

## REVOLVE

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*Honorable Mention, Fiction*

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A DIFFERENT KIND OF COLD made me clutch my coat around my chest. Kicking a crushed can from underfoot, I knew that I needed to stop thinking. If I kept my mind clear and focused on keeping dry, it would be like it had never had happened. It would make it go away.

Day's pale glow highlighted skyscrapers on the horizon and shone against the grime of the city. Wet streets and a thin mist reminded me of last night's storm. The phone booth down the block was covered in black and blue graffiti signs, and spackled in gum. It stood out on the corner of Tootie's titty bar huddled beside an overflowing trashcan on Central. Perverts often hung out in front of Tootie's, casting paranoid looks at anyone who got too close. They made the booth the least suspicious thing on the street.

Hitting the return-change lever on the phone, it spat out a quarter. Prickly nerves up and down my left arm convulsed, shaking uncontrollably. I tensed to stop it. Didn't work. I took a breath and then another, inhaling deeply and letting out slowly, and struggled to think of nothing. Awkwardly, I inserted the coin, listening to it clink deep inside. My fingers punched out a number on the phone, and then held it to my ear. After three rings, he picked up.

"Yeah, baby. This is Blue." His greeting was intimate, like he was expecting some girl.

My response was watery in comparison. "Sup, Blue."

"Shit, Rodney," Blue choked out. He paused, pulling the phone closer to his mouth.

"Where the hell did you go, man?" he demanded in a low tone. "We didn't even know you weren't behind us until we met up at the van."

The door snapped shut behind me. Less than half a phonebook dangling from a cord brushed my leg. The twitching started again. Tucking the receiver between ear and shoulder, I massaged the cramping muscles away.

"I got nabbed."

"Fuck," Blue spat. "Where? By who? The cops?" he sputtered, then sighed on the line. "Are you calling me from jail, brother?" His anger quieted, replaced by caution.

"N-no, no, man," I reassured him. "In the back, a security officer grabbed me when we tried to leave. Dude just popped outa nowhere."

Something metallic crashed against the broken cement at my back. I spun around. A fat tabby scratched its dinner out of the trashcan. Just a cat. I took another breath, and let it out. Just a cat.

"Where you at?"

"Someplace safe."

"For how long?"

The morning's mist melted into the low hanging clouds, where it thickened into raindrops then fell, pelting the glass booth with little pings. "I think long enough for things to die down."

"And the dude?"

"Taken care of. But... it was real freaky, Blue. This guy, he looked like someone I knew. You know what I mean? The way he looked at me when I shot him..."

"Don't you know, man? When you plug someone, they all look like that." I heard him smile over the line. "But congrat-u-lations, man. You're one of us now. You killer."

I clenched my hand into a fist, watching my class ring cut off the circulation on my middle finger. "Yeah," it came out small and scared.

"Come on, don't worry about it. Shake it off, man. Stay where you are for a few days, then come meet up wit' us at my place so we can split the loot."

"Sure, Blue."

I had tried to shake the image of the man I killed. I tried hard, not to remember the way his blood splattered in a million directions, drenching his red-stripped windbreaker. My gun smoked afterward. His eyes were widespread as the life faded from them. I wanted to shut out the way he gasped like a fish out of water, and the way his body spasmed before it went still.

"Whatever you say, man." I hung up, dropping the phone back on its holder. I tugged my coat tighter around me, and darted out into worsening weather.

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"There you go, Rodney." A dark hand handed me a Styrofoam coffee cup, its contents steaming and oily. Fluorescent lights on the lounge's ceiling and the refrigerator in the corner buzzed like muted cicadas. The water-cooler gurgled air bubbles to the top of its jug.

The employee lounge's walls were gouged and scraped. A laminated sign next to a small window read: *At Merili-James Funds and Banking Solutions, a clean workplace is a happy workplace. Please be sure to throw your trash away when you are done.* Lightning flashed across the plastic from the window on the side.

It had rained for the past three days straight. Holes in my security coat had begun to form months before, so I tossed it out. Now as it approached the end of September, the freeze season of the year, I regretted it. Reduced to a red-stripped windbreaker already wearing out in the elbows, I stood out like a bum among the riff-raff that decorated nearby street corners, playing their rap, singing or shaking their ass to get a quick buck.

Blue, however, was impeccable. For a wrinkling old man he was sleek and polished in his suit. A pale lavender tie neatly knotted was tucked back behind a gray vest. Not an article of his clothing hung loose or free. Everything about him was compact; like he had everything he needed on him, and carried it with him wherever he went.

"Thanks, Blue." I took a sip.

