

## **Short Story**

## **Tony the Hustler**

By Jeff Davidson

Eric had been renting out an apartment in Arlington, Virginia, for years. It was literally one block to the Rosslyn subway which carried people into D.C., so there was high demand for the unit.

Eric got a call from a guy named Tony, who was in his late twenties, a career type apparently, who said he'd like to see the unit. Eric gave him the cook's tour, which takes all of about ninety seconds, and Tony said he wanted to take the place. He filled out the application forms, but explained that because he had changed over checking accounts, his checks would not be good for a few days.

He wanted to know if Eric could hold them. Based on Tony's appearance, demeanor, use of language, and other visual clues, Eric said okay. As a measure of good faith, Tony gave him one hundred dollars in cash towards the security deposit. Having rented the apartment for years without running into any trouble with his tenants, Eric figured this situation would be okay as well.

### **Days Pass**

The third day after their meeting, Tony said it was okay to deposit the checks, which Eric did. Days later both came back as bounced checks. Eric called Tony at home and he said, "Oh, I'll take care of it." Meanwhile, Eric started to get suspicious and for the first time since he'd been renting apartments, actually decided to call the personal references.

Both references turned out to be bogus. One had left the area, and there was no forwarding number. The other phone number was disconnected. Now all his internal alarms went off! Eric had Tony's work number and gave him a call. It was hard to get past the secretary. The screening at his firm was rather elaborate. Without wishing to besmirch his personal reputation, Eric left a note saying it was important that he talk to Tony.

Eric tried Tony's phone numbers again that evening and in the morning, to no avail. Four days had passed since Eric first encountered Tony, two since he moved in, and Eric hadn't been able to speak to him. Eric had re-entered the checks only to find out that they were still not covered.

### **In Person**

Eric went to apartment after work hours and confronted Tony. "I'm gonna have to ask for these funds in cash," he said. Tony replied, "No problem." Eric let it go at that because after all, he'd either pay, or there would be a huge problem, but for now there was nothing to do.

Eight days went by and still no payment came. Eric tried to contact Tony again, but as before, it was hard to reach him on the phone, at the apartment, or anywhere.

Eric's heart sank as he realized that Tony had no intention of ever paying him a dime. Tony had perfected the art of moving into peoples' apartments, staying there for months and having no qualms about it. He'd ignore phone calls, ignore letters, ignore any type of appeal on any level. This was his craft and he had mastered it.

As Eric lay in his bed that night, he felt sick to my stomach. He'd lose thousands of dollars over several months going through the eviction process. Eric could not afford that. Then, a plan emerged. First, Eric would need a good night sleep.

Eric showed up at the apartment at 8:30. Eric figured that Tony would be long gone by then, and he was. Eric surveyed all that Tony had crammed into the tiny apartment. He had a CD collection, a computer, and surprisingly, a closet full of excellent suits and clothing.

### **Instant Mover**

Eric had brought boxes, bags, and even a hand cart that he had borrowed from the building manager downstairs, a dolly, wrapping paper – everything Eric could think of to execute his plan. With a tremendous amount of energy, partly through fear, and partly through aggression, Eric began packing up everything in the apartment.

It took three labor-intensive hours. Eric made numerous trips from the apartment, traversing the long hallway to the freight elevator, down to the basement, and across to his personal storage locker, which Eric had never mentioned to Tony. The move was strenuous physically and emotionally. Eric's muscles were aching, he was hungry, and was stealing time from his own job.

Eric came back to the apartment and put a note under the door. It read, "Tony, you owe me \$950, and if I don't receive the money by 6:00 p.m. this evening, I am going to sell all your possessions." Then, Eric went home and had a deep and reasonably satisfying nap.

After 5:00 p.m. Eric got a call. It was Tony and it was kind of refreshing to actually receive a call *from* him for once. Eric knew exactly what the call would be about, and he was mentally and emotionally prepared to receive it. Tony opened with a legal flurry about how he was going to take his case to the Arlington magistrate.

### **Calm and Collected**

Eric calmly said to him, "Fine, but I am going to sell everything you own unless you give me my money, and I want you out of the unit by this evening. So, I want to see a truck or a van, or something, that you are going to use to haul away your possessions."

Tony railed on and on, and Eric said, "You've got about an hour to act, so you'd better get moving. I'll be there at 6:30. I want the money for the days you tied up my apartment, I want the key and the parking pass, and I want to see a vehicle that can transport your belongings."

Potential obstacles plagued Eric: 1) Tony might call the law, but Eric doubted it since Tony was such a con man he was probably on a wanted poster. 2) Even if Tony wanted to pay, maybe he couldn't come up with the money. Maybe he couldn't get hold of a vehicle. Maybe he had no place to go.

At 6:30, Eric parked on the far side of the lot so that Tony see his car and crept toward the building. He saw Tony near the loading dock. Amazingly, Tony didn't seem perturbed in the least. Eric surmised that Tony had played out this scenario before, or at least something like it.

### **Give Me the Money**

Eric said, "Do you have the money?" He said, "Here," pulling out an envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket. The parking pass and key were also included. Eric thought 'How convenient.' Unemotionally Eric said, "Come this way, I need to take off the lock on my storage bin."

Tony followed Eric, ultimately loaded up his stuff, and mercifully drove off. Eric got in his car, and left. The drive home was sweet.

Although he would have to return in the morning to clean the apartment, then place another ad and go through the whole process of finding another tenant in record time (and still Eric would lose some rent money), he had removed the scourge from the apartment.

### **Lucky This Time**

Eric had gotten off easy and he knew it. He thought about all those people who've been swindled, not just for apartments, but for cars, houses, even their life savings... Con men take advantage of other people's good nature or for that matter, gullibility. When one con doesn't work, they go on to the next. Yes, Eric had gotten off easy and he now diligently calls all renters' references immediately.