



# **Roserain**

**It washes nothing clean**

**A Story from Rosehaven: Stories from the Quiet War**

**Thomas Veil**

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It must have begun in the night, because it isn't so hot now. I can feel a cool breeze wafting its lazy way through the bedroom window, making the hairs on my chest stand to attention. But it's the sound. The downpour drumming against the canvas awning sheltering the window. It makes me feel so relaxed, and to be honest, it could easily lull me back to slumberland. It hits the perfect pitch. Does everyone have a sound that switches them to standby mode? That would be a great way to win a war, just beam the dreamy sound of rain hammering against canvas over enemy lines, and they, blissed out and drowsy, would be putty in our hands. I could be putty.

Memory is a strange thing. Sometimes it favours a story you prefer. I'm back in the tent, trying to get back to sleep, but I can't shake off the feeling that they're here. They can't be here; no one knows. Cold hands grip my wrists; something heavy is across my legs. I can't move, can't kick, can't get up. The mask is clamped to my face. What is this? What is this? I can't... and breathe. Inhale. In and out. In and out.

The rain is even more hypnotic as I drift, only just aware of the giggling beside me as they release the rubbery gas mask and give the curling blue smoke inside to someone else. I always remember it as them laughing, though sometimes the laugh sounds like mine. Sinking into the rhythm, I float. These were the days; they were the best times. Mates for life, we were. Whatever happened?

Oh yes, I remember.

John, Peter, Clem, and I grew up together in the Rosehaven of old, went to school together, almost living in each other's houses, much to the annoyance of our mums. We told each other everything, helped each other with our homework, and stood up to Max Dogget together. We actually ambushed him and his cronies one day, leaving them covered in white paint and glue just before registration. We couldn't stop grinning about it for weeks. I'm glad I was there that day, even if people remember it differently.

By the time we left school for university, none of us had dads. My dad had died when I was three, John's just before his third-year exams, and the other two lost to messy divorces. "We were each other's dads," we used to say. It wasn't a joke.

We shared flats and went to the same uni. John buried in balance sheets, Peter sharpening his arguments, Clem half lost in fumes, and me, turning life into lines on a stage. Six days of work, one for escape. Saturdays were sacred: tent in the boot, the road open, laughter billowing out the windows. "Enhanced relaxation," we used to say, like it was something we'd invented. Ask any of them and they'll tell you the story with me in the best light.

Then the war came.

No one knew who fired first. It didn't matter after the bombs and barricades arrived. Cities splintered; allegiances fractured. We picked our way through the day's checkpoints and flashpoints. It could be quite hard to tell between New Tomorrow and

the Heritage Front, or even the Blue Wheel, although they were mostly blue (colour-coded soldiering at its best). Anyway, it was worth it just getting away for a day, being super relaxed on the way back, gameified to the max. Some close calls, but they only bound us closer together.

Inevitably, the war took its toll on the university. First, creating a microcosm of the conflict on campus, leading to arrests and vandalism, then later arson and attacks on staff. Some didn't make it. We took no side but our own. One dark, wet night, rain lashing the streets and dampening the sounds of war; we made a pact. We would be on our side. We would use what we had learned so far to take what we needed from a breaking society and turn it into something better. For us. Fuck New Tomorrow. Fuck the Heritage Front. Fuck the Blue Wheel and any other useless little fuckers in factions. We were better. I was the best.

And so, it worked quite well, cutting through the chaos like a hot knife through butter. Using our skills and creativity to save many from the surrounding violence. Many masterpieces, many pieces of classic jewelry, and many sublime examples of the most exquisite porcelain in existence. Over the coming months, we identified museums, corporate offices, dealers, and private collectors. We disabled security, human and otherwise, and moved the best pieces to our 'invisible' storage facility in the sticks. Concealed entrance, waterproofed, ventilated and entered through an almost invisible door camouflaged with a nasty-looking clump of briar. Inside were units of shelving storing the best objects d'art, waiting for normality to return and for the winners who needed proof of their importance by owning a few rare items. We could have given it away to the needy, but we stockpiled, waiting. Well, that was the plan.

