

Attack of the Zombie Woman

There was a guy at work I didn't like much. His name was Jim. We called him "Chops". He was a relatively handsome young man, very outgoing. Too outgoing. He was well-built, larger and more toned than me, with red wavy hair and very distinct red sideburns. Big sideburns.

We worked close in together. No choice. It was a small business, just big enough to have a large roster of employees, just small enough to feel mom and pop and have all the problems of a small family.

We were in deliver grocery. Standing at computers for 6-8 hours a shift, on concrete, no chairs, no real scheduled breaks, and a high volume of verbally abusive and condescending customers calling in their much needed orders of booze, junk food, and more booze.

We would stand at our workstations, which were situated in something like a 7-11 looking environment. Bathed under the choke of fluorescent lighting, and entertained only by our small-talk between filling orders and taking calls.

The small talk between Chops and myself was always forced. He came into the environment and burned like a bright light. Fast, noticeable, but towards a quicker end than those of us that didn't stick out as much.

There really seemed to be an unspoken tension between us. Nothing was ever really said, or done, or acted out, but there was something none-the-less. Maybe it really just came down to male contending ego. Who will be the coolest guy in the place? Whose wit is more precise? Who has better stories? Who will the girls talk about when they are not present? It's an age-old conflict, and one that was very subtly going on between ole Chops and me at work.

We had been working together at the grocery store about a month. Long enough for us to get to know each other in the small environment, even if we didn't care to get to know each other. He had the opportunity to be jealous of some of my work success, and I had the opportunity to be jealous of his cute girlfriend. I knew he went to military school, he knew I went to public school.

Every night would be the same old thing, take calls from either rich customers living up in the Hollywood hills or take calls from poor customers living down in Hollywood who were pretending to be rich.

I'm not sure which is worse, for the most part people who actually have money aren't as abusive on the phone as those who don't. Sure, they're often spending more money on food for their dogs than you can afford to spend on your own food, and when they order wine they talk down to you as a guy who answers the phone--couldn't possibly pronounce French wine names accurately. Sure, when the delivery driver gets to their house they buy 126 dollars in groceries with two 100 dollar bills and tip the driver two bucks saying they can't afford more.

But the worst is the poor guys, the real trashy ones, cooped up in their Hollywood apartments, medicating themselves with beer, or whiskey, ordering fifteen dollars in groceries so they can have delivered the one pack of cigarettes they are really craving but are too lazy to go out and get.

I'm not sure where they learned the idea that the best way to act *rich* is to treat other people like shit, but it seems to be a behavior that is in common with many of the customers.

The one break in the monotony of the job is when a stray, crazy, homeless, or drugged up person comes into the store. Sitting on the mouth of one of the many hells in Los Angeles, the store I work at is not in the best part of town.

Often those coming in are the most desperate in society. They are woman-hookers who happen to have penises, homeless people who have truly gone mad without food, shelter, or someone caring, and crack-heads who have completely disintegrated their mental and physical minds.

It is a unique sociological lesson working at the delivery grocery. On the phone we can deal with some of the wealthiest persons in the city, and in person we deal with some of Hollywood's poorest.

Often, Chops and I are much too busy to get on each others nerves, between the many phone calls, or the people lined up at the counter, we can be completely unaware of what the other is doing. And sometimes that is best.

On one fateful night, taking phones, filling grocery carts, and working away, something happened.

I was standing at the counter just having rung someone up for a coke and fifty-cent bag of peanuts, when I saw her. Standing on the street in front of the double glass doors of our business was this woman. She looked rather young and relatively well-kept to be spotted as homeless at first.

But the look on her face and in her eyes could suggest to a veteran of this business that she might be a little crazed.

She entered the store giving me a very insecure glance. Now I am one of those people who really tries--I can say this--I am one of those people who really, at first, tries to treat everyone equal. Especially when working, when someone comes in to buy something, I treat them nicely. It doesn't matter who they are, what they look like, or even what they may smell like. I do try.

It was hard to tell where she had come from, or what she wanted, or what may be going on with her. Her hair was brown and kind of greasy looking, but kept up nevertheless. She had a dress on, and a sweater. It was hard to tell from her physique if she was oddly shaped, or happened to be pregnant. The idea of a homeless and pregnant is always disturbing. Always. The what, when, where, why, and how can just get too disturbing.

The woman quickly grabbed a basket and wandered down the aisle. I glanced toward my other co-workers as well as Chops. His back was turned, and he was fully involved on a phone order, so I felt like it was just me who had noticed the odd behavior of the woman.

After about ten minutes of darting back and forth, wandering through the store she placed three very odd items in her basket. A jar of marinated artichoke hearts, a bear shaped bottle of honey, and a bag of sunflower seeds. Three items that did not go together in any logical way, items that would not make a meal, nor would they serve as someone's weird craving or snack.