The coffee was Bella Luna; it wasn't great, but not bad enough to avoid drinking or to throw out. It was dark, thick, but not strong; it was weak, watery more than anything else. The thickness part wasn't from the actual coffee, but seemed to emanate from years worth of dust and grime that clung to the walls and throughout the ventilation system. The brew was hot, but not enough to rid the chill that both time and weather left in my bones.

Glancing at him, I sucked the coffee down anyway. "I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate this, man. I've been doing security for the past thirty years or so, and for the longest time, it didn't feel right to transfer here." I blew a breath over my cup. "I'm sorry. I know I should've tried harder to stay in touch with you, man. But since, you know..." I shook my head. "I went through a real bad time afterward."

"Not problem, man." Blue took a swig of the brew, winced, and threw the rest into the lounge's sink. "I already had a gaping hole in my schedule since Leery called it quits." He shrugged, looking away. "Besides, you are one cost efficient addition to MJFBS. And hey, if it makes me look good to the man upstairs, it's all the better for me."

Once upon a time, we could have been called friends. But seeing the way he refused to look *at* me and talked at me rather than *to* me, I knew there was impossible to go back to the way things were before.

Blue rinsed out his mug, set it on the counter next to the sink, and reached inside the refrigerator. Grabbing a juice bottle, he twisted off the lid and downed its contents. "Come on, Rodney. Lemme introduce you to the rest of the night staff."

We made a right when we reached the hall. The first room on our left was decorated with at least eight security monitors, miles of multicolored wire, cheap tables and abused office chairs. A case of lockers guarded the door. When we entered, four heads turned in our direction.

"Hey, Mr. Madison. Here kind of late tonight, aren't you?" One man asked Blue. His glasses dwarfed a pudgy face.

"Unfortunately, Bob. As I'm sure you all heard, Leery quit last Saturday. I've been scrambling all day today to find a replacement for his shift tonight," Blue gestured towards me. "Make sure you guys show Rodney enough of the ropes for tonight. Don't worry about going over everything; just cover the basics." Blue tossed the empty bottle into a trash over six feet away. When it went in, he smiled.

"Tell him where to go for check up points." Blue straightened the cuffs on his sleeves, then introduced me. "Rodney, this is Bob Stanford, Bill Applescott, Rei

Honami and José Rodriguez. Guys, Rodney Denbury." I met each of them with a nod of acknowledgement. They nodded back.

"Then I'm off." Blue turned, exiting the room, pausing only long enough to toss a "have fun tonight, boys," over his shoulder as he left.

"Come on over here, Rodney," José offered me a swiveling chair. "Take a load off. I'm going to show you what you're going to be doing tonight." José clacked on the keyboard for a few seconds, until the monitor showed the basic floor plan of the bank.

"Okay, now," José pulled a Bic from behind his ear and tapped it on the screen. "This is the setup. We have cameras here, here, and all around here. We keep maintenance on them every month or so to ensure they're in working order. Tonight, me and Bill are watching the screens for funny stuff." He waved a walkie-talkie, then tossed it to me. "Your radio. Always channel two."

"Alright," I replied, setting it next to the keyboard.

Pulling a clipboard hooked on the side of his harddrive, José flipped back three pages. "Bob, you're going to be covering the first floor lobby and its check points. Rei, you've got the outside perimeter."

"And me?" I wanted to know.

José glanced over the clipboard at me. "You're in the basement with the vault."

I winced. Sure, I technically was a newbie. But damn, with all my experience at security, they tell this old man to baby-sit? I wanted to comment about it, but thought about my summer security jacket. Perhaps staying inside would be the wisest choice for tonight.

"The safest place for the newbie, eh?" I shrugged it off. "'S okay. I get it."

José frowned at me, shaking his head. "It's policy to keep at least one man down there at any given time. Besides, you read the papers, man?" I quirked an eyebrow. "Three months ago, a local gang tried to rob this place. They came in through the roof on the second floor and made it to the vault."

"Punk kids," Rei mumbled. "What a shitty plan. The security camera hidden on the building next door caught them on video."

"Oh, come on, now. It wasn't the worst ever," Bill argued. "What about '86, huh? You can't tell me that it was worse than that one. At least these last guys actually made it in."

José grinned wide. "True. But what about '91, with Billy What's-His-Name? You think '86 was worse than that?"

Slowly, I left the conversation. The guys went on fine without me, arguing animatedly over the best way to rob the bank. Knowing what they knew, how they would beat the system, and get in and out without getting caught. The way they pointed out and laughed at the flaws in each other's strategies, it was obviously that they were long-time friends. I was the stranger. I didn't fit in.

The situation strongly reminded me of the old days. I didn't fit in then, either. I never know why, but it was so hard to be accepted. When my cousin introduced me to the gang in our neighborhood, I met Blue; I was a member for about a month before we hit the bank. Listening to the guys, the situation then and now were pretty similar. The ones who belonged planned the heist, while me and the other peons just sat on the fringes. Taking the guns only when we were told to shut up and follow.

