

SOMEONE'S ALWAYS WATCHING

by Rick Marcou

"Cmon Mikey, come with us. You can make some good money. We'll show you, bro, it'll be easy. Easy money."

"I don't know, Vince. I can't do what you guys do. I'm not tough like that." I knew Vince's reputation. Everyone did. Vince was tall, muscular, with wavy black hair. A good-looking guy, but his eyes were sinister, if eyes had the ability to portray evil. He had a short fuse, those eyes quickly turning to a glare and his body pouncing once he felt wronged. Mikey had seen it many times.

"Sure you are. You don't even know yourself. I see it in you, you could do this. Just try it once, you'll see." But he also had this, the ability to convince people, draw them in, with his charm.

And so I did. And we robbed two places that night. They gave me a knife for the first place, a small shitty convenience store. We all had those masks on, at the time I just knew they were called bala somethings. Mine stunk. Like it was kept in someone's shitty garbage for a week. Vince did all the talking, and held a gun pointed at the guy's head. Monroe grabbed the cash out of the register. Then we booked back to the car around the corner and tore off. Went right to the next place, which was bigger. I held a gun for the first time. Vince said we both had to, there were more people working there. And two registers. Monroe got the cash from one, I got it from the other. We booked out again.

I was now a veteran, they said. Like stealing candy from a baby, they said. But you don't need a gun to steal candy from a baby, I said. Vince looked at me all serious-like, maybe pissed. Then he broke out in laughter, saying "Yeah, but the gun will scare the shit outta that baby!" Monroe joined him in laughing. Monroe the follower.

I was in a white room, painfully white. Kinda hazy. My Dad was there. "What are you doing Michael? Why are you doing these things? You can be better than this. You can make choices, help people, not hurt them." Then his face closed in on me. "I'm so disappointed in you!"

My eyes, opened, I looked up at the ceiling, confused. Where was I? I turned my head and saw Vince on the couch next to me, looking at me, staring with a weird look.

"You ok bro? You passed out, and then you were saying things in your sleep. It was like some whacked-out crazy person."

"How long was I out?"

"I dunno, like 40 minutes, maybe more. But that babbling was happening for the last couple minutes. Crazy shit bro. I didn't know if I should wake you or shoot your ass. But then your eyes opened."

Fast forward two months. The robberies continued, and a bunch of other shit. Not caught yet, but Vince was getting sloppier. If he could make some money, he'd do it, no matter the risk. Cops would ask around, but these were small takes, couple hundred at a time maybe, and nobody got hurt. Vince never used his gun, none of us did, or our knives. But then the drugs started. Some girl he started banging got him wasted one night, heroin. They got to doing it regularly, the banging and the heroin. So Vince wanted to hit more places, even trying to tell Monroe and me we should go back to a place we had hit the week before. No way, Monroe said. That ain't how we roll. Monroe was far from a voice of reason, just a degenerate to be honest, but he was right. First time he ever

disagreed with Vince, probably. But Vince said we go, it's his call, they'll never expect it. He was dosed up when he did. His eyes were bloodshot. I was worried.

We went. The guy behind the counter was the same old man, but this time there was a girl. Teenager, maybe 16. Vince was scattershot, the drugs scrambling his brain. He told Monroe to grab the money, but Monroe was just staring at the girl. Vince shot the gun at the coffee machine behind the counter, yelling "do it now!". Monroe grabbed the money, but then told Vince he wanted the girl too, she was cute, we could have fun. Monroe the degenerate. The only sex he ever got was molesting some nasty skanks he had to pay for. Vince agreed, "Yeah, take her. Maybe even Mikey can get his dick wet. You gotten pussy yet Mikey?" I tried to ignore him, but we never used our names. Was he too strung out to focus, or was he throwing me under? I had to say something. "This is a mistake, let's just get outta here". Vince stared at me, I could tell his crazed expression even through the balaclava. "Shut the fuck up Mikey!" The girl tried to hide behind the man, apparently her father. He was now panicked, frantic, saying "please just go, you got the money, leave us, please." Never seen a guy look so scared, beg for something like he did, his eyes so wide and face so desperate. Vince and Monroe didn't care. Vince told me to grab her. She looked at me, frightened, cowering behind her father. Vince told the man to get out of the way, give us the daughter. He wouldn't, he stayed behind the counter with her behind him. Vince said move or you'll get shot, and pointed the gun at his head. Monroe had his knife out, ready to strike.

"What are you doing Michael? Help people, not hurt them. I'm so disappointed in you!" Those words suddenly inhabited my ears. And now my eyes could really see.

Vince was yelling "Move or I'm gonna put a bullet in your fuckin' head." And the shot went off. And then a second shot.

I looked at my gun, then at the father and daughter, staring in shock. I dropped my gun and ran out, and kept running.