

I'm one of the most screwed people in the entire planet. I'm a broken garbage truck and everyone else is the crap that tries to ride on me but just sits there starting to smell. I looked up into the heavens, and watched the clouds swirl around uselessly. I'm giving up, I thought. Just like every single thing I've ever started, I'm giving up.

Moments ago I had been fired from my stupid job. I was another brainless office worker who had failed to complete his progress report. My hideous little boss had fired me faster than a bullet.

I thought of John. Sweet John, my roommate and best friend since I gave him freshman orientation. He was currently working as a bagger boy to get enough money to go to a nice college. If I can't pay the rent, being the nice guy he is, he'll pay it for me. That means he would be like 80 years old by the time he finally got enough money to buy a plane ticket to get to his college, let alone tuition. Oh John, what have I done to you? He was probably standing at the end of McKarters supermarket packing some old lady's bag, dreaming of his future degree. I'm a dream crusher, that's what I am: a worthless no good dream crusher. I'm an anchor that weighs too much and pulls itself and the whole little boat behind it into the dark mucky abyss of the ocean.

There I was, standing the middle of the sidewalk at 12:40 in the afternoon with not even enough spare money to buy a hot dog from a street stand. New York city continued blaring around me, honking horns, people yelling just the general noise of the Big Apple. Then I saw John and my future. It was a wanted poster, something I had seen on the way to work everyday. It had a picture or sketch of some lawbreaker with the reports of his whereabouts and the details of the crime. Yeah, I'm crazy but the thing that stuck out to me was the cash reward of finding the person. It was like a message from the man upstairs himself.

"Did someone die?" John asked, a worried look on his face

"Nope" I replied eagerly.

"Then why were you waiting at the door?" He closed the door behind him and set his bag on the table next to the fridge.

"Because I got fired." I grinned.

"You what? But..." I stopped him mid sentence.

"No buts, just listen. So I was walking home from my ex-job when I saw a wanted poster."

John opened the fridge and pulled out a purple Gatorade. “And...” He grabbed an apple off the kitchen counter and shot me a quizzical look.

“Well, the reward money is big.” I hinted.

“Nope, no. Never. That’s absolutely not happening.” He spat.

“But...”

“No buts you said.”

“But, our future, John...” I whined like a toddler, kneeling down on the dusty wood floor. “I want you to do this with me...”. I would have said yes, I know because I was wearing my “Do what I want face”. The kind of convincing face I thank for my ex-job.

“Okay... let’s think about this. You want me, to take a weapon. Hunt down a criminal of the law, KIDNAP him and drag him to the police for money.” John stared me down. “Yes, exactly.” I replied. “No.” He turned around, hoping to shut me out. “Okay John,” My last ditch effort, “let me just tell you how much. \$1,000,000. And its not like he killed more than one person!” I pleaded. He stood still for a moment.

“No.”

“Please?”

“Peter.” He sighed. That’s my name by the way. Peter Collins. “No.” He just nodded his head, like I was a dog who peed on his carpet and was too stupid to know that’s bad..

We stood there, in the small apartment, with only the sounds of John crunching on his apple.

“Well, I’m sorry you can’t come along, but I’m still going.” I turned on him and faced the oak door leading out of room 245. In the corner of my eye I saw him. His face was blank, the apple resting in his hand.

I closed the door behind me. I stood by there for a few minutes then I heard John let out a sigh.

“Wait, I’m coming.” He burst out of the door. “You need my protection if we are embarking on this eminent death trap.” I smiled and shook his hand.

“Glad to have you on the team, buddy.”

John rolled his eyes then asked “What’s next Mr. Mastermind?”

I grinned. “We get guns.”

John followed in close pursuit through the rush hour traffic. My phone's GPS was set to a local gun shop. The GPS estimated five minutes, but with the tight packed traffic 20 minutes would be more accurate.

