

Heist

A man sat alone in a room; windows shut, blinds closed, the darkness only permeated by a lone streetlight shining through a broken shutter shade. A cigarette glowed in the black, providing a small orange anomaly of warmth in the otherwise frigid house. The man took an exaggerated drag off of the stick before hearing the trademark ring of his cell phone. It lit up with blue lights and vibrated and danced on the table that was placed in front of him. His eyes narrowed as he noticed who was calling: Steven.

The man didn't dislike Steven, per se, but Steven was an odd boy. As far as it concerned him, Steven was just the skinny pale kid that just-so-happened to be good enough with technology in order to work with him. If nothing else, Steven was good at what he did... even if he was a bit skittish (and a drug problem didn't particularly help him either). "Hello." The word came out of the man's mouth, mingling with the smoke and enticing it further and further into the unfurnished room that was seemingly engulfed in a void of shade.

"Are you ready?"

It was meant as a question, but it rang hollow and emotionless. Steven didn't actually care if the man was ready or not. He was focused on if the man could perform the task that they had decided to complete together, and with their third associate. Steven was all business. No emotions, no second-guessing, nothing. They were prepared.

The man grunted out something reminiscent of a "yes" before clicking the phone shut. What had it been, twenty seconds? No matter. The phone had over five-hundred minutes on it and the man would only need a five in case something went wrong (and it wouldn't). The keys to a black Escalade scraped against the table as the man picked them up, and vanished from the room in one fluid moment. The cigarette was still burning on the table as the front door slammed shut.

The engine roared to life. The speedometer lit up the area behind the steering wheel, and the various buttons controlling aspects of the car formed an abstract Christmas tree's worth of lights and colors across his dashboard. He lowered the driver's window about half way and the cold December air rushed into the car, overcoming any remnant warmth that was left in the giant SUV. The man didn't have any heat tolerance, and loathed sweating. His brief flashback to the first time he drove this car away from the dealer flashed into his mind; how it was winter, and the AC had been turned up full-blast during the test drive. The salesman was too polite to say anything but the man could see goose bumps tracing his forearms. *Snap out of it.* The sudden interjection had come from his conscience, and he quickly drove out of the driveway in obedience.

Nicotine? Nicotine. The man quickly popped another cigarette into his mouth while waiting at a red light before getting on the highway; as nobody was around to see a bright yellow flame bathe his face in light. His sullen green eyes were only visible for the brief instant before the cigarette caught flame and he drew the tobacco smoke into his lungs. It burned a little, but it was a good burn. A sensation, A feeling.

He was *alive*.

The light turned green and the man didn't think twice before he put his foot on the floor. The tires caught and he sailed onto the highway on-ramp. Cars were still scarce for some odd reason. *Faster.* He gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles turned white and popped. *Accelerate. Go.* He flew through the night as the crescent moon enclosed him in a pale light as he passed by a distant graveyard.

Miles away, near the Liberty Bank off of Fourth Street, inside of a locally-owned coffee shop sat Officer David Rogers, his head in his hands as the waitress brought him his black coffee without saying a word. "Two more weeks," said Rogers. "Then I retire, leave this dead-end job, and go home to Delilah." He looked out of the window almost like he was in some stereotypical music video for one of those new bands that always seemed to pop up, but of course he wasn't. His reality was much less exultant than being paid large sums of money to look out of a fucking *window*. Lights of Chicago lit up the street he was by, and people passed by in monotone gaits

all to reach their individual destinations. His eyes were red and he hadn't slept for a solid 56 hours. The poor man had no idea what he was about to become a part of.

Steven walked outside with his laptop in a messenger bag. When the man stopped his car, Steven climbed in awkwardly; his slender frame coupled with his abnormally tall height gave him a natural clumsiness. "Hey Daniel."

Daniel. Only the man's mother had called him by his full name. "Call me Dan, please."

"Sure thing, Dan."

And with that, they drove.

The man knew exactly where he was driving. There was a white truck that was parked by Pier 22 in Chicago that was *supposed* to be filled with bedding; instead, Steven had set up a portable lab. That was his destination. Steven stayed silent the rest of the ride, but promptly got out once they arrived, and moved quickly to lift the back of the truck only tall enough for him to roll in. Moments later, several men climbed into the back of Daniel's Escalade. This was all a part of the plan they had set forth months before. One of them grunted a mere "Go," to Dan, and he quickly accelerated to his next destination: Liberty Bank, off of Fourth Street.

Dan pulled into an alley about a block away from the bank. The men traversed from the car to the trunk in an instant, taking various weapons and explosives out and stuffing them in various pockets and straps. Daniel stared at them for an instant before looking down at the back seat that his children had sat in less than a day ago. Regret welled in his stomach but he wasn't such a fool as to say anything to these men. Instead he buried it the best he could and flipped the car into park.

"15 minutes."

The same man that had spoken before now said this to him, and Dan immediately started counting down the seconds in his mind. *One, two, three, four, five, criminal.* His mind interrupted his thought process entirely, and it was damnably hard to count when his own conscience was throwing words at him that he thought he would never be called. *Dirtbag,*

fugitive, scum. He kept counting; it was the only way to hold back the tears from welling in his eyes.

The men entered Liberty Bank without a sound, quickly pulled ski masks over their heads, and pointed their guns at the tellers. "I see one hand reach for the silent alarm and all of you won't be waking up tomorrow." The sentence rang coldly, and each bank teller put their hands in the air without a sound. This whole plan was designed to take no more than fifteen minutes.

Daniel waited impatiently for the men, rasping his fingers on the steering wheel. *15 minutes? Ha!* In reality it had been about seven, but Dan counted along with his quickening heartbeat and lost track. His paranoia had overtaken him almost completely as he touched the pistol he had strapped under his left arm. He couldn't breathe all the way in. *What if they need help carrying the money?* The thought was as volatile and spontaneous as could be, and yet the nerve-stricken Dan took it as fact as soon as he thought of it. He exploded out of the driver-door and ran to the bank without a second thought.

Officer Rogers witnessed a man dressed entirely in black run into the bank. He cocked an eyebrow and couldn't help but feel his instinct kick in. *Something was wrong. Wasn't the bank supposed to be closing?* He exited the shop, leaving some money on the table, and walked across the busy street and onto the first of the many stairs leading up to the front of the Liberty Bank.

The men had just gotten done. One kept an eye on the tellers as they left, and another walked in front of the one with the two bags full of banded hundred-dollar bills. They walked slowly at first, and were almost to the door before their estranged colleague burst through the door. His eyes widened as he saw how quickly they had gotten the job done. Steven had communicated with them from his small lab, telling them where the alarm systems were, if there were a guard on duty where he would be, and where the exits were. They had done their job to elitist standards, and yet they had no idea what to do when their driver burst through the door and nearly took a bullet in his torso. He mumbled some gibberish before he walked out slowly behind them, slowly feeling relief.

Rogers didn't even have time to react when he saw the four men walk out of the bank. One of them shot at him, and hit him square in the chest, incapacitating him. He saw red and fell to the ground in a heap, but he saw one of them stagger behind the rest as they scrambled away, almost studying him, but then he ran away too. Officer Rogers reached for his radio and called for an ambulance and backup. He had been shot in the same location before; it wouldn't kill him, but he still cursed every omnipotent power he could think of as he lied there in pain awaiting assistance.

Dan sprinted after the men, who hadn't said a word to him as he left the bank. *They just shot a cop. Nobody was supposed to get hurt.* His mind raced but he couldn't comprehend any of it. He caught up to them and quickly jumped into the car, starting it and driving away, back to pick up Steven.

What have I gotten myself into?