

SCARED RABBIT

Seeing the gun in his hand didn't frighten Shelley, at least *not at first*. Growing up in a small town like Finley, most folks owned a gun or two. When they weren't being used for hunting or on display at gun shows, town folks usually stored their guns and rifles safely away.

Although there were a few occasions when safety was not practiced. The last time someone was shot and killed was about ten years ago. It happened when the Barley boys, probably the most dim-witted clan in Finley, were drinking (something they did a lot of). Joseph Barley came up with the idea of playing Russian roulette. All four brothers took part in the game. It was during the second round when Brother Jacob pointed the pistol to his temple...and went to meet his Maker.

Overall, Finley was a safe place to live. Most people—especially the ones who never ventured outside of Finley—still didn't lock their doors. Not even after that incident two years ago, when three convicts escaped from the state prison in Walla Walla and had been reported to be headed towards Finley. The most folks did was to lock the latch on their screen doors and pray that the convicts would be found sooner rather than later.

Of course, there were the sporadic school break-ins or stolen cars—attributed to bored teenagers. Boredom and petty crimes were an unavoidable part of life in a small town with a population of only 5,776 residents.

The bank had been robbed last year. Shelley was off that day. The robber turned out to be Harry Jenkins. The sheriff never did determine if Harry had tried to rob the bank because he was upset that they had foreclosed on his home or if he was just trying to get back at his ex-wife, who worked as the bank's manager. Recently divorced, homeless and back on the bottle, Harry was depressed, discouraged and drunk...very drunk. But despite his problems, he was a nice guy. Most people in Finley were nice, hard-working folks.

So when trouble came to Shelley's bank teller window, she didn't recognize it. Shelley felt so sure that nothing really serious would

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ever happen, that when the man demanded money from her, she waited *politely* for him to produce a bank withdrawal slip.

The bank robber seemed puzzled and irritated at her lack of action. He thought that maybe she was slow or simple-minded. He repeated his demand, this time taking care to pronounce each word slowly, making sure that she clearly understood him.

For a moment, Shelley stared at him thinking there must be a misunderstanding or that maybe this was some type of joke. She even looked around the bank half expecting someone to pop out from around a corner and yell, "You've been punk'd!" But the man, a bit bewildered, continued to stare at her.

Something about him seemed familiar to Shelley, and it angered her. She didn't know why, but she wanted to hit him...hit him hard. She had been taking a self-defense class at the community center. Not that she expected anything to happen to her. She was just bored and besides Blake Underwood, the only fireman in Finley without a beer belly, was teaching the class. He was cute, especially now that he and Felicia were no longer a couple.

It was during the fourth week of class when Shelley started to notice a change. She couldn't put her finger on what was happening, but she felt different *somehow*. Never one for confrontations, Shelley hated it when Nell, a co-worker, would sometimes take Shelley's lunch out of the refrigerator and eat it. Of course Nell, always giggling, would say that it was a mistake and offer her lunch (some foul smelling mystery meal) to Shelley, a vegetarian, as a substitute. Shelley would politely decline Nell's offer. Hungry and annoyed, Shelley would skip lunch and return to her teller window.

This had gone on for three years, and then just last week, Shelley had walked into the company breakroom to find Nell seated at the round table. In front of her was a plastic container with a label clearly marked 'Shelley's Lunch, Please Do Not Eat. Thank You.' Shelley raced over to Nell and snatched the sandwich from her hands. Before Nell could say a word, Shelley called her 'a selfish sandwich stealing bitch.' After which, the once timid Shelley proceeded to demand that Nell not only pay for this lunch but all the lunches she had stolen (and yes, Shelley used the word stolen) from her over the years. Shocked and somewhat frightened, Nell

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gave Shelley fifty dollars and promised to pay her twenty-five dollars each week until the debt was paid.

A similar thing happened two days ago when Shelley told Da-Dawg, a conceited wannabe rapper, to turn down his music. She went on to tell him that the gibberish he called his rap lyrics were little more than a thinly veiled attempt to hide the fact that he was a misogynist. She also told him that she didn't like the way he referred to her as 'that mousy *ho* that lives across the hall from me.' Annoyed, Da-Dawg threatened Shelley, but to her surprise, she threatened him back. An argument ensued. Shelley refused to back down. Finally, at a lost for words, Da-Dawg slammed the door in her face and then turned down his music.

