

## An Offer Refused

"Sit down Jimmy, take a piece of gum."

"I'm alright thanks." Jimmy took a seat opposite Lucky.

Lucky's lip curled, "Look now Jimmy, I been trying to get rid of that gum for you don't know how long, take a couple sticks guy."

"Just throw it away Luck, you gotta bum flavor there." Jimmy stared at all the hyphens in the name.

"Bum Flavor? It's Vanilla-Raspberry-Pomegranate, you got a problem with the way any of those taste?"

"Not all separate from each other no but you get em' all mixed up, that's when I say no thanks i'm all set." Jimmy held his hands tight to his chest, palms out, and made a dismissive expression.

Lucky stared at the gum as it sat there on his desk, the only object out of place, everything else in Lucky's office was diligently organized.

"Throw it away you gotta be kidding me." Lucky said shaking his head at the kid's gile.

"I mean *you* don't like it, obviously no one else does either if they won't take any." Jimmy looked down, "Whoever bought it made a purchasing error."

"I bought it!" Lucky roared, standing up from behind the desk. Two men came in with their hands inside their custom suits.

"Everything ok back here Luck?" The older of the two said looking at Jimmy as he twisted around in his seat, trying to see everybody at once.

"Yes, fine." Lucky adjusted his suit jacket and took a deep breath before easing back into his fine leather chair. The two men backed out and returned to watching the door from the outside.

“Look Lucky I-”

Lucky held his hand up and waved him off. Jimmy knew, if Lucky waved you off, you fucked off.

“I like you kid you’re honest.” He said and looked Jimmy right in the eyes, to see if Jimmy himself believed that statement.

“Thank you sir.” Jimmy said.

“No no don’t get started on all that sir stuff, you came in calling me Lucky you might as well keep doing it.” Lucky had a look now like he was smiling on the inside, his mouth stayed normal but his eyes were doing the talking, “You know, when Benny brought you in here I got the gist of what happened,” Lucky leaned in to Jimmy and waved him closer, the two both hovered over the desk and Lucky finished in a whisper, “he wanted you taken care of. If you just had a piece of gum and told me what happened, no matter what you said, you were going to the landfill with Tommy and Anthony, now look at you, you’re sitting here calling me Lucky.” Lucky raised his hands in the air and looked around the room in all its perfection.

“You see I like things to be organized.” Lucky said as he reached into a drawer.

Jimmy eyed the place he couldn’t see, where Lucky rummaged, “Yes si- Lucky I took notice of that right away.”

Lucky came up with two cigars and a lighter, he lit one and handed the second and the lighter to Jimmy who lit his and passed the lighter back.

“Efficiency is one thing you learn to appreciate as you get older.” Lucky nodded and looked around his office after he took a long drag.

“I appreciate it even at my age, I just can’t maintain it when things get busy.” Jimmy said trying not to cough after he took his own long pull.

“Listen Jimmy I want you to do something for me.” Lucky said after a moment of appreciative silence.

Jimmy went white, what kind of task would be delegated in exchange for his life, “What’s that Lucky?”

Lucky looked down at his hands, “Throw that gum in the garbage over there.”

Jimmy grabbed the gum, squished it in his hand for good measure, and dropped it in the trash next to Lucky’s desk. When it was all done and the sound of the gum hitting the bottom of the completely empty trash had long fell away Lucky looked up at the place on his desk where the gum had been, it was perfectly clean.

“Thank you Jimmy.” Lucky’s mouth still wasn’t smiling but his eyes were.

They sat in silence and smoked, Jimmy beginning to think that Lucky may have him killed after all, that this had been a game to liven up Luck’s day. After what seemed like five minutes and half the giant cigar Lucky finally nodded and looked back at Jimmy.

“We’ll finish our cigars Jimmy and then you’re going to walk out and i’m never gonna see you again.”

“If this were a movie you would have made me your protege.” Jimmy said.

Lucky’s eyes smiled, “You don’t want to be my protege Jimmy, you won’t get any insurance and your life expectancy will drop to about thirty.”

“That’s seven good years.”

“Jimmy I know where you’re coming from, you’re young and hungry, it’s strange to see you there chomping at the bit to get in the game, to make yourself a success. I was you once, now here I am on the other side of the desk looking back at it all, when I look at you Jimmy I see my whole adult life flashed before me.”

Jimmy didn’t speak he only waited for Lucky the Great to continue.

“People say around here I’m a legend, they say I’m the Godfather, The Capo di tutti capi, things like this. I’m not. I am a businessman who started out as a hired gun, a thief in the night. Now I sit at this desk and keep an eye on numbers, decide who gets taken to the landfill and who goes upstate a few years to keep the show running. It’s a job that takes efficiency and perspective.”

“It’s the job of a true leader.” Jimmy said with reverence.

Lucky looked at Jimmy’s admiring expression and shook his head.

“No, no it’s the job of a man who has no other options Jimmy. If I wasn’t where I’m at now I’d be dead or in Prison and those two were the likely outcomes, *this*,” Lucky rapped his knuckle off the oak desk, “is the lottery ticket life. That’s how I got the name when I was only a few years older than you, I should have been dead three times and I came out ok, all chance, all Luck.”

Jimmy was hearing these details directly from the man himself, everyone on the street fought about rumors and stories but this was the real thing from the real man. The thorough wire search process he went through meant The Great knew he wasn’t being recorded or broadcast.

“You were meant for it.” Jimmy said.

Lucky shook his head and checked the length of his cigar, a little under half now.

