

Short Story

Phil and Barty Rob a 7-11

A bit of Bad Habits



Introduction

Phil and Barty are two characters I created for the novel *Bad Habits*. They are inseparable friends, staunch allies, and clinically diagnosed psychopaths. Not the kind you usually see in movies, who are much more often sociopaths than psychopaths. Phil and Barty are overly calm in the face of danger. They have no sense of personal risk, and they are always out looking for a good time in order to stave off boredom or satisfy some small curiosity. In this story, they've decided it would be a good idea to knock over a convenience store.

The Story

"You have to use the fake gun, because you spent the money we were going to use to get another real one on the hooker and the waffles," Phil said.

Barty turned toward Phil and opened his mouth. Then he furrowed his brow and closed his mouth. He did that two more times and then spoke.

"Sometimes you see a picture on the internet and you just have to reproduce it," Barty said with a shrug. He pondered the experience and continued. "I really didn't expect that I would need that many boxes."

"The hooker probably wouldn't have been so uncomfortable if you had defrosted them first," said Phil.

"She got paid."

"And that's why you have to use the fake gun this time."

Phil and Barty sat in their car in front of the 7-11 in the spot facing a malfunctioning Powerball and Megamillions sign that said you could win 29 or 138 million. But it might have been 188 million. The light rain had stopped but the asphalt was still wet, and it consumed the light from the store and the streetlamps. Barty broke into a big grin and started bouncing in his seat.

"Which of us gets to threaten the clerk?" Barty asked.

Phil rested his chin on the steering wheel before saying, "I probably should. I know you like doing your tough guy thing, but he might recognize your gun's a stage prop if you wave it in his face."

The deep black hole in the muzzle of the gun in Barty's hand returned his direct stare. He pulled the trigger five times and the gun clicked each time in response.

Phil took the the pistol from Barty's hand.

“Huh,” Phil said. “I didn’t realize I forgot to load it.”

He took an empty clip out of the bottom of the .45 and slapped in a new one. Then he took the prop gun out of the pocket of his leather jacket and handed it to Barty, who trotted out his saddest puppy dog face.

“Just remember for next time,” Phil said, “waffles or hookers. Not both.”

“Words to live by,” Barty said as he pushed open the door of the ‘84 Mustang, hinges groaning as if even just one more visitor was too many.

A pair of small bells over the door announced their arrival. Years of airborne grease from the overcooked meat sticks they sold as hot dogs and sausages muted the jangle. Corporate pride has difficulty penetrating certain neighborhoods.

Phil entered first, making a beeline for the salty/crunchy aisle. Barty, just about to whip out his best Al Pacino, switched more to a Bill Murray and sidled up next to his partner. The clerk, a sweaty young man of heroin chic, rolled his eyes. It would take a lot more oddness than that to set Barty apart from the hoipolloi of an urban convenience store.

“Aren’t we going to rob the place,” Barty whispered.

“I thought we’d case the joint first,” Phil said, “just like Paul told us to do.”

“Oh, right,” Barty said as he started to shuffle around the chip aisle while peering over the shelves.

Two other customers occupied the store. The first was a tall, obese man with three bags of chips dangling from one hand, an equal number of softcore porn magazines stuffed in the crook of the same arm, and his free hand resting on the handle of one of the doors in the beer section. That hand jumped sporadically between the doors for the domestics and sale priced imports.

The other customer was a short Asian woman about sixty years old in a heavy coat. It was an odd choice for the beginning of June, but she wasn’t sweating. It may have helped that she was in the process of checking the expiration dates in the milk case. The refrigerated air was streaming out of the open glass door.

Phil searched out the cameras that covered the front of the store. The small can of black spray paint in his back pocket was for taking those out of commission. He just had to make sure that he came up behind them and wasn't captured by other cameras doing it. That way it was their word against the sweaty, pencil neck clerk if they actually got caught. Not that they would.

Barty, on the other hand, was busy swapping the sour cream potato chips with the cracked pepper ones, so they were under the wrong label. Then he turned the sweet barbecue bags around until they were all facing the wrong direction. The whole time he was muttering things like fight the power and take that, muthafucka.

Phil tapped Barty on the shoulder and motioned for his partner to follow him deeper into the store. They passed Beer Man unnoticed, but Milk Woman gave them a sidelong glance with narrowed eyes before returning to her lactic assessments. At the frozen foods case they turned right along the back of the store.

A few more steps and they were under the camera pointed at the front of the store. Phil turned to Barty and was about to tell him to pull out his faux firearm when he noticed his partner in crime was carrying four boxes of frozen waffles in one arm. He opened his mouth to ask.

"Just in case I meet any hookers," Barty said.

Phil shrugged.

"You ready?" Phil asked. "As soon as I paint this camera we do this."

Barty looked at his waffles, nodded, and pulled out his prop. Phil pulled out the spray can. He shook it for a few seconds, the ball inside rattling, then aimed it at the lens, thickly coating it.

"Let's do this thang," Barty said.

The pair moved quickly up to the counter and leveled their pistols at the clerk.