As Shelley continued to wait patiently for the man at her teller window to produce a withdrawal slip or leave the bank, it hit her. It was as if someone thumped her on the head. Her heart was suddenly pounding, followed by an image of the words 'You're being robbed' rushing through her mind. It was an unlikely thing for her to do, but Shelley smiled and mumbled. "Not today buddy."

"You don't want to do this," said Shelley nervously. The words tumbled out from her lips. She didn't mean to say anything and she wasn't sure why she had—like she wasn't sure why she had confronted Nell or Da-Dawg or the others. Shelley looked anxiously at the gun he had shown her hidden under his jacket. Had she been more observant, she would have noticed him in line. She would have realized that it was ninety-five degrees outside and much too warm for a coat, even the thin one he wore.

She took a deep breathe. Planting her feet firmly upon the floor, she gently bit her lower lip. A habit that started on her first day of kindergarten when Mrs. Caldwell asked Shelley if she wanted to pet the rabbits caged in the back of the classroom. Shelley raced out of the room crying, thus earning the nickname, Scared Rabbit, which had stuck with her all through high school.

Her brother, Will, a year older, now married with kids of his own still called her Scared Rabbit. She hated it. But what could she do about it. Besides it was true. She was a scared rabbit. Which was probably why she never left Finley, never even thought about leaving, not even to follow her longtime boyfriend when he went off to college.

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“I ain’t playing lady. Just give me the goddamn money and I’ll be on my way and nobody gets hurt,” said the gunman, whispering forcefully. There were no bulletproof windows at this bank like she had seen at some of the larger banks in Seattle or in Portland. This meant that nothing stood between her and the jittery gunman. He slid the canvas bag on the counter. Shelley smiled, thinking that all that was missing from the bag was a big, green dollar sign.

He appeared to be in his late twenties. His face was handsome, but deceitful...the kind of guy who got all the girls, but was also quick to leave them after he’d gotten what he wanted. Thinly built, he couldn’t have weighed more than a hundred and thirty pounds. He wore a plaid shirt and blue jeans held up by a thick black belt. Rocking slightly, he was sweating a lot. He stared at Shelley; the same way Will used to stare at her just before he would do something...anything to make her cry.

Shelley was smart, detailed oriented and usually had an excellent memory, but with the gun (beneath the counter) pointed at her, she couldn’t remember anything. She forgot what actions she was supposed to take when faced with a bank robber.

What she did know was that she was angry with this stranger. And as frightened as she was, she had to face him. She didn’t move, but continued to stare directly in his face—a brave move for her since she was just about the last person to be heroic. At least that’s the way she’d always been.

Growing up with two older brothers who used her as a punching bag, Shelley had learned early on to run away from danger. Even with her father’s support, she would still hide behind him as he scolded her brothers for whatever the latest method of torture they had inflicted upon her. Even now as an adult, she avoided any altercations with her brothers.

She was especially afraid of *Will the Tormentor*. While most brothers view their little sister as someone to protect and maybe tease a little, Will had made it his mission in life to make her cry everyday. Whether it was destroying her dolls or crapping on her clothes, Will made life at home a living hell. He never missed a day to find some way to make her miserable. There would always be this look of satisfaction on his face when he succeeded. Will was the reason Shelley moved out on her own at sixteen. She had worked part-time at Plaza Time, saving all of her money for an apartment. It

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was a tiny studio just over 400 square feet, but she was safe from Will's torments.

"Come on!" said the robber. "I'll shoot your ass and everybody else in here. Now give me the goddamn money, bitch!"

Shelley swallowed hard. The saliva sat in her dry throat. "No!" Shelley said firmly. She diverted her eyes for a moment as she tried to figure out who was this person inside of her. Why was she saying these things? Just give him the money dummy, she thought. "Don't be a hero." That's it, thought Shelley. Now it was coming back to her. It was the bank's policy to give up the money. Tina Jenkins, the manager, was adamant about this. "Don't be a hero," she repeatedly said to the tellers (Nell, Shelley and Tina's daughter, Candice).

This policy was especially enforced after last year's bumbling bank robbery left a teller, one customer (Mr. Turner) and Tina injured, none seriously of course. Harry was too drunk to shoot straight. And old man Turner was hurt when he tripped over a table as he attempted to rush out of the bank. Harry was quickly wrestled to the ground by the security guard, a retired police officer. The beer that Harry had consumed to give him courage had also caused him to be a clumsy robber.