After only 16 minutes we were standing outside of the Callisters' Gun Shop. A large neon sign illuminated the words "We Sell Firearms. First Purchase Discount"

I looked at John, "Ooo, a discount!" He just nodded *no*. The inside of the store was filthy, with large weapons mounted on the walls and ammo on small shelves surrounding the store. At the front, a larger man with a bright red face was arguing with a skinny store employee. The customer complained a little more, then stormed out of the store, mumbling something about recoil. I could see the butt of a gun sticking out of his pocket. John sent me a worried look, then held his breath and approached the glass counter.

"Hello, we would like to buy guns." John told the employee.

The man, whose name tag read "Cody" sighed then replied with "Well good, because that's basically the only thing we sell."

John bit his tongue and I could tell he was holding back from scolding in his typical father like way that I was all too used to.

"Yes, can we have two guns please?"

The man sighed again "Yeah, well, it's not that easy." I looked over at John.

"Can't we just have two guns?" I pleaded.

The man sighed for a third time. "No. It will be around a five day wait until we can check to make sure you're okay to have them." John sighed. In five days I would have no pay and John would be set back by over \$200 of his college money.

"But." I let out on last worried plea.

"Dude please," Cody replied, "You're literally the most annoying thing I've encountered all day." John was already walking out the door when I had an idea.

I felt myself running down the New York sidewalk pushing away kids and adults to catch up with the large man from in the store. John staggered behind me trying to catch up.

"Hey you!" I yelled at him, "Wait up!"

He stopped and shot me an angry look. "What the heck do you want?" He asked me.

"You're the guy from the gun shop, right?!" I asked. He looked taken back for a minute. "I heard you in the store, you dislike your gun, am I right?"

“If you want it you have to pay up” he informed me.

“How much?” I asked, looking at my feet. John had caught up to us, and he was breathing heavily behind me. “I have about twenty dollars”

The man stood there in disbelief. “You’re kidding right? This gun is worth \$100 dollars.”

I sensed John getting anxious. I pulled out my wallet and took out two twenties, my last “savings”. John did the same and came up with a twenty and three ten dollar bills. He painfully handed them to me.

“Is \$90 okay?” I asked him.

“You look like good people who won’t do any harm, am I correct?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then \$90 is fine.”

He handed me the gun. John handed him our money, said good day, and we parted ways.

The minute the man had left John gave me an angry look.

“Well, now we’re completely broke” he said.

“But John, on the bright side,” I held up what my best guess would have been a pistol. “We have a gun!”

John shook his head. “Any idea how much ammo is in there?” He questioned. “We don’t need ammo John, you heard me promise that man I won’t hurt anyone.” I replied.

“What? No ammo?”

“Yup!”

“How! If we can’t fire it why did we just *waste* 90 dollars?” John wore a frightened face, his hands started to shake.

“Its to psych out the enemy. Intimidate them. We are both way too stupid to wield a loaded weapon.”

“You’re a huge idiot.”

John grumbled behind me, but I knew he agreed. Step one was complete, I mentally noted in my head. Now for the hard part, step two.

It was then when the police car rolled onto the sidewalk and two cops jumped out, gun in their hands.

“Freeze!” The first one nudged his gun toward the car. Behind me was an open sewer drain, and a brick building. Even if I was in a fit position to run, there was nowhere to go.

“Up against the car, you’ve been reported for being in possession of illegal firearms.”

The fat man squealed on us, and scored himself \$90. I reached into my pocket and pulled out the handgun. Then in one fluid motion I threw it behind me into the sewer drain. I closed my eyes, squeezing them together praying the cops hadn’t seen.

“UP AGAINST THE CAR!” He yelled again.

The car was warm from the afternoon sun, and I felt the butt of the police’s gun jabbing against me.

“Search him McCoy!” The cop standing behind me said. I felt McCoy pat down my side, checking the pockets of my jeans for the weapon.