"Hands up, skinny," Phil said.

The briefest panic flashed across the face of the clerk, no one really ever gets used to that view of a gun, but his experience and whatever he was on mellowed him enough that his next response was a sigh, a rolling up of his eyes, and a half-hearted raising up of his hands merely to shoulder level.

"It's not like I'm *not* going to give you the money, man," the clerk said. "There's no need to get personal."

"Hey," Barty said, waving the gun in his face. "We're in charge here. Open the f...what?" Barty asked Phil.

"You may not want to wave that in his face," Phil whispered out of the side of his mouth. "You know? Where his eyes are?"

Barty pulled the gun out of the clerk's face and hid it behind his leg, substituting his finger for the prop.

"Next time not as obvious," Phil said.

"Good advice," said Barty.

"If you guys want to come back later after you've practiced a little," the clerk said, lowering his hands a little more and examining some dirt he had just discovered underneath his nails, "we're open 24 hours."

"Oh, looks like we got a wise guy here," Barty said. "You want I should pop a cap in your ass?"

"You do hear what's coming out of your mouth, right?" the clerk said.

Phil grabbed a handful of Slim Jims from the front of the counter and whipped them at the clerk's face. Not to be outdone, Barty did the same with three issues of the Enquirer that sported Bill Clinton making out with a space alien on its cover.

"Dude," the clerk said raising his hands in front of his face. "I have to put those all back if you don't steal them."

Barty and Phil smirked, looked at each other, and each pushed a display container off the counter. Barty's was a tall box of telescoping back scratchers, and Phil's was a white plastic rack of five hour energy drinks. The weak sigh from the clerk offered scant justification to continue their harassment. Phil raised his gun at the clerk again.

"Alright, punk," Phil said, "We don't want to have to ask you again to open the fu..."

The front door opened so fast that the door closer creaked in protest. In the door bounded a young asian man in a black shirt with a Captain America shield on the front. The black shotgun in his hands sported a wide multi-hued strap with a dragon on it. His shock of overmoussed black hair was as wild as his bloodshot eyes.

"Open the register, round-eyes," he roared after advancing on the counter, pushing Phil and Barty out of the way, and leveling the barrel a foot away from the clerk's nose.

The clerk's eyes stretched open as much as they could, and he raised his hands so high he was standing on his tiptoes.

"Was that racist?" Phil said to Barty.

"I'm not sure," Barty said then turned to the new thief. "Hey, we were here first."

New Thief responded to the pouts on Phil and Barty's faces with a blank look on his own. It stayed on while he turned back to the clerk.

"I'm sorry, but that's true," the clerk said.

New Thief shook his head to banish the dissonance and replaced it with the righteous fury he entered with.

"Open the register, man," he said. "I don't give a sh..."

The sound of the hammer of a .44 magnum being pulled back is a particularly threatening sound. New Thief froze when he heard it behind him and to the left. Beer Man emerged from behind a shelf of brightly colored and likely carcinogenic baked goods. His salty snacks abandoned, beer choice still undecided, his porn was still safely tucked under his fat, sweaty arm. The hand of which carried an open wallet with a badge.

"I guess it's my lucky day," Beer Man said. "We've been looking for you for months now. It probably wasn't a good idea to wear the same shirt to every robbery. Lord above, have you even washed it? It f..."

The sound of the hammer of a .38 is not quite as threatening, but it still gets the point across. Beer Man froze just as solid as New Thief when Milk Woman emerged from the candy aisle on his left.

"Drop it, fat man," Milk Woman said.

"Now just hold on, ma'am," Beer Man said. "I'm an officer of the law. You can see my badge, right? There's no need for you to get involved. I've got it under control."

"I don't appreciate cops pointing guns at my son," Milk Woman said.

"Son?" Phil said. "You brought your mom along with you to a robbery?"

"Shut up," New Thief said. "At least I didn't bring my boyfriend like you."

"Wait," Barty said. "You have a boyfriend? Does your mother know? Cause if she didn't before..."

"I said shut up," New Thief yelled taking his shotgun off the clerk and pointing it at Phil and Barty.

Phil and Barty put their hands up in the least surrendery way possible, and Barty started giggling.

"What's so funny?" Phil asked.

"All these people in the store," Barty said, "and the only one without a gun is the guy who works here."

The clerk's hands dove under the counter and pulled out a shotgun. Perhaps the clerk was just making sure there was a shell in the chamber and he yanked the forend back. The only problem is that, if you already have a shell in the chamber that hasn't been fired, it ejects the unused one first. In this case, the shell popped out the ejection port, bounced off the

near wall, and hit the clerk in the eye. It didn't stop him from pointing the gun at Milk Woman but did make him look a little bit more like a pirate when he did so.

"What's so funny?" Barty asked Phil.

"Turns out you're the only one without a real gun."

Now Phil and Barty were in the center of a square where the corners were all armed and yelling at the other corners to drop their weapons. It was all rather exciting and the pair were smiling from ear to ear.

"I've never been in a Mexican standoff before," Phil said.

