

Shooting down the shops

I remember a couple of years ago I had popped into town to get some new jeans, or shoes, or something like that. I parked in one of the multi-stories that are dotted around the centre mainly because I am too cynical to take public transport and way too lazy to park any further out than I absolutely have to. Being too fit can't be any good for you. Just look at Bruce Lee. Anyway, I digress, my route from the exit of the car park took me past a supermarket and a clothes shop, down an alleyway and then smack bang in the centre. I was just walking past the entrance to the supermarket when my phone beeped at me. Just the one beep mind you, I don't go in for all these stupid tones and what have you. It was a text message and as curious as anyone I read it. I'm not going to bother to tell you what was in it because that's not important to this little tale and besides, it's got nothing to do with you. However it did land me a bit of a situation. As I was reading it, head down and walking, I bumped straight into Heather. I didn't know her name was Heather then, but I found out later.

"Oh no. Really sorry." I said feeling, as you would, a bit of an ass. Now I don't know how you would react to that but I would like to think that the majority of people, and I include myself in this, would say something along the lines of;

"Hey that's no bother."

Or

"It's ok my fault."

But no, she looked straight at me, or more to the point, through me and sauntered off down the alley and into the centre. I was just thinking how rude she had been when this old lady came up to me. Actually old lady isn't really fair because now you're thinking seventy or eighty, but she was probably only mid fifties. Which is old to me.

"I think your girlfriend dropped this." She said as she handed me a purse.

"Oh, " I said, "she's not my girlfriend. In fact," was as far as I got because she cut me off.

"Well she should be a pretty thing like that and you would make a lovely couple. Just good friends eh? I know what you mean. But don't give up on a chance that's what I always say."

And with that she turned round and went into the supermarket. She didn't give me time to protest. I was left standing with a purse and a feeling of bewilderment. Where exactly do these people come from? She was right about one thing though. She was a pretty little thing. I felt that there was only one thing that I could do, being the nice chap that I think I am. So off I went down the alley looking out for her.

I walked out of the bottom of the alley into bright sunlight and about twenty million people. Ok maybe not twenty million but you get where I'm coming from. I couldn't see the one pretty little piece of wood for all the ugly trees. I looked up and down the street but no luck. Only one option then.

As I was rifling through her purse, to find out some details of where to send it nothing more, I received what I can only describe as being a great big slap around the side of my face, because that

was exactly what it was. Ooh it still makes me wince now. It certainly came as a shock.

“You cheeky bugger!” she shouted at me.

I was dumbstruck. I honestly couldn't think of a thing to say.

“You complete bastard!” she shouted this really loud and to my dismay people were starting to look over at us.

“Bastard.” She reiterated.

Well I couldn't let this go on now and so I told her what was what.

“I uh... It's not what it uh...” see, that was telling her.

“You what?” she snarled, “You're sorry? You didn't mean it? You're mums dying and you need my money for her medication? Cut the shit honey we both know exactly what's going on. You're lucky I don't call the police.”

And with that she stuffed her purse into her little handbag and walked off. As she walked down the street I was struck by how intense this all was. Crazy really. And the funny thing was I was starting to quite fancy her. I mean, she certainly had character. But off she was going out of my life as quickly as she had come into it. So I decided, against my better nature and probably anybody's for that matter, to follow her. At a safe distance of course. I suppose you could say that I was smitten. We went down a couple of streets. Luckily not into any shops because I had decided not to go into any after her. It's one thing to be smitten but something else to be a stalker. Not only that but women's clothes shops always make me feel like a pervert. Then she stopped, fiddled around in her bag for something. Pulled out a tissue and carried on walking. She was probably about thirty to forty feet away from me by now and I was still staring at her, when out fell her purse from a hole in her bag and onto the floor.

Dilemma or what?

I was mulling it over when a guy came out of one the shops, not sure which one, maybe Burtons, and picked it up. Well this should be interesting I thought. It was. He looked around and asked if anyone had dropped a purse. He got no reply. Heather had carried on into a shop. So he did the only thing any respectable man would do in that situation. He opened it. Well I could see what was coming. I had to wait around. About half a minute later the guy was reading a bill or something from the purse. I saw her the instant she came out of the shop. Her face red with anger and steam practically coming out of her ears. She strode up to him and WHACK, slap across the face. Instinctively I rubbed my cheek, which was still a little tender from earlier.

“What the hell is this?” she demanded from the poor man. He of course said nothing.

“You complete bastard!” she yelled.

He didn't even manage to stutter an explanation, at least I almost got that far.

She grabbed the purse from him and stuffed the letter or whatever it was back into it.

“You're lucky I don't call the police!” she said and stormed off. Well that made two of us that were lucky, by her reckoning at least. Not sure my cheek felt the same way and I would imagine his didn't either.

Well that was enough for me. I decided that anyone that stupid to keep losing her purse and blame the people trying to help her out was not worthy of my attention. So I carried on with my original intent to go shopping.

Several shops later and I couldn't find anything that I wanted.

Shoes, as I recall now, were what I was after because I was going to a wedding the following week and mine were wrecked. I could have worn them but the bottom was flapping on the left shoe and the innards were shot on the right shoe. They made me walk with a limp and that's not cool unless you're a black hip-hop star, or trying to emulate one. I was neither. Anyway to console myself I decided to shoot down to Electronics Boutique and buy a new game for the computer. I say for the computer but actually it was for me. A few minutes later and there I was looking at the titles of all the latest releases. There wasn't really a lot of choice when you looked into it. You had basically three types of games. The ones where you're an army guy/space marine and you're shooting up afghans (the people not the dogs)/space mutants to ostensibly save the world. Racing games that make you go round, and round, and round the same track until you either throw up, get bored or in some cases both. And the other games are where you get to play God over fairgrounds, hotels, the world etc. Well being the intellectual guy that I wish I was I plumped for Star Plight, where you play the role of Captain Rex Brave in his battle to the end of the universe blah blah blah. I walked up to the counter and handed over the game.