John did the sums, Peter found the weak spots in people, Clem took care of the messy work, and I was the front, the actor, the liar, the necessary charm. We rehearsed our moves, studied old raids and movies, creating a small, organised and motivated team.

As usual, John and Peter identified our next target, and all four of us worked out the plan of attack. We made sure there was a diversion by 'encouraging' unrest in the area. It was a sizeable townhouse in an exclusive neighbourhood in the middle of the city. Guards and alarms, no doubt, but the patriarch, a prominent hedge fund manager, had died a few days before, so the family would be in a state of flux, making them an ideal target. Inflammatory rhetoric played on a loop at high volume from an old loudhailer we'd left lying in the street. Flash bangs and a burning minibus set the street alight; Clem wedged the crowbar home and the back door, hidden from the street, gave way. We bound and gagged the maid and the butler, who wouldn't listen to my perfectly rehearsed reason. This time, done with a slight foreign accent, not too much though. Maybe they wouldn't understand. Some might think a riot is too messy, too unpredictable. But that's its beauty. If there were any response, it would be human. Faced with a burning bus and a hundred screaming people, or a silent alarm from a rich man's house? They'll choose the fire every time. As for the mob coming in here? Please. They were after the symbols of power in the square, not some banker's porcelain. And the help? Once they were tied up, they were furniture. My little performance wasn't for them; it was for me. A dry run. A bit of fun. The real security was the gag. Within ten minutes, we were on our way with the loot in our backpacks and a moving street riot behind us.

We jumped into the escape car and tore up the road, checking the mirrors until they fell empty. We arrived at our little bank, our favourite spot. No tent that day, though. We built the place ourselves. It took us weeks. I volunteered to sort out the ventilation system, making sure the fans ran silently through the narrow, briar-protected entrance. I told them I'd seen something similar in a documentary about ancient wine cellars, although I might have embellished it a little to sound useful. The spy cameras covering the hideaway could be accessed from our phones, so we all checked them before the final approach. All clear. I'd set the cameras up myself, because no one else had the patience for that kind of detail. John reached the door first, pressed the secret switch, and it opened. I kept my hand near the inside pocket of my jacket out of habit, fingers tracing the seam. We all piled in, eager to have a rest and spark one up, and nothing.

Nothing.

Bare shelves. Empty cases.

Everything was still in place, just stripped clean. Nobody exploded. Nobody collapsed. Just gutted, like a silent blade had sliced through all four of us at once. One by one, we sank to our knees, holding our heads as our dreams slipped between our fingers.

The silence was the worst part. No alarms, no broken locks, no boot prints in the dust we'd left.

"How?" John finally croaked, his accountant's brain grasping for logic. "The cameras... the door... the codes. It's impossible."

"Of course it's fucking possible," Clem snapped, staring at a dust-free rectangle where a Fabergé egg once sat. "It's done. It's happened."

Peter stood up slowly. He didn't look at the shelves; he looked at us. "John's right. It's not possible for someone who didn't know. Not like this. This is... surgical."

Another silence, thicker now. The word someone hung in the air, but we all flinched from the next, logical word. Someone with a key. Someone who knew the schedule. Someone with six nights and a quad bike.

It was easier to invent a phantom.

"Cheeky fuckers," Clem spat, grabbing onto the idea of an outside enemy like a lifeline. "Who would fucking believe it? They've stolen our nest egg right from under our noses!"

“Who are they?” John demanded, voice rising in panic. “I still don’t get how they got past everything.”

We spent a full minute constructing an all-knowing “them.” It was the only story that kept us from being the villains. But you can only believe in ghosts for so long before you start staring at the living.

The blame game didn’t begin with an accusation. It began when Peter’s eyes, sharp with a lawyer’s cold logic, stopped searching the room and settled on me.

“It’s all your fault,” he said.

I stood my ground. “Who the fuck are you? I’m a fuckin’ lawyer, so I’m Peter fuckin’ perfect? Everyone knows lawyers’re all the same. Slippery little cunts who think they rule the world. It’d make more sense if you’d done it. Greedy bastard, like the rest of your kind. Couldn’t give a monkey’s about anyone else. Bet you’ve been planning this all along.”