“Nothing, Johnson, they’re free to go.” The gun came off my back and I pulled my face away. John shot a puzzled look my way, and I mouthed the words “tell you later.”

I explained to John what happen, and after people stopped starrng we went to look.

“Wait, hold up, you threw the gun down the sewer? We spent \$90 on that!” I had thought about that as well.

“Well, we could get lucky,” I told him. I walked over to the drain, praying for a miracle.

“Oh my god, we are the luckiest people in the whole world!” John announced.

I walked over, and saw the gun, perched on a loose slate of concrete. It had nearly avoided at least a 19-foot watery grave.

“Grab it!” John said. I reached down and picked it up. Holding it in my hand, I sighed a breath of relief.

Back at the apartment I put the wanted sign out on the kitchen table.

“This is him,” I said pointed to a man Identified as Kurt Mackey.

“Wait, no, you’re kidding! This guy’s been charged with murder!” John spat.

“Only one person, calm down.” I told him, “It’s not like he’s a nut or anything.”

John looked to be all nerves. Next I pulled out a map and circled in red where the wanted sign said he was last seen.

“We’ll go there.” I told John.

“When? The rent is due in...” He looked over at the calendar “Two days.”

I grinned. “Okay, then tomorrow night. We have until then to prepare.”

The next night everything was ready. I had a pair of handcuffs that were discounted value at a local thrift shop, and had no key, (I left that detail out when I told John.) also an industrial strength black rope.

“Okay, nice work. Here’s what I’ve got.” John set the kitchen knife down on the table, then... “Firecrackers? Why?” I asked.

“Because you said that we have no ammo. I’ve watched “Home Alone” enough times to know that they sound just like gunshots.” John replied.

“Smart.” We stood there for a moment, me smiling, John trying his hardest to hold back from doing the same.

We had driven for a while, giving John a chance to rattle with nervous energy until we had reached the circled area.

“Are you sure we should do this?” he asked.

“Yes John. No going back.” We parked two blocks away from the suspected location, and got out. The streets were empty, except of the occasional person sitting on their porch.

We had walked for a few minutes, when we saw the red and blue lights.

“Crap, what’s going on here?” John asked. Police cars were parked facing a house. A large man stood in front, with a bullhorn.

“Let the hostages go!” He shouted up into the house.

“Nope.” John said, turning his back and walking away.

“Okay, John, you can back out now and leave me all alone, or...” I shouted to him.

“I hate you so much right now,” he replied, turning back around.

We pulled aside, and sat down behind a bush. The police were shouting something up into the house, and the sirens were blaring.

“Okay, here’s what we do.” I said, “We enter the house next to that one,” I said, pointing to the house in front of us. It looked burnt and abandoned. “Then,” I continued, “we jump into that open window and apprehend the criminal.”

We snuck up the path that leads to the door of the abandoned house. I pushed it, and it opened, to my luck it was unlocked.

“Okay,” John breathed. We rushed up the blackened steps, to the top floor. The house walls were blackened and the house looked ram-shackled. I looked around until I found the window facing the criminal’s house.

“John,” I whispered loudly. He came over. “Okay, give me the rope.” I announced.

John handed me the black cord. The top floor was at least 16 feet above the ground. I doubt I would die if I fell, but a few broken bones.

“Okay.”

I flung the rope over to the house.

“Now what?” John asked. I climbed into the windowsill.

“I jump.”

I swear I heard the angel’s sing as I flew threw the air. I looked up and grabbed the open windowsill of the other house.

“Oh my god, Peter, are you okay?” John yelled over.

Despite an aching in my arms, I felt fine. I hauled myself up and over the window and safely inside. I held the rope tight, and nodded to John. He disappeared for a few moments, I imagine securing the rope on his side. The he came up.

“Now crawl across!” I whispered to him.

Behind me, light shined through the crack of the door. I imagine that on the other side was the criminal. This would be difficult; the police said he had hostages. I was panicking inside my head, worried. What if a innocent person got hurt? What if it was my fault? I had to erase my worry for John's sake. He flung himself over the side, hanging onto the rope. The night air was chilly and he flew through the open window.

