

## Criminally Funny

By Thomas Sullivan

I'm sitting inside a 1950's era, single pump gas station that has been converted into a bar. It's the kind of weathered place where a guy with a big chip on his shoulder would come to drown his sorrows and complain about being yelled at by his boss all day long. Across the road is a newer service station with six pumps and an attached convenience store. Apparently, the owner of this bar saw the writing on the wall when the competition arrived and shifted to a new source of revenue. The two businesses are the only buildings found at this intersection on the rural edge of the Kitap Peninsula. It's the cultural center of the area.

The owner is standing behind the bar top, talking to two regular customers who sit directly in front of him on ancient barstools with red spinning seats. He's in the process of cleaning a glass when his eyebrows suddenly race upward.

"Oh hey," he says, "did I tell you about my car?"

His two patrons nod in the negative.

"Oh man, get a load of this. I was parked outside, over there..."

He points to the area in front, which still has a sagging, wooden awning that once sheltered gas-pumpers from the rain.

"And I left the car running, since I was just coming inside for a second to get something from the shed out back. And when I came back out the car was gone."

The two men lean forward with wide eyes and opened mouths. One guy laughs. The other cracks a joke about repo-men. The owner reveals that the car is paid for and continues his story.

"So, you know, I called the police, filed a report and all that. Then I called Mandy and had her pick me up."

He reaches back to the bar, grabs a bottle of Jim Beam, and refills one guy's glass with far too much booze.

"So last Thursday I'm driving my truck down Manset Road. And I see my car. On the road, driving in front of me. I know its mine from the bumper stickers. So I follow it. At the stop sign at Manasses Junction I pull up on the left side of the car and look over at the driver. The guy gets this 'oh shit' look on his face, punches the gas, and takes off."

Both customers laugh and I join in, abandoning my efforts to conceal my eavesdropping with a

newspaper.

“So I chase after the fucker,” the owner says, “and we get up to a pretty good clip. At the next intersection the guy signals for a left but then squeals right, onto the Johnson Cutoff road. And he tears off down the road. After about two minutes of this the guy slows down, drifts over to the edge of the road, and stops. So I pull in behind him and just sit for a minute. Then, I grab a baseball bat and get out of the truck.”

“You drive around with a bat?” one guy asks the owner.

“No, my son’s. Left it in the truck after a little league game. So I walk up to the side of the car, you know, staying a bit back just in case the guy’s armed or something. And I’m at the rear door when the guy takes off again.”

One guy roars and slaps his knee before shouting “Oldest trick in the book!!”

“So I haul ass back to my truck, jump in, and start chasing the guy again. I come up over the hill there, you know the one by the road to the reservoir, press the pedal to the floor and scream down the hill. After about thirty seconds I round the corner and I’m back behind the guy. So then, he slows down and pulls over to the shoulder again. And I pull over. And I’m thinking “Yeah right, pal, not happening.” So I sit and the guy sits. And he’s looking back at me through his rear view. Then all of a sudden the door whips open and the guy takes off on foot. Goes straight into the woods. Disappears.”

“Just taking a leak?” The guy on the left chuckles at his own joke and folds his hands across a sizeable belly.

“So I get out and lock the truck. I get into my car and see the keys dangling from the steering column. It’s still in drive but the engine is off. So I shift into park and try to start it up, but it won’t turn over. I look down at the gas needle. It’s on “E”. The putz literally ran out of gas.

The four of us roar with laughter. The owner shakes his head and then pours himself a beer. I dig out my wallet, put a five onto the bar top, and head outside. I start walking down the gravel road back to the state park where I’m camping. There’s no chips on shoulders in that bar, at least not today, just humorous acceptance. And what are the odds, I think to myself, of stumbling onto that? I’m no believer in divine intervention, but something put me in the right place at the right time to hear the perfect bad criminal story.

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