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**Pig Farm Fugitive (Prisoner Of Love) (14m) (Reading Copy)**

It's 1953 and I am the copy boy and general chore-person at work in a small weekly newspaper's one-room editorial office in White Plains. Bill, our publisher, flings the door open and charges into the office. He's wild-eyed and waving a folder of tabloid-size press proofs and a set of car keys. He looks frenzied.

"Gary, take my car and get these proofs out to the printer immediately. Ya' gotta do it now or we're gonna loose A&P! You gotta be there by four o'clock."

Bill is a large, senatorial-looking man with wavy grey hair and the twinkley-eyed animation of a sideshow barker. His usual confident manner is gone and he seems worried. A&P is our biggest advertiser and they have made price changes in their two-page ad for the next edition, minutes before the deadline. The ad needs to be reset, and to do that in time for the press run, the corrected proofs need to be taken, immediately, to the printer, 50 miles away in Belleville, New Jersey. There's barely enough time.

At 18 years old, it is hard for me to judge the situation and tell when Bill is worried, joking, drunk or a little of each. When drunk, he becomes a practical joker, notorious for his occasional booze-driven stunts. A few years ago, he is at a cocktail party where he is trying to get financial backing for a new venture.

He's had a few too many. Bill removes his prosthetic fake left eyeball and slips it into the Martini glass of the wife of the man with the money. She faints, collapsing on the floor, spilling the gin and the eyeball onto the carpet. The result is that Bill has joked himself out of his investment deal.

So, when Bill hands me three dollars to cover the tunnel tolls and lunch, I am convinced this is the real deal. If we lose A&P, we might go out of business. It seems we 're always almost going out of business and I'm thrilled to be chosen to save the day and possibly my own job.

As I gallop down the stairs to the street, where Bill's blue Cadillac is parked, I do some mental math to see if I can find a way to keep some of the change. I have a blind date with Mary's friend Rebecca at seven o'clock tonight and have stashed my salary envelope containing \$31.80, after taxes, in cash, in my back pocket for safekeeping. The back pocket is my safe deposit vault. I never dip into it for anything but a major event. Dates with girls are a very high-priority major event, requiring maximum money security.

Driving the huge blue Caddy feels like I'm piloting the Titanic. I feel more like a Captain than a mere driver. It floats over bumps as if they weren't there.

Inside the Lincoln Tunnel, I leave the windows wide open hoping for cooler air but it seems every bit as hot as it is outside, where the radio says it's a sweltering 102 degrees.

The tunnel seems even hotter and I wonder how the patrolling officers,

The tunnel seems even hotter and I wonder how the patrolling officers, walking the narrow elevated ledge, can stand the heat and fumes. I'm nervous, driving in such tight confines. The white tiles of the tunnel walls, inches away, whiz by in a blur. I reach to turn on the headlights to help keep my distance from the officer's walkway, a mere two feet above the windshield. The headlights splash against the wall and the dashboard illuminates. Suddenly I notice that the red fuel gauge needle is resting below the letter "E." I begin to panic. I'm out of gas. The car could stop at any second. My rescue mission is in serious danger. At the end of the tunnel I burst into the afternoon daylight. I'm relieved to be out of the tunnel and glide into a tollbooth lane to pay the fifty cents. I use one of the three dollars that Bill gave me. I ask the toll taker where the closest gas station is? He says, "There's a Sunoco station just as you round the curve onto Route 3. You can't miss it."

I follow the signs to Route 3, driving slowly and praying while holding the wheel gingerly with my fingertips, as if that might help the car to make it to the gas station. My chest tightens as the needle creeps further into the below-empty zone.

I spot the Sunoco station and laugh out loud with relief. I roll ~~gingerly~~ up to the first pump. The station has no other customers. The attendant, wiping his hands with a rag, strolls to my window and asks "What'll it be?" I check the prices on the pump and calculate that at twenty-eight cents a gallon I can surely finish the trip with two dollars worth of gas. "Gimme two-dollars worth please." I open the door and walk over to the Rest Room.

Strolling back, I hear the bell of the pump dinging and see the attendant still pumping gas. I rush to the pump and see that the little window with the rolling numbers says eighteen gallons and over five dollars and climbing." Stop!" I scream. "I said two dollars and you've pumped way too much. I don't have that much money. I can't pay for that. You've got to take out that extra gas. I don't want it."

The attendant sneers and says "Hey, so what? I made a mistake. You can use the gas. You were empty."

"You don't understand" I bellow indignantly. "It's not my car. I can't pay you. I don't have the money. You have to take out the gas."

"Can't do that. There's no way. Sorry, you just gotta pay. You can always use it."

Now I'm fully righteous and put my hands on my hips and say "I'm not going to pay for it because I didn't order it."

He doesn't blink when he shrugs and says, "Well, I'm just going to have to call the police."

"Good, Do that!" I challenge him with complete guiltless conviction.