“This isn’t very fun.”

“Yes it is!” I reassured him. John hung there, looking at the ground.

“Please!” he yelled over to me. He pulled hand over hand, and then let go. Only one hand, he hung there, his face going red. Please, god let him be okay. John struggled then grabbed the rope and climbed the rest of the way over. He was still and stiff.

“Okay,” he whispered. “Now what?”

I didn’t have any idea.

“Look John, if we are going to operate as a team I can’t do all the thinking now can I?” A panicked look crawled over his face.

“You have no idea what to do?” He said in a flat scratchy tone.

“No I don’t.” I replied.

“Peter, gosh, why did you drag me into this mess?” He backed away. “I’m going back!” he shouted

“You can’t,” I told him.

“Yes I can!” he couldn’t and he knew it. I saw it on his face and the way he said it.

I tip toed back over the floor and cracked the door open a sliver. I moved my head up against the door and peeked through. What I saw relieved me. The criminal was sitting there under the window, alone. The room was empty except for him. And just to add to my relief, he was crying. Just like me, this poor guy was in over his head.

“Well?” John whispered.

“He’s actually alone and crying.” I said, grinning. “Wait, for real? Is he armed?” John asked.

“Yes, but I have a plan.” I reassured him. “Ready?”

I lit the fireworks, and then stormed into the room. I pulled the pistol out of my pocket and pointed it at the man on the floor.

“Put your weapon down!” I yelled.

The man jumped and threw his gun across the room.

“Please, don’t hurt me!” He begged. The fireworks went off and the “criminal” burst into tears. Outside the police sirens wailed and I heard yelling and screaming. I ran over and tugged the thrift shop handcuffs around his wrist. I pulled them tight and he let out a little squeal. Behind me John was waiting nervously at the door. I pushed him out into the hallway, and John came out from behind the door, almost daring himself to look. I just smiled at him. I lead the criminal down the stairs, and they creaked below our weight. The prisoner was shaking; the night air was sneaking down our backs and stinging at our bare skin. John creaked along behind me, wobbling nervously, like when you just get off of a rollercoaster.

I pushed open the door and the red and blue light blinded me. I heard someone walk over. The headlights of the vehicles were on full strength.

“Hands up, weapons down!”

A few minutes later we were sitting in the back seat of a police car, speeding toward the station. That’s right, we had gotten arrested.

“You boys are lucky that you captured that guy.” The cop in front of us said. “Your jail time for owning an unlicensed firearm might be shortened by at least three years.” John was sitting behind me, shaking his legs nervously.

“I can’t believe this!” I said. “We should be celebrated as heroes! Do you know what we just did!”

The cop rolled his eyes. “Relax, I’m kidding.” He told me. “I’m willing to bet that we can make an exception for you guys. I mean, you didn’t even have any ammo!”

John was still nodding his head.

“What about the reward?” I asked. There was silence for a few minutes, and then he replied

“Dunno.”

John was breathing heavily next to me.

“But, this is was supposed a happy ending!” I scolded, “Not stupid real life!”

John was nodding even more next to me and I could see tears welling up in his eyes.

John had left, it was just me sitting and waiting. I promised John I would give John all of the reward money. I didn’t care about me anymore.

“Mr. Collins?” A suited man stepped forward, his face tired and slightly angry.

“Yes, that’s me.” I said.

“We have closely considered your case. We came to a decision that it is unfair and unjust to not give you the reward.”

He set a large check down on the table addressed to “cash”.

“But, we have taken a chunk out of the prize money to pay for ticket.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. In a way, I had gotten my happy ending. In the end, all the reward money went to John and he left for the University of California. He gave me his emergency savings, enough to buy a nice suit. I’m currently going onto my fifth job interview, and I’m thinking this will be the one.