She approached the counter and set the basket down. As soon as it left her hands, and I looked at the contents, she acted as if it wasn't her basket. Instead she looked at me straight in the eye with no break of eye contact. As if she was staring past my soul.

"How much are cigarettes?" She asked.

It took me a second to respond because her speech was so hard to understand. She pointed again.

"How much?"

"Cigarettes?" I asked, "They are five dollars nineteen cents." Expensive I know, but how to explain to her they are priced for delivery.

She looked down at the few dollars in her hand. She then looked up at me, straight in the eyes once again. And I saw what can truly only be described as a transformation. In the older days someone would have said she had just been overcome by the devil. Hell, in these days I'd say she had just been overcome by the devil. No exaggeration, I saw her face transform, and on it was a look of PURE HATE. Nothing else. Rage. Hate. She was staring at my face, as if she'd like nothing more than to see my death, probably a violent one at that.

"What?" she kind of shrieked. And then she flung her hand full of change at me as hard as she could. Somehow I dodged as a penny and dime buck-shot blew past me.

Chops was pelted in the side, as coin currency bounced off the wall, the computer, and his head. He turned, still talking to a customer on the phone, while giving me a "What the hell" look.

But her shrieking continued. Cackling almost. She was suddenly, violently, drunk with rage and instability.

"Out! Out right now! Leave!" I shouted at her.

For someone who was born timid, I had become, because of the lunatics who wander into this job, a little more forceful when situations such as these arose.

"You have to leave, right now!" I barked. And with some cackling and more hateful looks she left. Laughing to herself the entire way out.

There was an awkward pause of silence between my coworkers and myself.

"What the fuck?" Chops asked as he hung up his phone call.

Everyone started laughing, myself included, out of how strange the situation was, or how uncomfortable we all were--I don't know.

Chops' receipt printed out of the computer and he started pushing around his cart filling his order. I had an order to process so I walked over to the check out stations, which are closer to the front double-doors.

About five minutes passed, and it was Chops and I both side-by-side at the check out stations.

"I can't believe that! That lady was crazy." He said, laughing to himself.

"Yeah, you should've seen the look on her face when she snapped." I said.

We were bonding for a second. Who would of thought?

And then I saw her on the other side of the front window walking quickly toward the front doors. She was looking back at me with the devilish, un-fearing grin.

"Crap!" I said rushing toward the door.

The woman and I got to the double-doors at the same time. I placed my hands on the handles, just as she placed her hands on the handles outside.

SHE YANKED!

With the door snapping a bit, I held it closed.

SHE YANKED AGAIN!

She was trying to force her way back into the store.

“No way!” I yelled. “No way!”

The other employees in the store rushed backward deeper into the store in retreat. Chops rushed toward the double-doors and me. The woman was yanking with all of her hatred-might. She was screaming, and thrashing about. Her body looked like something out of *The Exorcist*.

“Lock the doors, lock the doors!” Chops shouted.

“I don’t have keys!”

“Go get the manager’s keys, I’ll hold the door!”

And so Chops took up my hold on the door. As I backed into the store looking for someone with keys I saw the muscles in his arm twitching as he held the doors closed with all his upper arm strength.

Quickly the manager came from the back, anxiously sticking her keys into the door as Chops fought to hold them closed. The crazed woman yanking from the outside the entire time.

CLICK.

We got the doors locked. Now it was time to call the police. It’s not like the few of us who were working couldn’t team up and beat up the woman. It wasn’t about that, it was about trying to avoid a physical confrontation with someone so deranged. Who knew what was going on in her head, what she was capable of, or what she might be carrying around in her blood?

There was a strange calm, as the manager attempted to call the police. The woman paced back and forth in front of our double doors. She had picked up a hamburger from the place next door and was laughing and smearing it all over our glass doors and front windows. She would become calm for a moment, pressing her face against the glass like a zombie in a George Romero film staring at us. Then she would snap again, start screaming hysterics and punching and slamming the glass so hard we were sure it would break.

With every THUD of the glass being struck Chops would snicker to himself, “What the fuck?” or “Holy shit.” followed by some under the breath laughter.

Now that she was locked outside, I couldn’t help but find the situation strange, it was kind of humorous. Chops and I couldn’t stop comparing her to scenes from *Dawn of the Dead*. Not very nice of us to make fun of the clearly psychotic and mentally ill, but that’s what the situation had turned into. We were like two rivals in a classic horror movie who have to put their differences aside to fight the supernatural evil, which stalks them.

About twenty minutes after it started *The Attack of the Zombie Woman* was over. It ended with her laying on one of our delivery driver’s cars smearing her hamburger into his windshield and laughing to her self.

We got out all right. Nobody got hurt, nothing was broken, and Chops and I now had a story, which we could tell together, and bond with.

Two weeks later he was promoted to management, then fired for stealing from the store. I haven’t seen him since. Or the zombie woman...