Change for $100

by

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The front tire bumped the concrete curb just hard enough to send a jolt through his old Chevy. In the rear view mirror he saw his “house” bounce around. He winced and hoped that he had remembered to lock the cabinets in the kitchen.

He swung the heavy door open being careful not to bump the car beside him. The paint was still fresh and he didn't want to mar it. The smell of eggs and coffee hit him as soon as his feet hit the pavement.

He walked in and found a seat facing the door with his back in a corner. As soon as he picked up his menu a waitress set a glass of water in front of him.

“My name is Ruby and I'll be your waitress. What can I get you Suge?”

He looked up to see a pretty young waitress with curly, fire red hair.

“I'd love some coffee miss.”

“Cream and sugar?”

“Please ma’am.”

She walked behind the counter to pour him a cup. While she did he pulled out his wallet and glanced inside. All he saw were several hundred dollar bills. When Rudy placed the coffee he held one up.

“I don't suppose you can make change for this can you?”

She pursed her lips and shook her head. “I’m sorry Suge but we don't take big bills.”

She pointed to a sign above the register that said no bills larger than twenties.

“But there is a bank right across the street. I bet they’d make change for you.”

He craned his neck to see past her. Sure enough he saw a small bank across from them.

“Well how about you just bring me some hotcakes while I walk over there?”

She smiled as she took his order and went up on her tiptoes.

“I’ll have em ready for when you get back.”

He stood up and walked out the front entrance. Checking both ways, with not a car in sight, he crossed the street and walked into the bank. There was a small line to see the only teller. Directly in front of him was a young mother holding her sons hand.

The boy turned around to stare up at the strange man behind him. He smiled down at the boy and waved. That was when the front door was thrown open. Three men in clown masks ran in holding shotguns.

The one in the lead ran to the teller pointing his gun at her. She screamed and threw her hands up in front of her face.

“Everybody down on the ground” the second man yelled.

The bank patrons knelt down with their hands shielding their heads. Looking up he saw the boy standing wide eyed staring at the guns being trained on them. He reached out a hand and took hold of the boys arm.

“It’ll be ok. I promise. We just have to sit down and be quiet for a few minutes. Can you do that?”

The boy nodded and sank down to the floor wrapping his arms around his knees. While this was going on the last robber was busy chaining the door. When that was done he turned to face the rest of the bank.

“Where is the manager?”

When no one replied he yelled again “where is the freaking manager?”

A short dumpy man came out of a back office. He was gasping air and pulling at his tie. He reached into his front pocket and three shotguns immediately pointed at him. Freezing in place he stared down the barrel of the guns as he wheezed.

The lead robber stepped forward and jerked the manager’s hand out of his pocket. He reached in and pulled out an inhaler. He looked at it and then back up.

“Are you the manager?”

The shorter man tried to answer but couldn't. Finally he gave a jerky little nod.

“Where. Are. Your. Keys?”

The manager started to clutch at his throat.

“Just point to where they are and you can have this back little man.”

He pointed towards the office that he had just left.

“Desk” he gasped out.

The leader tossed the inhaler to him as he walked into the office. The manager missed the catch and the inhaler clattered to the floor. Falling to his knees he picked it up and jammed it into his mouth. Taking a deep hit he leaned back against the wall. He took in a ragged breath before hitting the inhaler again.

The drifter stood up and took a step towards him. One of the robbers spun and pointed his shotgun at him.

“Get down!”

He froze. “You're gonna shoot me for wanting to help a man?”

“I said get down!”

“Or what clown?”

The robber stepped towards him and jabbed the barrel of the gun into his sternum. “I’ll put another whole in that bald head.”

“You don't have the stones you two bit wanna be.”

Behind the clown mask he could see the man’s eyes go wide. He leaned his head back and yelled over his shoulder. “B, can I pop this guy?”

B stepped out of the manager’s office holding the keys. “Be my guest. I'm going into the vault. P, watch them. T, do whatever you want with that guy.”

