

KILLER ESPRESSO

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On a fresh autumn day, a strip of shops was bustling with travelers making rounds to visit the popular storefronts. The sun passed overhead to cast its warm, orange hue over the properties, paving way for the entrance of dusk. People began to retreat into the nearby apartments until the moon crept up to its place in the sky, leaving a once busy atmosphere to quiet into stillness.

Only one shop remained open; the Killer Espresso café. Its brick walls, sun-bleached with age, enclosed a rustic interior with organized seating and antique furniture. An overhang sign spelled out the cafe's name, written in a bold, red font.

The door opened to let out a teenage employee, dressed in a beige uniform. He looked back at his elder boss, "You staying past hours again, Mr. Chuck?"

"I do not find much problem in it," Chuck smiled brightly, his cheery composure warming the crisp air. "This shop is my second home, after all."

The employee met his smile, "Alright, just be careful. We can't be losing you too." He shifted his coat on his shoulders, starting down the street.

"Have a blessed night!" Chuck watched his employee, waiting until he safely passed around the block to step back

inside. He whistled a soft tune to himself as he picked up a broom, brushing the accumulated dust toward the entrance.

Whistle, whistle. Whistle, whistle.

His movements were slow and methodic as he paced himself, losing thought in the melody.

Whistle, whistle. Whistle, whistle.

He stepped past the door to brush the dust out onto the patio, moving closer to the adjacent shop to sweep a few crumbs onto the street. He paused his soft whistling, but before walking back toward his café, he froze.

Echoing in the distance was Chuck's whistled tune, being repeated by another voice. It grew louder and louder before its owner could be identified; a figure donning a long, tattered coat.

A chill coursed up Chuck's spine as he dropped his broom, "Oh, hello sir. Is there, uh, something I may assist you with?"

Stepping closer, the tall man's face, hollowed with age, revealed a pair of icy eyes staring down at Chuck. His staunch breath reeked of smoke and decay, paired with a raspy, booming voice.

"...Still open?"

Chuck clasped his shaking hands together, "Unfortunately, my shop is closed for the night. I was just tidying up, but you can come back tomorrow and I would be happy to serve you!"

"Street seems quiet. Nice neighborhood?" The man

replied.

“Yes, yes,” Chuck held himself to be polite. “I have resided here with my café for around fifty years. The community is pleasant.”

The stranger huffed, “You’re here late.”

Chuck nodded, “The work never stops, but truly, if you come back tomorrow, I can give you a cup of our finest Killer Espresso!”

The man appeared disinterested in his pleasantries, casting his piercing gaze to the side, “Doesn’t scare you bein’ out here? Considering last month...”

A sigh escaped Chuck, “Goodness, it is tragic what happened. I am praying for that young man’s family.”

“The papers say his Sunny Side Up Diner was doin’ good,” the stranger replied.

“Well, the new-age style has become popular in recent years. It is not my cup of tea, or cup of espresso,” Chuck laughed. “He mastered the art of advertising, I can give him that.”

The man looked back at him, “Your joint?”

“The Killer Espresso Café, just a few steps down,” Chuck pointed behind him, glancing over at the outdoor seating. “How about we take a seat? I would not want you to be forced to stand here.”

Before Chuck could finish, the stranger was already heading toward his establishment. He followed after him, taking a seat and brushing back his grey hair from his face.

"How's business?"

"Slowly picking back up steam," Chuck shrugged. "We have been doing better than before."

"Nice interior. Very antique," the stranger commented, peeking through the window.

"I take my style from my father. He owned this before me, all the way up until 1972," Chuck smiled as he reminisced. "He taught me everything I know."

"Said the community's good, yeah?" the man tilted his head.

Shifting in his chair, Chuck examined the tall man, attempting to get a better look at his physique. He noticed the slight glare of an object tucked into his waistband, although he was unsure of what it was.

Chuck quickly conjured up a reply, "Yes- I am close with plenty of the owners around here. I suppose that is why... Solomon's death was so tragic."

The figure remained quiet, looking down at his coat.

Filling the silence, Chuck cleared his throat, "I know you may not be aware, but did the papers reveal anything about the criminal?"

"Nothin' but the gun," the tall man looked back at Chuck with his icy gaze. "A standard Glock."

Chuck glanced back at the man's waistband, the reflective object gleaming back at him, "A Glock? Oh dear..."

The tall man readjusted his coat, "One year anniversary of that place, just gone."

Chuck clasped his coarse hands together on the table, “He had a long career ahead of him. Every time I looked over at his diner, a line was wrapped around the block.”

“Yeah. Been walkin’ these streets for a while. Watchin’ what’s next.”

“Really?” Chuck attempted to hide his amused expression. “Well, enough about my day-to-day. What is your line of work?”

“Detective,” the figure announced. “Detective Gary Gilbert.”

Chuck straightened his back, his palms becoming clammy. “Oh, I never would have known-!” He laughed nervously. “How long have you held that job?”

“Most my life. I work hard,” the now exposed Gary looked down at his lap, towards his waistband.

Chuck began pushing himself to his feet, “Truly, you have been ever so kind to me. How about I show you around? I can give you free breakfast tomorrow.”

Gary shrugged, lifting himself to stand, “Sure, that sounds nice.”

Chuck stepped up to the door of his café, opened it, and followed behind Gary to the inside.

The door shut as the cool café lighting reflected outside the window. Chuck’s broom laid on the street, next to the pile of dust and crumbs from the busy day. The dark outside sat in wait.

BANG.

A loud gunshot crackled out into the night, violently shaking the exterior walls of the Killer Espresso café. The door swung open with force, and after a few moments, a cheery, rosy-cheeked Chuck stepped out onto the patio, softly whistling a tune.

Whistle, whistle. Whistle, whistle.

He flipped the open sign to closed, drew the shades, locked the door with his pair of jangling keys, and stepped out into the dead street towards his home.