I sighed. I propped an elbow on the table, leaning into my wrist. For a long time I wished I killed myself instead of him. Money just wasn't worth the guilt and shame that hangs over a lifetime.

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I'd stood around the room outside the vault for three hours before the weak coffee did me in. I tried to stifle a yawn and failed. My eyes felt dry, my eyelids heavy. Muscle knots on my back and shoulders ached. Before long, I'd nodded off while standing. The loveseat catty-corner to the door tempted me from across the room. *I'm soft, it cooed. My padding's thick, comfortable.*

Treacherous feet slowly dragged me over to it. Hesitantly, I sat down and thought, *what would it hurt?* My mind was languid, calm; too tired even to dream. However, as I thought it, I slipped into one.

I ran in the dark; it suffocated me. I tried so hard to find them. My friends yelled out to me. Telling me to hurry, that they were running late. I had to catch up; I was always falling behind. I scuffled over the broken cement, but they were always out of reach. No matter how far I jogged, no matter how close they sounded; I couldn't get to them. After a while, their voices faded, replaced by an overwhelming static in my ears. Still, I ran. Until my foot found an unstable rock, my ankle cracked and I hit the ground.

An echo yelled from a distance reached my ears. "Come on, man. Get the lead out."

I tensed. No. Not this again.

Hoisting a heavy bag over my shoulder, I darted out of the shattered vault trying to catch up to Blue and the others; I didn't want to be left behind when the cops showed. Breezing past the hall, I shot out into the alley. Without warning, strong arms grabbed me and threw me to the pavement. I fought back, but the hands wouldn't let go. Shadows of my friends were fast disappearing into the night.

Desperate, I reached for my gun. I hadn't used it yet; it was for show. But I needed to this old man off of me so I could get away.

The dude saw the gun and reached for it. He almost had it from me when my finger squeezed the trigger. A light flared in front of my eyes and my ears rang. A fist-sized hole formed in his chest and blood went flying. It covered both of us. I gaped, disbelieving. Lightening flashed again, the sky crackled and grumbled, then rain fell. A streetlight flickered into life, and I saw the guy's face. It was eerily familiar.

Without warning, the building lurched, throwing off me the hardwood bench onto cold tile. Darkness surrounded, so black it nearly suffocated me. I rubbed my behind. *Bench? What happened to the couch?* Turning onto my side so could get from hands and knees to my feet, I smacked into a bucket full of cleaner bottles, knocking a rain of mops and brooms down upon me.

Swearing, my hand reached blindly along the wall for the light-switch. I hit it three, four, five times. Power was off. It had been raining pretty hard; it wouldn't surprise me that it was down. I clicked the light on my Wal-Mart special wristwatch, and checked the time: 12:04 am.

Snapping the mini flashlight off my belt, I twisted the light on and looked around. A dusty halo hovered on its beam. A large, old-fashioned vacuum claimed one entire corner of the small room and a pile of cleaner bottles rolled around at the bench's feet. Fallen mops and brooms leaned against its back. The vault was gone. *How did I get here? Did the guys do this?* I wondered.

"Dammit." Flashlight in hand, I left, my light catching the plastic nameplate outside the door. Basement, it labeled. I frowned and headed towards the elevator. Except it wasn't there. Somehow the vault managed to disappear, and I found stairs instead of an elevator.

Taking the steps two at a time, I stumbled over two strangers unconscious in a heap at the top of the stairwell. They wore simple white shirts tucked into brown slacks. Blocky words scrawled across their backs: Security.

"Who the hell are you, buddy?" I nudged one of them with my foot.

Rubble clacked and fell under someone's foot. The sound carried to the stairwell. Carefully, I peeked my head over the corner of the hall. The scorched shell of the vault filled my sight. *It's up here? When did that happen?* Tripping over gravel I realized, I've seen this before.

"Come on, man," someone yelled down the hall. "Get the lead out."

A young black man jerked his head up at that, his face a silhouette against his flashlight. He sprang from the wreckage, carrying a large sack on his back. I didn't even think about it. One second I was in the hall, and the next, I was running as fast as I could to catch up to him.

Catching him by the waist when we reached the back alley, I threw him down, wrestling with him. He bit, swore and kicked, pulling a gun free from his behind his belt. Its metallic gleam caught my attention; I reached out to grab it from him.

A light flared in front of my eyes and my ears rang. A hole the size of my fist formed in my chest and blood flowed. It was everywhere, covering both of us; drenching my windbreaker and forming a lake all around me. Dazed, I looked up at the boy who stood over me. Lightening flashed again, the sky crackled and grumbled, then rain fell. A streetlight flickered into life, and I saw the boy's face.