

Raymond was hunched forward leaning on the counter of his bar. His left was stroking down his mustache in a rhythmic matter and his right was clutching his beer.

Usually he did refrain from booze, being a barkeeper was dangerous in a certain way. There were always instances when you had to take a drink with your customers to keep them happy and thus keeping the peace and keeping the flow of money. It was easy to become addicted and you were at the source of the stuff.

Uncle Jared told him that a man needs rules. Especially a man in his line of work. Especially with friends like Raymond has.

But today was one of *those* days. One of the many days he broke one of his rules.

He took another large sip and looked around dimly lit bar. The yellow light reflected of the wood boarding and the red leather padding of the benches. The Jazz Music was playing barely loud enough to drown out the chatter of the four youngens that occupied his establishment. Four knuckleheads that were the big-shots around here. And refused to pay for their drinks.

"I should move," Raymond thought to himself. Drugs and gangs and violence. Sometimes he sympathized with the white man.

When the door opened Raymond glanced at the door, stopped and looked again. A whitey?

The gang stopped their chatter to look up at the sudden intruder. Raymond opened his mouth to ask himself a silent question when the guy in jeans, T-Shirt, and NY-Cap drew his gun, held it with two hands and started firing at his four patrons. The muzzle flashed eight times with loud bangs and all four of the black kids sank into the seats.

Raymond dropped his beer and jumped behind the counter but the stranger's guy was already aimed at him.

Bang!

Raymond's shoulder was jerked back and a searing pain consumed his mind as he hit the floor.

"Motherfucker!"

"You jumped," said a calm voice, "why does everyone jump? You know you can't adjust your trajectory in the air right? A clay pigeon and on this range?"

Raymond stemmed his feet against the counter and pushed himself up. He groaned in pain and turned his head to look at the gun he had under the counter as the shooter walked towards the bar. His steps stopped.

"There is beer on the floor, barkeeper. If you want to attract customers you should at least keep your establishment clean."

Baffled by what happened in the last thirty seconds Raymond tried to push himself further towards the weapon but stopped the moment he heard the white guy walking again.

The guy looked over the counter at him with a bright smile on his face. "Hi, how are you?"

Raymond barked out a painful "what the fuck?," as he put his left hand on his throbbing right shoulder. He could not make out any of the assailant's features under the shadow of his cap. He was neither fat nor slim, average height, cleanly shaved.

The stranger put his gun away behind his back while Raymond moaned in pain and confusion as his yellow shirt was dyed in an almost brown shade of red by the blood oozing from his wound. Clenching his teeth and taking some ragged breaths Raymond looked at the figure with hazy eyes.

The guy grabbed a clean glass and filled it with a rum and took a big gulp.

"Ahh, that's the life! You want one too? You're Raymond right?"

"What do you want," Raymond barked.

"Nothing really."

The barkeeper took some hasty but deep breaths to calm his mind.

"Get out."

"Why?"

"The cops are coming."

“Don’t be ridiculous, nobody calls the cops here.”

Raymond’s mind was racing.

“The gang will rip you to pieces, asshole.”

“They won’t come in,” said the guy with a smile, “I paid the biggest nigger to stop them.”

The black man pressed his eyes shut. “Take the money and fuck off.”

The man stepped closer and drew his gun again to aim it at the barkeepers head.

“Money? Nah... I’m going to kill you now.”

Ray’s eyes went wide.

“No! Please! Just take the money! Please!”

“But you know my face, you’ll tell on me.”

“I won’t! Please! I’ll do anything!”

“Oh yeah? Prove it?”

Raymond looked up at the figure looming over him.

“How? Anything!”

The man took out a knife out of his pocket and tossed it towards Raymond.

“Cut off one of your fingers,” he beamed.

“What?”

“A finger. Cut it off.”

The barkeeper looked at the knife, back at the the man and glanced then at the gun under the counter. It was only five feet away. Too far, he knew that.

“If I do it you’ll let me live?”

“Yeah, sure whatever,” he said turning back to his drink.

Raymond, still slumped against the wall grabbed the knife, and tried to open it but his left arm went completely numb aside from the pain in his shoulder. He fumbled with the knife for a minute, the whitey observing him curious. It took a couple of desperate tries but Ray clenched the blade between his fingernails and put the casing against his leg to open the pocket knife. Tears were running down his face. He was desperate. But the sooner he got rid of the man the sooner he could call for a medic.

“What other chance do I have” he thought to himself. He lay the knife it in his crotch and grabbed the handle. Then he slowly moved it towards the limb left arm that was laying flat on the ground.

“Take the pinkie or the ring finger and cut at the joints, that will work best.”

Raymond looked up at the figure as if there was a chance this was all just a joke but his guest just looked down at him.

He couldn’t make out much of his face in the dimly lit bar and with the cap but he saw a smile.

“Go on.”

Ray turned around to face his arms. Tears ran down his face as he moved the shaking blade towards his numb hand. Carefully he put the blade on the skin creases of the joint of his pinkie. He clenched his eyes shut and pushed the blade down.

Moving his good hand slowly downward as he pushed the blade back and forth he felt a strange tingling sensation. Then his hand felt resistance.

Raymond turned his head away, upwards towards his visitor. He couldn’t bear to watch at his cut of limb or the blood that was pooling on the floor. He opened his eyes.

“WOW! You really did it!”

“I- please, sir!”

“I didn’t think you would actually do it!”

The white man chugged down the rest of his glass of rum down in one swig.

“I’m gonna shoot you now.”

Ray froze. “But...”

“It’s kinda funny really. Can you *really* trust an intelligent being? How am I supposed to believe that you wouldn’t tell to me on me after I shot you and forced you to mutilate yourself? How could you trust me to let you go as a witness?”

“You’re gonna pay for this,” Raymond stammered out.

“You take credit,” the stranger asked. Then he raised his gun at put it to Ray’s forehead and pulled the trigger.

The murderer bowed down and picked up his knife and the cut-off finger and sighed.
“Time to get to work.”

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In the thirty years Sergeant Miller served in the force had had seen a lot of things. The mutilated heads of suicide victims, gang and drug crimes, beatings and stabbings, abuse, prostitution, and everything else that lurks in the shadows of civilization. The most disturbing thing he had seen was when people messed with voodoo, ritual sacrifice and cannibalism. Until now...

A mailman called the police when he found a young african-american male, est. 30 years old, lying on the sidewalk in one of the worst god forsaken areas of New York with a gunshot to the back of the head.

Vacant houses of red stone, shut down factories, tiled up windows and sometimes a single shop or bar in between. The victim had an empty envelope with “2k” written on it and faced towards the street. Behind him there was an open door to a small and old bar.

The officers on duty called in the paramedics, forensics and took a look inside the bar. Just one look was enough to make them go back and call the sergeant.

Miller arrived, took a look inside and mumbled “this is above my pay-grade” before he called the Major and the FBI.