

Midlife Post-Apocalypse

My Colt 1911 sits fully loaded on the seat beside me. I admit I bought the damn thing because it looked real mean. Out of the rows of military assault rifles and modern Glocks, the polished steel frame and cherry wood grips drew me in. “45 ACP. Hollow points. It’ll blow a man’s head clean off.” The pawnshop owner said. Grinning like an idiot, I imagined staring down the sights and shooting my boss with it. For three grand I got the pistol, two magazines, and five cases of bullets. Supposedly it was a bargain, but hell if I know, I’ve never fired a gun in my life.

Not a car guy either, though I’ve dreamt of being a mechanic since I was a kid. Unfortunately, my astute father insisted that I become a lawyer like him and since rising to the rank of partner at his firm, I’ve exchanged the same white, boring sedan for a new one every two years. I guess that’s why the black Corvette beckoned me. The dash had no GPS, no self-driving feature, not even a radio. I peered under the hood as if I knew what I was looking at. The engine was rusted as if it had spent a year under the sea, but it roared when you gave it the juice. It was simple, classic, and damn sexy.

With the car and gun, I went straight to the nearest courthouse, signed the papers, and paid the ten-grand fee. The guard took my ID and incinerated it. Within seconds, the government seized every one of my accounts, including the 529 in my name for Ron Jr. A keystroke and

Ethan Philbin

rubber stamp rendered my marriage with Shireen null. At that moment I became a non-citizen. A Sovereign.

The old judge leaned over his bench and squinted. Part of me wanted to put a bullet between his eyes, committing my inaugural non-crime. I could do that y'know-- kill a judge. Technically I could do whatever I wanted now, but the auto turrets in the courtroom would turn me into hamburger if I so much as scratched my nose funny. The judge said, "You have one hour. After that, every hunter in the world will know your name, your face, and your last known location. Best you leave now, son."

Hunters Shmunters. I'm not worried about all that. With the help of my nest egg, I'm better equipped to handle the wastelands than most poor schmucks. Almost always, when guys sign the papers, it's because they've got nothing left or they're criminals looking for a plea-bargain. Me? I got out because I wanted out.

I blasted out of the city a free and happy man. At the city walls, I bribed the guard to open the gates and carjack me. That was five minutes ago.

Now I'm doing a buck-ten on the wasteland highway. There is nothing around but sand and death, with the next stop being two hundred miles away. The engine is burning up, the chassis shakes my bones, but I've got to get as far as I can from the city.

Shireen will be pissed. She knows by now that I left grid because she'll see the missing hundred grand out of our joint account. She's probably calling this instant, but I threw the phone away last night. Who needs her negativity anyway?

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Little Ron will be fine. I'd be surprised if he'd even care. The last time we spoke, he mentioned wanting to become a copyright lawyer or something. I'm not sure of the specifics. I wasn't listening.

The engine pops and steam billows out from underneath the hood. The car shudders over to the side of the road and breaths its last breath. Damn. Opening the hood, I reach down for the first nob I see; the radiator cap.

The hood slams shut after no progress is made on the engine. With all four blistered fingers in my mouth, I survey the surroundings. The desert sun beams down and sweat puddles around my eyes. Pink blotches on my arm remind me of the sun-screen I forgot to buy. The city shimmers behind heat waves in the distance. I'm not even four miles out.

An idea comes to mind. I'll kill the first person who comes down this road and steal their car. Yeah, that's a fine idea. It's what an outlaw would do and I'm an outlaw now. Taking the pistol out of the seat I point down the open wasteland. There is nothing to shoot at but getting a feel for the gun is better than no experience at all. Okay, focus. Just pull the trigger and try not to wince.

Click.

...Does Shireen have enough money to live comfortably until she can find a job? Would my father pitch in for Ron Jr. schooling?

Click. What is wrong with this gun?

I mean, my father would pitch in, right? He wasn't happy I married Shireen in the first place, as he much preferred Erica, but surely he's grown to love her over the years. Right?

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Click.

Maybe I should have taken the cash out of my retirement instead of our savings. Shit.

I rack the slide like Rambo and a cartridge flies out and hits me in the eye. My shoulders already ache under the weight of the stupid steel frame. Bracing my feet and closing my eyes, I ready myself for the blast. Slowly now, just squeeze the trigger.

Click.

God. Damn. It. Where is the safety?

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