

A FATAL HABIT

**A
SHORT
STORY**

by

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He was tall.

As tall as me.

Relatively speaking.

I'm tall to a four foot tall ten year old lad.

Perhaps a little small to a seven foot Basketball player.

But then there wasn't a seven foot AmBF Player in close proximity to where I was standing.

To where we were both standing for that matter.

So in the gloom of this alleyway we were both tall.

The same height.

That had a comforting feel about it.

You have no idea what it is like being on a crowded train. Packed in like sardines with my head around the height of the average person's armpit.

I now consider myself a bit of an expert on under-arm deodorants as I can identify some

thirty different brands just by a small whiff of the armpit.....but I digress.

I like that Nordic one the best though and surprisingly, with some women especially, their deodorant, like their perfume, it changes minutely because of their skin and sweat glands having an effect on the scent value.

I don't know why I do this; let my mind drift off into some absurd conversation with itself. It happens only when there is clear and present danger around. I guess it has something to do with nerves but it sure as hell plays havoc with any reaction moves that I should initiate like in this situation.

I couldn't make out the guy's features even though he was standing right in front of me. His gun hurting my ribs. He had a hoody on. Dark glasses which must have played havoc with his eyesight especially in the gloom of this alleyway. I couldn't even make out his mouth as it was covered by a kerchief or something similar.

'I want all your money.' Almost making it sound like a pleasant request though a bit muffled through the kerchief.

That was good, I thought to myself. He wasn't demanding it.

'I think my Bookmaker has the same secret desire.' I replied.

That seemed to confuse him.

'Just give me what's in your wallet, smart-arse.' A little more forceful. This time with a hint of hidden rage. I could tell that he wasn't some type of mind-reader or fortune cookie reader as I had bugger all in my wallet. I was dead broke. Not enough change to get me home on the train.

I thought about asking him if he could lend me enough for that, but thought better of it.

He may get the wrong idea and think that I was some type of a smart-arse and they're the type that should be shot into extinction! That's how I thought that he might see it in any case.

So I shut up.

I was standing with my arms spread-eagled as though I was being measured up for a wooden cross. That seemed absurd to me as robbers and pilferers were placed on crosses. Way back in any case. And the occasional small-time rebel of course. So some book describes. Not a week-end gambler who possibly bet too much of his hard earned on the gee-gees. That was according to my latest girlfriend in any case.

'I ain't got that much....' Going to lower my arm then pausing, hoping that he didn't take the action as some sort of commencement of a close quarters unarmed combat move.

I've been practising them in front of my bedroom mirror and consider myself lightning fast if I must say so myself.

'Ya wallet.....' Menace in his voice.

Still.

Some more.

I could now understand what he was saying quite clearly though he hadn't removed the

'kerchief. It was made all the clearer to me by the threatening manner. His obvious agitation.

I'm quick like that.

I got the impression he maybe getting a little impatient.

He took a step backwards and waved the gun at me possibly picking the initial beginnings of that lightning fast su-issoo body role which I had secretly invented.....I named it. I got a hundred of them, these impressive rolls, kicks and flying scissor kicks stashed away for just such a situation. I reckon that I could start my own unarmed combat school with all these new unheard of before moves that would stun all those black belts and 'wannebe' judo freaks.

I'd make a fortune....franchises.....that's the go, I thought to myself.

I'm waffling again but it sounds good don't you reckon?

He moved the gun from his left hand to his right.

With his left index finger he dived into his left nostril. Withdrawing it I noticed a glueb of matter on its extremity. He raised his finger up close to the dark glasses to closely inspect the object as though it contained the secrets of the universe. Satisfied that he couldn't decode said secrets, he wiped the finger on the front of his jeans. I glanced down to notice that the jeans from the knee up to the crutch line were badly discoloured.

That is disgusting.

Sickening.

Ghastly I thought to myself as I offered my wallet to him. Almost out of pity now.

He maybe able to buy a handkerchief or two.....if he looked into my secret compartment that had a \$10 note folded up in there.

For emergencies.

This was an emergency I reckoned.

Pretty soon if he kept up with the dastardly habit then he would find it hard to walk as his jeans would be so stiff and ungiving.

That type of thing is likely to kill you.

Or make you a social outcast if it continues!

I was about to ask him if his mother or father ever smacked him as a little boy when-ever they caught him doing such an animal thing when I heard a yell cut across my thought processes.

'Hey! What's going on back there?'

I thought that it was bloody obvious. I still had my left arm straight out parallel to the ground.

I as sure as hell wasn't giving directions to the local pub. And I can tell you for sure that the two of us didn't enter this dim alleyway to compare the colour of our socks if you get my drift.....although I think that I could void my bowel right this minute!

'Stay where you are. This is the Police. Lift your hands up where I can see them. Do it. Now!'

Good.

Concise.

Clear.

Without any form of misdirection, ambiguity or complication.

This guy could learn from that.

A street lesson that any thug should appreciate.

I shot both my arms straight up into the air, my right still clutching my wallet. Only too pleased to conform.

Too scared not to!