With that he turned to go into the vault. T brought his gun up to his shoulder and pointed it in the drifters face.

“Are you really going to shoot me in front of a little kid? Come on, that's years of therapy there.”

He saw the gun dip slightly. T stood still for a second before bringing it back up. He jerked it towards another door.

“P, I’ll be right back after I take care of something.”

The drifter turned and walked the direction he was pointed. As he passed by the little boy and his mother he gave them a wink. The robber shut the door behind them. As he did the drifter turned around to face him.

“Hey man, we don't have to do this.”

The robber stepped forward and jabbed the shotgun at him again. This time he reacted. He slapped the barrel aside and rushed forward. The robber flinched and squeezed the trigger. The blast made his ears ring but that didn't stop him from tripping his opponent.

As they fell T lost control of the gun. The drifter grabbed it and reversed it. He drove it into T's face. He heard the crunch of his nose as it broke. His head bounced against the floor and his eyes glazed over. The drifter dropped the gun, wrapped both hands around his throat and squeezed.

When T went limp he rolled his body over and took off his jacket and mask. He put them on and picked up the gun. Walking back into the lobby he shut the door behind him. P was waiting for him. Well, waiting for T.

“Got him?”

He held up his thumb and drew it across his neck.

“Awesome. Pretentious prick deserved what he got.”

B came out of the vault with a duffel bag over his shoulder.

“Come on boys. We got what we came for.”

The three of them backed towards the door. B undid the chain and let them out. P rushed to the driver’s side of an old impala.

“T, take the money and get in the back” B instructed.

He took the duffel bag and threw it in before sliding in himself. As soon as B was in the passenger seat P stomped the gas pedal. Tires squealed and they shot forward.

They drove for several minutes before pulling into an empty warehouse. B was out as soon as they parked pulling off his mask. He pulled the back door open and grabbed the bag. P was rubbing his hands together as he got out.

“I can't wait to start spending this. What about you T?”

“The only thing I want is breakfast” the drifter replied. “And you boys are keeping me from it.”

The two robbers turned to face him as he brought the shotgun up to waist level. He cut them down with two quick blasts. He checked the bodies to make sure of them.

When he was certain that they were dead he pulled off the mask and jacket. Taking a handkerchief from his pocket he began wiping down everything that he had touched. Using the same cloth he searched B's pocket until he found a cellphone. It was an old fashioned flip phone. Opening it up, he pressed in a few numbers before hitting send.

“911, what's your emergency?”

He didn't answer. He placed the phone next to the bodies and walked away. He scuffed his feet as he went through the dust in an effort to obscure his footprints.

He walked the few blocks back to the cafe and sat back down. Across the street flashing lights could be seen in front of the bank. Almost immediately Ruby set his plate down.

“Suge, I saw all the lights and I was worried about you. What happened over there?”

He smiled up at her before taking a sip of coffee. “I don't know. I never made it there. I was digging in my truck for a twenty.”

“Phew. I guess today was your lucky day.”

“I guess so. Hey, could you bring me my ticket and another coffee to go sweetie?”

“Sure thing sugar pie.”

She spun on her heels and skipped off. He smiled as he took another sip. He poured warm syrup over his hotcakes and dug in. When he was done he picked up a napkin and a pen. On the napkin he wrote a note.

“To the prettiest waitress in west Texas.”

On top of that he placed a $100 bill and slid both under his plate. Ruby returned with his coffee. As soon as had it in hand he tipped a pretend hat to her causing her to giggle. Walking outside he saw the young mother holding her sons hand. Only the boy spotted him. He gave him a wave and a smile before climbing into his truck. The boy pointed and began tugging in his mother’s sleeve but she was busy speaking with a policeman. He waved again as he pulled his truck and home out of the parking lot.

“Just a few hundred more miles to go” he said to himself. He turned on the radio and Johnny Cash came on. Soon he was humming along and tapping on the steering wheel.

“Yep. Just a few hundred more miles.”