I'm shaking from this confrontation and walk to the tire display next to the office. I sit on a tire with my arms folded to wait for the police in my most upright-citizen pose.

Ten minutes later, a Police Officer, riding a tricycle motorcycle, the kind used for small town parking meter ticketing, chugs up to the Cadillac. The officer waves and smiles at the attendant and says, "Hi, Ernie, How's Mom doin'?" He chats a moment with the attendant and then turns to me and says, "My brother here says you have a problem paying for the gas." I explain that the attendant pumped too much gas and it's not my car and I don't have the money to pay for it. The Officer looks at the big blue Caddy and says "Do you have the registration for this car?" I look in the glove compartment and in both visors and say, "It's my boss's car and he must have the papers." The policeman says, "Well, you're going to have to come with me to the station. Follow me and don't get lost. If you decide to get lost, we'll have cars after you in a few seconds.

I'm driving Bill's big giant car behind this silly looking tricycle, with its winking red light. I'm embarrassed and the temptation to zoom off is strong but I resign myself to the idea that I've agreed to drive myself to my own arrest on the honor system.

The cottage-size building of the Secaucus, New Jersey Police Department, is on a small hill, overlooking a big pasture with animal fencing. Secaucus is the home of many pig farms and a well-earned reputation as the most foul smelling community in the region. Today, as I walk with the Officer from the car to the front door, the 102-degree heat wraps the stink around my head. I'm almost gagging. Not even my oldest sneakers smell this bad.

Inside, the cycle officer explains the gas station owner's complaint to the Desk Sergeant.

I try to explain that I am working for a newspaper, taking proofs to the printer and that I only asked for two dollars worth of gas, all the money I had except for the fifty-cent toll for the return trip. I'm shaking. He appears to momentarily consider my predicament, looks indifferent and says, "We'll let you rest a while in that cell until you can produce the registration." We can let you go if you can post \$25.00 bond but the car stays here until we see the registration."

I think of the cash in my back pocket. I could use that money to temporarily buy my freedom. But hormones gain victory over heroics. Besides, I don't have the registration and even if I did, I wouldn't get back to the office until after closing, too late to get reimbursed so I could go on my big date with Rebecca. I decide that as far as anybody is concerned, I have no money on my person. I'm innocent. I'll gamble, that with their hovering deadline, the newspaper will get me out of jail.

I'm allowed to make a call so, at three o'clock, I phone Joe, my reporter-friend at the newspaper and explain the predicament. I hear Bill shouting in the background. Immediately, it's clear to me that their concern is not about my welfare, it's all about the proofs. Joe asks, "Did they get to Belleville or not?" When I say the proofs are in the car, Joe shouts that he'll be down within the hour with the registration. He hangs up. I realize that I've forgotten to remind him about the bail money.

I'm placed in a small empty cell with a wood bench and one tiny window that overlooks a large pig farm. The stench is so strong that I cover my nose and mouth with my hand to try to surpress the urge to gag.

The Sergeant shouts from his elevated desk, "I'm ordering food. We have to feed the prisoners. How do you want your hamburger?" Always up for a free lunch, even in this steamy pig fog, I say, "Medium, please." Ten minutes later the single, paper-wrapped hamburger with no ketchup, arrives and tastes so bad that I just put it on the bench and stare at it. I can feel the sodden heat baking the pig smell into my skin and clothes.

I begin to worry that I might miss my blind date with Rebecca. I think, "What if she's as pretty as Mary says? I wouldn't want to screw up a blind date by being late because I was in jail." I think for a moment about paying the bond with my salary but decide, again, that this is the newspaper's problem and I'm not loaning them any money especially when it's date money.

Joe arrives in his car and doesn't stop long enough to post bond. Breathing hard, he flashes his press credentials at the Sergeant and says "Here's the registration. Give me the proofs, we're almost too late, They're holding the presses. Let me have the proofs and I'll be back in a half hour to finish the paperwork and pay up." The Sergeant lets him take the proofs from the car and, instantly, Joe's gone. I'm alone again, sitting in the cell. About an hour later, Joe returns, pays the bond and the gas charges. The cell is opened and Joe tosses me the registration and says "Bill says to leave his car at the office and put the keys on his desk." Then he says, "I'm going to need you as a witness that I gave the Sergeant the twenty-five dollars of bond money. He won't give me a receipt for it. I know it's going right into his pocket. Joe winks, waves at me, and dashes out the door.

As I drive back to White Plains through steamy rush-hour traffic, wearing a cloak of pig stink, I ponder the five life lessons I've learned today.

- 1) When borrowing a car for a rescue mission, always check the amount of gas on board.
- 2) Sometimes righteousness will get you into trouble instead of out of it.
- 3) If all you have is two dollars for gas, never go to the bathroom
- 4) Even when riding silly tricycles, cops have the power to ruin your day.
- 5) No matter how much of a hero you are trying to be, always leave enough room in the schedule to take a shower before a blind date.

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