“Well, someone was!” shouted John. “The only reason I doubt one of us did it is because it’s so well planned. We’re good, but not this good. I can’t believe they got around the security. How’d they get the stuff away without tyre tracks? God knows we’ve been careful! How’d they even know about the stuff? About us? About anything? I agree with Peter. It must have been one of us. The only thing I’m sure of is, it wasn’t me!”

Peter, Clem and I all shouted, “It wasn’t me either,” so much in sync and harmony it would have been hilarious if it hadn’t been so serious.

“OK, OK, OK,” I said, holding my hands up, the universal signal for surrender. My voice was all reason, a flat, steady deck in a roiling sea. “We can’t just implode. Let’s be practical. What’s the move? Do we hang a traitor? ... Build a guillotine? Or do we get our heads together and find the actual problem?”

I let the silence hang after the word traitor, watching it land. Peter’s jaw tightened. Clem’s eyes, already hard, narrowed as if recalculating a threat. John just stared at my placating hands as if they were holding a hidden knife.

“So,” I pressed on, softer, the voice of the only adult in the room. “Do we tear ourselves apart, or do we think?”

It was the wrong tone. Peter took a step forward, not back. “Think?” he spat. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you? Trying to copy me, the lawyer. Talking us in circles while you pocket the evidence.”

Clem started it. Fuckin engineers, they're so Neanderthal. Without saying a word, he shoved me. Then a headbutt. If I hadn't dropped my head, my nose would have been mush. He was much bigger than me. I dropped. Clutched my face. The rest broke loose: fists flying, feet scrambling. As Clem drove me into the dirt floor, I didn't see my friend. I saw a liability. Peter's shouting wasn't a plea for reason; it was evidence. John's panicked eyes weren't searching for truth; they were measuring my guilt. Our lifelong partnership; the inside jokes, the split profits, the shared purpose, collapsed instantly into simple, brutal arithmetic: three against one. The laughter was a memory. The trust was a lie. The future and the fortune were phantoms. All that remained was the problem in front of me, and the solution in my pocket.

One more shove, one more accusation, and I knew they'd turn on me for real, drag the truth out of me.

So, I stood up, reached into my pocket, fiddled about a bit until I felt a click, pulled out my concealed firearm, as they'd say on American TV, and, sticking to my fallback plan, shot each of them in the eye.

Avoiding their gaze, I went to the reinforced corner I'd taken extra special care over; the one I'd told them was for humidity control. I dragged the empty shelving unit away from it, found the hidden catch, and opened the concealed inner door I'd built into the wall. This was where I had crammed the loot. It took me six nights. Parked an old farm quad down by the stream. Covered the wheels with carpet. Every trip I made, I was drenched in sweat and fear. It was unusual for the others to be otherwise occupied for so long. I checked everything was as I'd left it, then opened the outside door.

It was chucking it down, so I got an umbrella from the car. I love that sound, especially when I'm dry. I attached ropes from the main uprights of our place to the towbar, and then slowly but surely pulled our little secret hideaway down, so everything blended in, just subtly misaligned enough to look like old storm damage or erosion. Nobody would find the bodies; nobody would find the loot, and it was there whenever I needed it.

It's the rain that brings it back.

Lying here in bed, the sun's come out, just like it has in my life. I get up and look out the window at the wonderful view over the Caribbean. Never mind; the rainy season will soon be over.

But that was just the story, the legend. In reality, I'm still in Rosehaven, the only home I've ever known. And I still chuckle whenever I hear of Rosehaven's infamous Robin Hood, the art thief who stole from the rich to feed the poor in wartime and then quietly slipped away to the Caribbean. A fine story. A convenient lie. I know. I put it there. A neat lie keeps curious hands out of the wrong places.

The End



If you enjoyed this story, it and another 9 stories are available in Rosehaven: Stories from the Quiet War [here on Amazon for \\$0.99.](#)



Thomas Veil is a Scottish writer of dystopian fiction whose stories explore the quiet tensions beneath ordinary life. Having lived for many years in different cultures, particularly in East Asia, he draws inspiration from their subtle differences.