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Perspectives of a Day Gone Bad

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Carl's Perspective

If Johnny knew how to freakin' drive, I wouldn't even be here. Easy plan-a watchdog, a bagman, and a driver. You get two outta three doin' their job, it don't work. This ain't rocket science. Done it maybe half a dozen times. Same team too. Stupid.

Three to five seems rough, but lawyer says I got a shot at the low end. Rap sheet ain't clean but not terrible either. Been lucky. Coulda copped a plea like Johnny, but I ain't gutless. Told the lawyer I wanted to roll the dice; figured I could beat this. But he says, no, Johnny already turned on me. Cracked like a cold egg in hot water. So I do the time and Johnny walks.

But I'll get him. Two years, five years, whatever; I'll get him. 'Til then, I'll just count the days. And if he knows me like he should, he'll be thinkin' 'bout me.

And he'll know I'm comin'.

Johnny's Perspective

I don't really care about Carl. He's a crazy man and I wish I never met him. Thinks he's a smart guy, a tough guy. Hey, who's in the pen, smart guy?

Me, I just drive a car, that's all. Just a damn chauffeur. So I'm an accessory okay, but clean; no piece, no record. So yeah, probation? Johnny ain't stupid. I'll take that deal all day long. To get Carl out of my life and walk away? No brainer.

Cops were gonna catch Carl sooner or later. He had a history before I ever met him. Serious stuff. Never knew if he did these little hits for the cash or just for grins. Maybe both since he can't hold a job. Threatened his last boss at Jiffy Lube with a tire iron; somethin' about workin' Saturday.

Don't need that shit in my life.

Me and Lori hooked up when Carl went away. She was never really into him, I knew that. Got a kid on the way and still got my job at the plant. Gotta keep my nose clean. That's me, straight and narrow. And I ain't gonna worry about Carl.

But Arlis is worried.

Arlis took his place at the door that day, just like he always does, and I kept the car runnin' while Carl went in and did a once-around. Carl's all business. Once he made sure there were no customers and he got the nod from Arlis that there was no one comin', he went right to the clerk, showed him the piece, and grabbed the cash. Simple as that. Sometimes he slugs the clerk in the head with the .38 just for the hell of it, or maybe to make a point. Don't know if he hit him this time. Either way, less than a minute.

But Arlis is the nervous type. Thought the blond at pump 3 was lookin' at him. Did he know her? Did she know him? Don't matter. Arlis freaked and started runnin' around the corner of the building just as Carl bolted out of the store, gun in one hand and plastic bags of cash in the other. Carl jumped in the car and yells "Hit it!" Don't know if he even noticed Arlis wasn't there, but I threw the car in reverse, tires spinnin' and squealin' and dust flyin' all over the place. Carl's screamin' at me and wavin' the goddamn gun while I'm doin' a quick look around for Arlis before throwin' the car in drive, wasting just enough time, turns out, for blondie at pump 3 to make my back plate.

Ten minutes later we're legs spread and hands on the hood. And no one knows about Arlis; not the cops, not the clerk, and not even blondie at pump 3.

Cops run us in, but we ditched the dough and the gun in the dumpster behind the high school when we heard the sirens. Pump 3 got two of the plate numbers turned around and didn't even get the color of the car right. But we don't know this, we're gettin' grilled. The clerk was useless, pissin' his pants. He wouldn't or couldn't finger Carl. But I could. And I did. I had a chance to get this guy out of my life and I took it. Had to lead the cops to the cash and the gun, but so be it.

So Carl goes away for a while, but not long enough. I know Carl. He won't let this go. He'll come lookin' for me, no doubt. Carl's a crazy man.

Arlis's Perspective

Johnny told Carl he got the money out of the dumpster and saved it for him. That's nuts. No way he's sittin' on that cash and I told him I didn't believe him, but he comes by one day and puts a .38 on my table. Says it's Carl's. I don't know. Johnny says he's made peace with Carl and talks to him all the time. Says they might even do some work together again. But not with me. Carl says he's gonna get me for boltin' and wastin' his and Johnny's time lookin' for me. Says the whole mess is on me.

Wasn't my fault. I was scared. And I never said nothin' to no one about it. No way.

Johnny says Carl calls me stupid and brain dead. Says he only kept me around for laughs. Says I never should have been born. And I'm gonna wish I never was. That kinda talk makes me crazy.

Johnny says maybe I should run but he knows I can't do that. I got my regular meetings at the VA and I gotta have my meds to help me think straight.

Then one day Johnny says Carl's gettin' out tomorrow and I better watch myself. Says Carl's been talkin' bout me all the time; says Carl's like obsessed or somethin'. Then he calls me the next day, says Carl's on his way. Takin' the bus that stops in front of the pen and probably comin' right to my house, but Carl didn't come to my house. Not that day, not never.

The following week Johnny gets buzzed into the room, picks up the black phone, and talks to me through the thick glass.

"You done good, Arlis," he says. "Carl was a crazy man."

The Napping House Fucked Me Up

EMILY SHANK

I've cut myself
On the shards of unfinished stories
As I try desperately
To keep them from falling into the abyss

They slip through my fingers
And they are chased
By rivulets of crimson
The sting is like winter air
A biting reminder that
The world consumes warmth from life

In the frozen morning
My heart demands
Hermitage with those whose presence
Means warmth, sanctuary, and peace

But that is a desire forever denied
It is a wish better suited
For the colorful pages
Of a children's book.

Alexa Solonenko. *I Know Who You Are*. Photography.