“If you want to think that way fine, but let me tell you after you’ve been around longer you’ll learn that it’s all chance, it’s all random. The decisions people make, they’re so quick and indecisive, a person could just as easily do *this* as they could *that*.” Lucky motioned to his left and right side as he said the words and Jimmy nodded.

“But some people have things go their way.” Jimmy said pointing at Lucky.

“As I said, if you want to think of things that way fine, it’s a young man’s perspective.”

“Thing is, I think I might be lucky too, not as lucky as you but still.” Jimmy said.

Lucky smiled with his mouth for what may have been the first time in a decade if the rumors on the street were true.

“You are Jimmy, I think even more than me. Not in the way you think though. If you can walk out of here after these cigars are done and never see me again, never see Benny or Tommy or Anthony again, you will be the luckiest man i’ve ever met.” Lucky bore down on Jimmy with his eyes, making sure he was getting it. “See Jimmy I may have survived being shot and stabbed and hit by a car, but it still all happened to me, it was awful, you really can’t appreciate how awful until you spend three months in rehab learning to walk again.”

Jimmy winced.

Lucky held up a finger, “Then ten days after you can walk normally, get shot in the chest and spend three weeks in the hospital.”

Jimmy tried to steady his shaking hands as he smoked.

Lucky leaned in closer, “See people call me Lucky because i’ve lived through horrible wounds and still made my way to the top but if i was really *that* Lucky I would’ve made it here without being shot or stabbed or run over by a car, right?” Lucky put his hands down flat on his desk with the cigar in his mouth and they both sat in silence.

Jimmy had never thought about things from this perspective before.

“And you Jimmy, you are the luckiest man I have *ever* met because you came to me *today*. If you had come to me yesterday or the day before, landfill. Tomorrow or the next day? landfill. You came today, and you walk away alive. If you were *really* lucky though you would have never been here to begin with, you would never have gotten into business with people like Benny and I and you never would have made the mistake that led you here.”

Both of their cigars were about three quarters gone.

“I don’t know what to do besides this.” Jimmy said as he motioned around the room, “I don’t want to be a nine to five office guy or a factory clown.”

“Factory clowns and office guys don’t get shot or stabbed or have their lives saved by a pack of gum either, they have wives and children and family, they don’t have to worry that someone might find their loved ones and hurt them, they don’t worry that someone may be an undercover sent to land them in prison.” Lucky finished and took a long pull of his cigar that brought it closer to it’s end, all good things come to an end eventually.

“It’s boring though, that lifestyle.” Jimmy said.

Lucky waved his hand in the air, “It’s our culture, we glorify criminals and those who live on the ‘fringe’. The strugglers are the ones who have the good stories. Problem with all that is, it’s nice to go to the movies and watch the main man struggle and fight, live life outside the law, find success and fortune. It’s nice to do this. You stand up from your seat and walkout, throw your popcorn away and drive home to go to bed, after all you have an early shift in the morning. See *me*,” Lucky tapped his chest, “I can’t walk out and leave it all behind, it follows me everywhere I go, I don’t leave the office and live a carefree life. I walk out and look over my shoulder, a grown man who has to pay others to watch his back because people come to kill from the front more than you’d think, I got my hands full watching *it*.”

Their cigars were down to nearly nothing and they both took their last pulls, Jimmy watching Lucky’s every move. Lucky stabbed out his butt and stood up, adjusting his suit jacket and holding his hand out to Jimmy. Jimmy couldn’t believe he was about to shake Lucky the Great’s hand and stood up as he put his butt out too.

“I don’t know how to thank you.” Jimmy said as he took Lucky’s hand.

“You can move to a different state and start a new life, if I hear about anyone seeing you in this town again no pack of gum will save you.” Lucky squeezed Jimmy’s hand tight and stared

him down the nose as he said these last words. He held this for a second, like a picture, the defining image of a man who is making a promise he won't break. Lucky let Jimmy's hand go.

Jimmy nodded and started to back away, taking one last look at the gum in the trash before he turned and walked out.

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"What the hell happened Thompson?" Sergeant Morris screamed, his moustache stretching over his mouth.

Thompson didn't stop to look at him.

"Nothing happened, he offered me gum then a cigar and apologized about any problems Benny was giving me. He didn't try to have me killed, you saw me walk out of there alone and unharmed, I couldn't believe it either."

"Bullshit Thompson, if you had a wire on you in there i'll bet a helluva lot more was said than that." Morris's veins were sticking out in his forehead and neck, he'd been heading this operation for months. "Intel says Garboa hasn't allowed bloodshed in those offices since he took over in eighty-seven. Eighty-seven, that's twenty-nine goddamn years. He wasn't gonna kill you in there, all you had to do was play the fucking part *one* more time, we would have had him on attempted murder. *One* more time, you couldn't do it? He figure you out? Buy you off?"

Thompson was clearing things from a cubicle desk and Morris watched enraged as he went about putting them into a trash bag. He took his badge and gun from a locked desk drawer then took the key off the ring and held them all out to Morris

"I quit, I can't do this anymore."

Morris wouldn't take the badge, gun and key so Thompson put them on the desk.

"Goodbye Morris, I'm sorry."

"If you know something you're *gonna* tell us, we'll hold your ass in jail if we need to."

Morris said.

"Well when you come, I won't resist." Thompson said as he picked up the trash bag and started away from the cubicle nest towards the door.

"What are you gonna do?" Morris asked, frozen in his spot.

Thompson looked back as he reached the door, his mouth stayed normal but his eyes smiled.

"Think i'll go be a factory clown."