Shelley was certainly no hero, yet she repeated the word, 'no', to the robber. "I think you should leave now," she said, "before you get hurt." Her eyes pointed at the overweigh security guard acting as doorman for incoming customers.

The gunman quickly sized up the guard. Using his head as a pointer, "Him," replied the gunman. "I can take him. I'll take him out right now if you don't give me what I want." He redirected his gun.

"Don't!" she raised her voice.

Her tone startled him. He trembled a bit and quickly placed his hand on the trigger. "I ain't playing with you lady," he said through gritted teeth, pointing the weapon at her again. "Give me the goddamn money or I'll shoot up this whole place." He was careful to make sure that no one saw the gun but her.

"Don't be stupid," said Shelley. Out came her father's tone of authority. "You don't want to hurt anyone."

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Baffled, the gunman frowned, “Don’t want to hurt anyone. Bitch, you don’t know me! You don’t know what’s going on in my head.” Nervous, he jogged slightly.

“No, I don’t know you, *sir*. But what I do know is that what you’re doing is wrong,” she said. “Just walk away. No harm done.”

“I ain’t leaving here without my money,” he said, gripping the gun.

The security guard walked slowly over to the bench near Shelley. He had sensed that something wasn’t right about the fellow at her window. The guard smiled at Shelley looking for a sign of trouble in her face. Seeing nothing, he decided to hold tight and watch the odd customer from a distance.

Located down the street from Wolfchase Casino, it wasn’t unusual for people to enter the bank looking anxious and upset. With one unfortunate roll of the dices, gone was the money meant for the mortgage. The results being that many unlucky gamblers came to the bank seeking pity and a loan.

The gunman tilted his head, smiled at the security guard and then returned his attention to Shelley.

She smiled at him. Where this courage was coming from she didn’t know, but she liked it. In a firm voice she asked, “Can I help you with anything else, *sir*?”

Again, he looked puzzled. Silent, they stared at each other. It was a battle of wills. He didn’t know what to do. He hadn’t encountered this problem at the last two banks he had robbed. The tellers had nervously and quickly turned over the money, and he had hastily exited the banks before they could alert the guards.

Frustration grew on his face. “I mean business, bitch!”

“So do I, *sir*,” said Shelley. She felt an unfamiliar sense of confidence when she added, “Now if there’s nothing else that I can help you with, would you please leave the bank?”

He raised his gun slowly. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the guard leaning over the check-writing counter, watching him.

The robber quickly returned the gun to its hiding place inside his coat. He formed a gun with his hand and shot at Shelley. “You’re crazy. You know that?”

“No *sir*, I’m not. Crazy people try to rob banks,” she responded smiling and then waved her hand as if shooing him away. “You’d better get going.”

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“This is sick!” he said, as he moved away from the window.

“Sir,” said Shelley. The man turned around. “Have a good day.” Shelley watched him run, like a scared rabbit, out the door just as two squad cars drove upon the curb. Frightened, the man dropped his gun. Hopping out of their cars, the officers surrounded the would-be robber. They immediately shoved him against the side of the bank. After a quick pat down, he was handcuffed.

When the guard finished talking with the police, he walked over to Shelley. “You did a smart thing, *honey*...hitting the silent alarm,” said the guard. “I thought there was something funny about that guy. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” said Shelley, in a cheery voice.

“Good job. But you should have alerted me,” said the guard, a little disappointed.

“Nah, I was okay, Dad,” she said. “I can handle myself.”

“Since when?” asked the father playfully.

“Since now,” answered Shelley, looking out the window. “You know, that guy kind of looks like Will. Huh Dad?”

Her father looked at the robber as the police were loading him in the car. “You’re right. He does kinda look like your brother. Speaking of Will, if you don’t want me and your mother to invite him to dinner tomorrow, we won’t. I know how Will can be a jerk sometimes. I’d hoped he would have grown out of it by now.”

Shelley smiled excitedly. “I have a feeling that after tomorrow Will won’t be bothering me anymore.”

Laughing, her father asked, “What’s gotten into you?”

“I don’t know Dad, but I like it,” answered Shelley. She formed a gun with her fingers and fired at the bank robber. “Bang! Bang! Who’s the scared rabbit now?”

The End

Think About This...

Deep:

- Is Shelley a hero? Or should she be fired?

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Deeper:

- Is there ever a right time to confront a gunman?

Truly Deep (To Thine Own Self Be True):

- What would you do if you were Shelley?

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