Joel's house, he discovered that Joel had left his computer on and unprotected. Kyle sat down just to browse around, but upon finding the new program he saw that this could be the key to his new house. Kyle quickly copied the program onto a disk and took the disk with him.

The next day at work Kyle took this disk to one of his superiors and by the end of the day Kyle had a new job, car, and house. All Joel had to say was that he was proud of Kyle, and that it was ironic that they were both working secretly on the same idea. They just chuckled and smiled together for a while, then Joel stopped, but Kyle kept on smiling.

Kyle's girlfriends were now substantially more classy, but still none that stayed with him. He wanted a wife. He wanted a partner. He wanted Joanne. That night Kyle invited Joanne somewhere secret and special. A place that would intrigue any bored housewife, a romantic park, in a dark wood. Kyle had a blanket, and on it burning candles, and incense. Joanne, for one short passionate moment fell in love with Kyle. But that was all it took.

"Do you know what's odd Kyle?," asked Joel

"No," replied Kyle.

"Joanne went to her mother's last night," said Joel, "and didn't come home."

"I'm sure she's fine," said Kyle as he looked down at his computer screen and smiled.

Kyle arranged other meetings with Joanne, and they all went the same as the first. Kyle soon tired of the affair and wanted Joanne to leave Joel so that they could be married. Joanne refused, saying that Joel was too nice, and kind of a man to just leave like that. So, rather than accept the rejection, Kyle decided to make Joel look cruel, heartless, and criminal.

That night, Kyle entered the company building, using Joel's security code. He transferred money from other's pay-checks to his own. He deleted important system

files,  
and downloaded the company's customer database. He created the illusion that Joel was planning a hostile take-over. What Kyle did not know was that Joel was working late in his new office and watched Kyle do all of these things. Joel confronted Kyle and asked,

"What the hell do you think you are doing?"

"What does it look like Joel? You always were a moron. I'm finishing you. I have had enough of your perfect house, perfect job, and...well...not-so perfect wife," said Kyle.

"Not-so perfect wife?," asked Joel.

"Yeah, those nights that she was supposedly at her mother's, she was with me at my house," bragged Kyle.

"Doing what?," questioned Joel.

"You figure it out," said Kyle, "and...ahh...by the way, I took your program from your computer. He, he, he. Good idea. Thanks."

"YOU BASTARD," screamed Joel. At this Joel reached into his desk, pulled out his shiny new corporate handgun, and shot Kyle three times in the head. Then in an attempt to hide the bullet holes and the murder, he through him through the window of his twenty-fifth floor office to crash upon the pavement below. Kyle lay dead and bleeding, and Joel stands three hundred feet above him with a gun in his hand.

"Kyyyyyle, Kyle. KYLE," said Joel.

"Wha...what the?," said a puzzled Kyle.

"Don't you think you should give the simulator a break for a while? You're going to burn yourself out," said Joel as he resets the "American Dream" simulator, "besides, I haven't weeded out all of the bugs yet."