"We've got full game maps, walkthrough and cheat codes in a book for this game." Said the young man behind the counter, "It's only fifteen quid."

"Fifteen quid!" I said, "The game's only thirty."

"Yeah but it's a bargain really, if you buy it with the game you get ten percent off your next purchase." Said the man in all seriousness.

“Why,” I asked, “would I want to buy this book when I haven’t even played the game yet. Surely I would only want it if I get stuck. Otherwise, what’s the point.”

“Well, as I said, if you buy it with the game you get ten percent off your next purchase.” He smiled at me, “And the sequel’s out soon so you’d want to get it over and done with quickly so you could get that. Wouldn’t you?”

“Not really no, but I’ll take the book anyway.” I am a realist and I know for a fact that there isn’t a game in the known universe, or even the unknown universe that I can conceivably complete without all the help around. Even then it’s not worth putting your money on me.

He rang up the price on the till.

“That’s forty pounds then please sir.”

Forty pounds? Now I’m no Carol Vorderman but even I know that thirty plus fifteen is forty-five.

“Pardon?” I asked trying not to do an impression of the Cheshire cat.

“Forty pounds please sir.”

It hadn’t failed to come to my attention that now he was taking money from me I was a sir in his eyes. I dug my hand into my back pocket to pull out my wallet.

It wasn’t there.

Other back pocket.

No.

Front pockets.

No.

Sweat was starting to break out on my forehead.

“Forty pounds please sir.”

Yes. Yes. I thought at him angrily.

I tried my back pockets again. Still nothing. For some reason it hadn't magically appeared. Nor was it in any of the other pockets that I tried. In fact I didn't have it on me at all. Now I knew I had had it when I left the carpark because I remembered putting the change from the ticket machine back into it.

"Forty Pounds please sir."

"Sorry." I said to him, "Changed my mind for the moment. Sorry."

"Oh." Was the reply.

I walked out of the shop at a brisk pace and stood in the sunlight trying to think of what to do next. When all of a sudden I heard;

"You what? You didn't mean it? You're mums dying and you need my money for her medication? Cut the shit honey we both know exactly what's going on. You're lucky I don't call the police." Coming from the other side of the street. I looked over and as I did I saw Heather grabbing her purse back from a young looking man, who I assume had just been doing the exact same thing I had done earlier. His cheek was red as well. I also saw that she was pocketing something other than her purse. The cheeky mare!

The question was how to approach this matter with a little bit of decorum.

"Oi! Oi! You cheeky bitch." Yes that's just the way to handle it.

She looked at me, then at the guy she'd just robbed. Back to me and smiled. Then she legged it. Well I went straight after her. I must say that considering she was wearing shoes with heels she was pretty fast. Luckily I didn't have my Puff Daddy shoes on, I had opted for the trainers, so I soon caught up with her. I grabbed her by the scruff of her neck and she slowed down. She turned to look at me when we had both stopped. She was slightly out of

breath. Whereas I was gulping the air down like it was free beer. Maybe I should do a little more exercise then.

“What do you want exactly?” she asked.

“How about...my...wallet for...a...start.” I was trying not to sound too knackered and in doing so I forgot to breathe and ended up sounding worse.

“Beg your pardon?” she said

“Cut the crap... Just give me my wallet and you can go... I can't be bothered with all the hassle.” I couldn't to be honest. Not then anyway.

She stuck her hand into her bag and pulled out five wallets.

“Take your pick.” She said with all the arrogance in the world.

So I took my wallet from her. I didn't even say thanks.

“Don't say thanks then your ignorant pig.” She said and whacked me round the head with her bag and trotted off.

I was still too out of breath to go chasing anymore. I rested my hands on my knees and waited for my heartbeat to shift from the cha cha cha to the slow waltz.

I couldn't believe my eyes.

Sat on the floor, between my feet, was a purse. It was hers. I recognised it instantly. I smiled and picked it up. After having rummaged through it I came across an ID card. You know the sort. Proof of age thing so you can drink in the pubs if you don't look old enough. I can't think why she would ever have needed it, if she couldn't get served in bars then there would be no hope for the rest of us. Heather Philips DOB 18-06-1976 and a nice looking photo. Other than a driving licence there wasn't much else of interest in there. Still it would give the Police something nice to do in the afternoon.

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“I thought you didn’t want it.”

“I changed my mind again.” I said.

“Your choice.”

“I know.” I said.

“You know, there’s a book with all the cheats and a walkthrough in it for only fifteen pounds.”

“Yes, “ I said with something less than infinite patience, “You mentioned that before.”

“Yeah, yeah I did didn’t I” he replied

“Yes.” I said.

“You didn’t want it though did you.”

“I think you’ll find that your marvellous sales technique rather convinced me.”

The sarcasm eluded him completely and he seemed quite chuffed about it. Oh dear.

“Oh that’s good then. And you are sure you want it all this time?” he asked with a wry smile on his face.

“Yes.” I replied wanting to knock the smile round to the other side.

“Steve,” he shouted to the other guy working behind the counter, “Can you go and get me a copy of the Star Plight cheats book from the storeroom.”

Steve mumbled something and ambled off into the storeroom. He came out after what seemed like half an hour, but was probably only twenty-eight minutes, later with the book.

“Cheers Steve.”

I handed over the forty pounds for the game and the book.

“No mate, sorry that’s not enough, it’s forty five.”

Bugger!