

The Customer is Always Right

By Mike McHone (*Originally published in Blood Moon Rising, issue #22, Summer 2004*)

A used car lot, a few miles away...

"I hafta say that this is a very nice Cadillac, sir. V8 engine, ten-thousand miles on her, used to be owned by an eighty year old lady, drove it only to church on Sundays."

"That right?"

"Right as rain. We actually just put some engine cleaner through it."

"I like the color."

"Good eye. That's what you'd call midnight blue. Sold one just like it the other day to a banker. So," the salesman asks, "is this car gonna be for business or pleasure?"

"Both," the customer says.

"Well, ain't nothing better than a Caddy for either. In fact, my father-in-law liked this car so much, I sold him one too."

"Get outta town."

"Serious as a heart attack. He comes down here one day, right, and asks me to show him some cars. You know, something big so he can take the grandkids—my kids—out for a drive."

"You have kids?"

"Yes, sir. Jason junior—JJ, we call him—and my baby girl Lori."

"How old?"

"JJ's eight and Lori's six."

"They looking forward to Halloween?"

"Oh, my God, they're driving me nuts."

“Ha.”

“I mean, it’s—what?—a month and change away, but they’re acting like it’s tomorrow. Always talking about it. How ‘bout you? Any kids?”

“Thirty-three of them.”

The salesman’s mouth drops open.

“I mean,” the customer says, with a smile, “I have three at home, and a fourth grade class of thirty.”

“Oh.”

“Ha.”

“Had me rattled for a second. I was about to ask you how you’re able to walk.”

“Yeah, that’s what I usually say, that I have thirty-three kids, because, God knows, those kids in my class feel like they’re mine.”

“I’ll bet. Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, that we put some new tires on here not too long ago,” the salesman says, giving the front left one a swift kick.

“Uh-huh,” says the customer.

“Yep,” salesman says, “this is a fine piece of machinery. A fine piece of machinery.”

“What about trunk space?”

“Oh,” he says, pulling a set of car keys out of his grey slacks. “Lots of space.” The salesman unlocks and opens the trunk. “About six feet, by four feet, by two and a half, I think.”

“Two and a quarter,” the customer corrects looking deep inside.

The salesman laughs. “You sure?”

“I am. Trunk space is important for my second job.”

“Yeah? Whattaya do?”

The customer pulls a hunting knife from his windbreaker. “A little of this,” he says as he slashes the salesman across the throat, “and a little of that.”

The salesman stumbles, eyes bulging, face contorting, hands groping at his throat. He tries to breathe, but nothing but cracked, wet gargles come from his rent throat. Blood pours like a faucet, seeping through his fingers, down his arms, and splattering loudly on pavement.

The customer pushes him into the trunk and slams the hatch. The salesman flops around like a goldfish out of its bowl. Hands and feet slam against the truck lid.

For a while.

Then: silence.

The customer yawns.

Maybe it'd be better if he got a van?

Who knows?

He shrugs.

He tosses the knife down and moves his head from side to side working out the kinks in his neck and starts the long walk home.

Later that night, he will eat pizza with his wife, Maddie, and three kids, Sherry, fourteen, Max, nine, and Carson, six months. He will watch television. He will sleep. He will awake in the morning, he will shower, shave, eat toast, brush his teeth, get in his car, and go to work at the elementary school you used to attend as a child.

He smiles, shoves his hands in his pockets, and walks onward, saying hello and good evening to people who simply aren't there.

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