

A Tweet in June

by [Peter Glassman](#) (February 2023)



The Portrait, René Magritte, 1935

A good book review always gives me a good feeling. Occasionally I get emails or tweets from a reader with a comment—sometimes good, sometimes critical. My Vietnam thriller, *The Eyeman*, is about a marine war returnee who came back with a bottle of human eyes—Vietnamese eyes. He wasn't physically wounded. I admitted him to a locked psychiatric ward for evaluation and isolation from the general patient population. The marine had removed the eyes of fallen enemy Viet Cong. A reader sent me such a bottle and, yes, complete with plastic eyes. Another sent me a tweet, "The boot knife really works. We should meet." He included an address.

The marine in my novel is based on a real person. Was this tweeter my former patient and the real Eyeman? One day at my Atlantic Coast Navy hospital a patient told me the South Vietnamese felt that if they died without their eyes in their body, they were denied heavenly access. The North Vietnamese had no such religious creed but thought all their enemies did and thus removed the eyes from American dead soldiers.

Should I contact the Tweeter? The marine in my book is a serial killer of random Asians. He can't turn off the war. All his US Asian victims were found eyeless. My curiosity exceeded my fear and we met in Wells, Maine. I brought along an autographed copy of *The Eyeman*—his only other request.

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My plane landed in Manchester, New Hampshire, and I drove my rental Ford Explorer to a Maine post office address he gave me guided by my cell phone's GPS. I looked for someone my age wearing jeans, trail boots, a long-sleeve red-and-black checkered shirt, and fluorescent orange watch cap. He was easy to spot.

In my book the patient had an Italian name, Julio Marco. This large frame and bulky woodsman-looking guy's name was Domenic

Scutero. It was probably an alias. Although, I wouldn't put it past an Italian to change his name and keep it Italian. He had a salt-and-pepper beard with the same color hair hanging free below his orange wool cap. The man nodded as he leaned against a weather-beaten older Ford F-250 pick-up. A sudden thought flashed—I should have told someone back in Connecticut where I was going.

I walked toward him with my copy of *The Eyeman* to evoke recognition. He extended his hand to me as I stopped about three feet from him. He smiled with a set of perfect teeth that had to be dentures. The eyes were steel gray just like my patient from the Navy.

His voice was deep and resonating as he spoke, "I'm so glad we could meet like this." He had a firm but not intimidating grip. "I'm also glad you have a 4-wheel drive SUV. Some of the roads to my place are less than perfect."

I looked at the June azure sky. The weather was nice and my short-sleeve outfit was comfortable for the 80's temperature. I commented on his heavy weather attire. "Is the temperature different where you live?"

"It's thick woods. Long sleeves are good because of the bugs and it does drop to the low 50's at night." He looked at his watch. "If you're hungry, I know a few places on the way to my home."

I was hungry but hadn't given it a thought until he mentioned it. "I want to experience your environment so I'll follow you." We exchanged cell phone numbers.

He called after driving only fifteen minutes on a pot-holed, two-lane road darkened by dense woods on either side. We turned into a log-cabin style combination gas station and diner. Another thought brought relief—there are other cars there, thank God.

"They have venison and moose here all year round. I'll order for us."

The moose steaks were thick and juicy. They were beefy in texture but not in taste. I had trouble characterizing it but it was tender, properly spiced, and sweet. Scutero added. "Tastes like tender horse meat doesn't it?"

I almost gagged. "I wouldn't know. I never had horse meat."

He chuckled, "I see you have a wedding band. Where's the wife?"

"She went off with her women's social club for a week. I took advantage of her absence to follow through with this visit to Maine. I told her it was for background for a new book."

He drained his large coffee cup and stared at me. "Is it? What kind of story line do you have in mind for upper state Maine?"

I decided to be up front. "I want to write about a Special Forces Vietnam vet who did his combat job well but became a recluse and hermit—someone who lived off the land for the most part. Instead of becoming a serial killer like ex-marine Julio Marco in *The Eyeman*, he's called upon to help recapture several escaped killers from a regional maximum security prison."

"Do I fit the bill?"

"Absolutely."

Scutero produced a full smile at my answer.

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We finished our meal and went to our vehicles. He placed a bear claw of a hand on my shoulder. "We'll make one more stop on the way to my place. There's something I have to show you."

I followed behind him. There were no other cars going in

either direction, and the road lost its pavement after another fifteen minutes. His right turn signal went on and we pulled over. Scutero got out of his truck grabbing a backpack from inside the cab. "Come with me."

We approached a recently road-killed large deer. The head had a big antler rack and was turned at a grotesque angle. "Must have run into a truck like mine." He turned the deer's limp head to face skyward and reached into the backpack.

"Remember my tweet?" Scutero extracted a double-edged Special Forces boot knife from the backpack and pulled it from its sheath.

"Yes, you wrote, 'The boot knife really works'."

"Yeah, I read *The Eyeman* three times. Your guy Marco killed twenty-five Asians after the war. You made it sound like removing the eyes was easy with a boot knife like mine." He motioned me to bend down with him toward the deer's head. "I'll do the first one and you do the second." Scutero held onto the antlers with one hand and inserted the tip of the boot knife under the deer's eye and pushed it straight in. A stream of dark blood trickled down the animal's face. He turned the blade in a circular motion cutting the eye muscles until he completed the circle. He pushed the blade in another half-inch and the optic nerve was cut releasing the eye. "You were right. This is a good instrument for eye removal. It's your turn. Don't disappoint me Doc."

With a mixture of fear and resolve I repeated the ocular surgery and the deer was now eyeless.

"Fantastic, Doc, okay, let's go to my place."

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Scutero had a modern-looking A-frame house with a large carport spanning a space that could accommodate three

vehicles. The tall trees in the forest darkened the area as well as inside the house. We entered and the lights automatically turned on.

He locked the front door. The entry opened directly into a large fire-placed living room. Wall decorations were entirely of animal heads and pelts. Several deer heads were interspersed with raccoons, possum, moose, boar, and two bears. The skins of these animals were posted beneath each head.

"What do ya think, Doc?" Scutero opened his backpack again.

I was horrified. Every animal head was eyeless.

"I've been taking the eyes from animals ever since Vietnam. Like your guy from the Navy hospital, I started with the dead VC. After the war, I was sick of people but your book reminded me of the rush. I have to do it one more time Doc." He produced the boot knife again. There was still some roadkill deer blood on the blade.

I ran for the door.

"There's no escape Doc. You're going to be my last victim and my only human head mount."

I screamed as he came at me with the boot knife. I screamed so loud that I woke up.

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"Peter, what's the matter? Did you have a nightmare?" My wife Barbara had her hand on my shoulder and a concerned expression.

I looked at her next to me. I was sweating and my heart was racing. "Yes, I did—thank God."

This story is based on my Vietnam War novel, The Eyeman.

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Peter Glassman is a retired physician living in Texas, who devotes his time to writing novels and memoir-based fiction. He is the author of 14 novels including the medical thrillers *Cotter*; *The Helios Rain* and *Who Will Weep for Me*. Some of his short stories were written for presentation at the San Antonio Writers Group Meetup. You can read more about him and his books [here](#).

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