The guy seemed to move a lot faster than that though. Stepping sideways around me he took off as though the last train to the Blue Mountains was about to leave the platform. He was around the corner of the alleyway and out of sight before my arms had locked into their upraised positions.

Maybe it was just as well that I didn't try that su-issou body role on him. I didn't know really if I was that fast in reaction times!

'You OK?' Asked the cop as he spoke into a shoulder mike calling for an ambulance and a patrol car back-up.

I was a trembling mass of jelly. Unable to remain standing I slumped to the cold wet pavement. I knew that I was suffering from OCD....no.....that's not it.....PTSD after a life and death struggle. Something that I'll be able to brag about to my mates later on if I can just get through these several critical minutes.

I spent the night in hospital.

Shock they said but PTSD sounds much more serious.

My latest girlfriend didn't turn up to take me home.

She broke off with me, can you believe it.

In my dire time of need.

Now that's a typical woman!

I had to turn off my mobile for the entire period that I was hospitalised as it could have an effect on the sensitive equipment that was hooked up to me. To be truthful they just had a oxygen tube in my nose and one of those clamps that hurt like hell on my finger to monitor my pulse rate.

But I was suffering heaps!

I had two pillows and a buzzer button within easy reach if I felt some sort of fibrillation or what-ever. I didn't know what that meant but didn't want to expose myself as some sort of imbecile or cretin in front of any female nurse. I asked a male nurse. He was grim faced with his

explanation so I knew I must have been expected to be near death's door at some stage of the night.

Luckily I slept through it.

The night that is.

Not the fibrillations!

The latest squeeze had left a text message on my mobile the night before angrily stating that she was pissed off at being stood up *again* and that I was just a typical male thinking purely of himself. She wasn't even impressed with my immature excuse of being on death's door or thereabouts and had heard better from her kids and husband.

Kids? She never told me that she had kids. Come to think about it I was never told that she was married either. If she had of, I'm sure that it would have made a difference somehow.

What a bitch!

It was some months later that I was down near the wharves at an early opener having a quiet one after a night of surveillance that yielded bugger all for the hours and effort expended. I wandered through the main bar into the games room.

A schooner of cold in my hand.

I slumped against the door jamb to watch the only other person in the room play a game of billiards with himself.

No, not that type of billiards! The type that you play on a green baize table and two white and one red ball!

He was about my size.

Relatively tall as there was only him and me to make that important comparison.

That made me feel good. When I had this situation I felt a lot taller than I actually was.....which honestly was short when compared to the average height of the Australian male.

But then I was pretty wide.

Nuggety I would hint at.

Weights, early morning runs, bike rides and a swimming regime that would make a Personal Trainer pull his hair out. Or cry.

Thorpey too!

With frustration actually.

But I thought about these things and knew that one day I just may start such a daily routine.

If I could just find the time.

And the inclination.

The bloke stood up to admire his last canon, thinking three steps in front. I don't play billiards but if I did I reckon that I would be a world beater. Always thinking that one or three steps ahead of the game. Then again I reckon that Chess would be my go but at the moment I'm

having trouble with Draughts and Chinese Checkers!

I'll get the hang of them soon.

He transferred the cue from his left to his right hand. His left index finger disappeared into his left nostril to again re-appear with a boogie of some dimension on its end. He raised his finger to eye level and spent some time probing the specimen as though it contained the map to the Nazi bullion lost since the end of WW2.

Satisfied that it held neither that or the last remnants of his intestines, he wiped the mass on the front of his jeans.

I glanced down.

From around his knee to the level of his crutch the denim was discoloured. Stiff as a board with a dirty coating of smeared dry boogies and gluebs.

Beats ironing them I guess.

It was sickening.

Disgusting.

Ghastly and downright socially unacceptable.

If his parents had not taught him a lesson than I intended to.

I placed my now empty glass on a small wooden ledge at my head height and walked up to him to place my gun in his ribs.

His startled look was all the reaction I needed to satisfy my anger. And the need for retribution and an education in social etiquette.

Every-one knows that you should only use your little finger!

'You don't remember me do you?' A slight smirk on my face. Said with anger through my clenched teeth. This garbled and muffled my speech. I'll have to work on that. I repeated myself more clearly. 'You don't remember me do you? I was rudely interrupted about a month ago by an over-officious cop before I could let you know that I thought your disgusting habit would be the death of you.'

The blank look on his face further gratification.

I placed two of my best silk handkerchiefs in the top pocket of his leather Bomber Jacket. He still had no idea. What is it with these people? Has he slowly over the years extracted all his intestinal tract and most of his brain matter by his inhuman habit?

'About a month ago? No? Now that's a filthy habit that ya got. Ya never learnt to use a handkerchief.....or tissues? It's a little too late now I reckon.....'

I shot him.

The look of amazement further contentment for me.

We just can't have that type of anti-social behaviour going on in this day and age now can we?

I calmly walked out of the rear door of the Games Room, through the vacant Beer Garden and out onto the quiet empty street.

The sun had just started its daily climb.

I scratched my arse crack as I picked up pace. Really dug in deep.

It was itchy as all hell that's all!

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