"Wait, so what about that? Is that racist?" Barty said. "Well, it's certainly not good to be in one, I suppose," Phil said. "Best to err on the side of caution on that one."

"Would you two shut up," New Thief yelled.

"Right," Phil said. "This is getting kind of boring."

Barty made a frowny, sympathetic face at Phil then looked around until he settled on his prop gun. With his other hand occupied with waffles, he had no choice but to one-hand the action. He tossed the prop a couple of inches into the air and grabbed the barrel after it had spun around. Like a hatchet, he tossed it at New Thief's face. It banged off his head just above his left eye. His left arm he had spun up to try to block it had only served to knock the barrel of his shotgun off aim from Phil and Barty to the clerk. The pain from the hit caused him to pull the trigger.

The roar of the shotgun acted as a starting gun. New Thief's erratic shot caught the clerk off center and spun him around in a complete circle before striking the cigarette wall behind him. The clerk turned his wild, panicked eye and his shotgun onto the last target he had been aiming at. He pulled his trigger and fired into the side of Milk Woman, who had just put a bullet into Beer Man, who had just put three bullets into New Thief.

New Thief slammed into the magazine rack, spattering the faces of several Kardassians. Beer Man's bulk kept him from traveling too far after being shot, but he hit his head on a beverage case and was knocked unconscious. Milk Woman was less lucky. Aside from being

hit by a shotgun blast from only five feet away, she crashed into the cereal aisle shelves, adding a broken leg and shattered arm to her injuries. The clerk's use of a one-handed grip on the shotgun while firing led to a blow from the stock that punched him back into the cigarettes. His legs locked up and he fell face first into the cash register, hitting just the right keys for the change drawer to pop open with a ding after he hit the floor.

The shop was quiet now that everyone had stopped shouting and shooting. Phil and Barty stood in the middle of it surveying the damage.

"Wow," Phil said. "We should give you the prop gun more often."

"I didn't know I had it in me," Barty said.

"Ummm, so we should just take the money and go, I guess?"

The pair lowered their hands, and Phil tucked his own weapon into the waistband of his pants in the back before draping his shirt over it. They turned toward the register when the door banged open a second time, admitting two police officers with their sidearms drawn.

"Freeze," the First Cop yelled.

"They really do say freeze," Barty said to Phil as they both put their hands up again.

"Hey, if it works, why stop doing it?" Barty said.

"Oh my god," Second cop said examining New Thief. "Do you know who this is? This is the guy that's been robbing convenience stores all along the coast."

"And his mom," Barty said, pointing at the unconscious, groaning woman in the cereal aisle.

"We are so getting serious credit with this collar, man," First Cop said, holstering his sidearm. "Let's trash the tape and say it wasn't there. Then we can say we took him out by hand after he was wounded."

Second Cop called in the situation to the dispatcher and requested medical help while First Cop went to the back room and collected the surveillance video. He returned with the tape which he smashed and twisted before depositing it in the garbage receptacle near the coffee.

"What about these two?" Second Cop said.

First Cop looked Barty and Phil over before shrugging.

"You two want to get involved with this?" First Cop said. "You can either leave now and not tell anyone you were ever here, or you can stay and we can say you were part of the attempted robbery. There's no tape, so it's our word against yours at this point."

"Can I keep my waffles?" Barty said.

"Umm, sure. I'm in a good mood."

"Can we have our change?" Phil asked. "From the waffles? I can just go around and get it."

Second Cop went around the counter and looked in the drawer.

"There aren't any fifties or hundreds," he said. "So the most you could have given is a twenty. Four boxes of waffles at two fifty a piece is ten bucks. Here's your change, sir."

Phil took the ten dollar bill with a smile.

"We should leave before any other police get here, right?" Barty said to the officers.

"Adios, muchachos," First Cop said.

Phil and Barty strolled back out to the Mustang and got inside. Phil put the ten dollar bill on the dashboard, the key in the ignition, and looked over at Barty. Barty had just opened a two pound bag of Twizzlers and was stuffing one in his mouth, red juice trickling out the corner.

"What?" Barty said. "I've got sticky fingers...literally."

Phil grabbed a couple out of the bag and started munching, while pulling out his smartphone. He tapped a few buttons and put it away.

"There's another 7-11 about eight blocks from here," he said. "Whaddya say?"

"I'm in," Barty said around a mouthful of candy. "I have an idea, and we'll need more waffles."

Bad Habits

Alone in her cell in a cloistered convent in rural France, Sister Julia Anusim seeks penance for the sins of her past. When a voice in the dark tells her that a rogue US agent has joined with an ancient evil, she jumps at the chance to wash some of the blood from her hands.

Now she must travel to the United States to find Psychology Professor Gordon Jameson. She is certain he has the army she needs to save the world. But the group she finds is made up of the least likely holy warriors she could imagine. Threatened by a secret government agency, an ancient order that wants to take over, and the team who just might think she's insane, the nun and the professor must work together to stop the evil waiting to be unleashed by the beast entombed under the hill.

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