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Mr. Palshaw

English IV

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The Heist

I rammed into the door, throwing my left shoulder against the metal.

“*Jes*us! It won’t open.” I stepped back and leaned on the wall, gasping for air. My doctor advised me to avoid extraneous physical exercise wherever possible, as my asthma had been causing me troubles since second grade.

“No shit, sherlock. Move.” Matthewstepped forward, took off his jacket, and produced a hammer from the waistband of his shorts. Long black hair hung down to his chin. On a good day, he loved to make jests concerning prominent sports figures and cartoons. Any other day, he joked with waitresses and cooks at restaurants and talked his way out of trouble with the local police.

“You had that the entire *time,* and you never bothered to mention it?” I tried to look angry, but to no avail.

He punched me on the arm. “I wanted to see if *you* could do it.” He stepped towards the door. “Clearly you couldn’t.” Matthew lined up the face of the hammer with the door handle and swung down. One, two, three times. Finally, the handle gave in and fell to the floor, its metal insides clattering by our feet. “Alex? Take it away, buddy.” Matthew stepped back and grinned.

“Let’s do it.” Alex grinned from ear to ear. Originally born down south, Alex was a skilled junior craftsman, or so he claimed to anyone who would care to listen. Always boasting a cut, bruise, or splinter from his work, he affectionately called these wounds lessons in disguise, meant to guide him towards perfection. Most never quite healed correctly, and he never bothered to visit a doctor.

It was early morning on the last week of the school year. The Snack Shack was a ten-foot-high cube of cement, topped with a ring of stainless steel. The only door, a three-inch thick metal slab with two separate locks, was barred with a piece of oak wood.

As I leaned on the chain link fence that separated the courtyard from the field, the cold metal stung my back and the moisture seeped through my t-shirt. My bicycle, an old Mongoose with a new coat of paint, was stashed in the bushes connecting the parking lot to the courtyard. The sun inched its way above the treetops, orange and red swirling together like a mosaic painting. The baseball field was wet with morning dew, the dirt disheveled from the previous night’s game. In front of me, the courtyard consisted of six square benches, each more broken and faded than the last. The overhang, a piece of blue cloth strung between three lamp posts, struggled under the weight of branches, leaves, and debris from the surrounding oak trees.

I looked at my watch. “Shit. Where are they?”

The sound of laughing and bicycle chains rattling filled my ears. I looked toward the parking lot, and two silhouettes appeared.

“*Hola muchacho. Buenos dies.”* Matthew failed spanish twice in the past three years, and consistently confused his vowels.

“Good morning, Noah. Isn’t the sunrise beautiful?” Alex slipped off his backpack and took out his camera. He loved to bring his camera everywhere he went, taking pictures of the food he ate, the current day’s weather, and the antics that tended to manifest in his dad’s shop. Alex was fond of the notion that each picture represented a 25-megapixel mistake or triumph, one that he could show his grandkids someday.

“You guys are late. We agreed on 5:30.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Nobody’s here anyway. There will be plenty of time to liberate the goods that are locked in that hunk o’ junk over there. That’s what we’re all here for, right? I would otherwise be *sleeping* right now, but I have my priorities.” Matthew winked.

“Right, but...do you have the tools we need? What about shopping bags? I couldn’t find the nice cloth ones, so I only brought three--”

“Noah, *relax.* This’ll turn out *marvelously.* Remember last year at the lake?” Last summer, our families took a weekend trip to the lake. It was forecasted to be cool and breezy, but the temperature reached upwards of 100 degrees. Matthew suggested that we break into the shed behind our cabin and steal a fan, to which Alex and I agreed. Without any tools or knowledge of how to break a lock, we succeeded by slamming the wooden door to pieces while the rest of the camp slept. That summer was the very beginning of our journey towards delinquism.

Alex stopped for a moment and reached in his pack, pulling out the tools. One set of pliers, a package of bobby pins, and a plastic bag of metal hooks, each boasting a different shape.

“What the hell are these?” I sat down, grabbed the plastic bag, and took out each hook, laying them side by side. They smelled of oil and grease, and the thin metal slipped between my fingers.

“They’re called lever tumblers. Or just tumblers, as the pros call ‘em. I stole ‘em from my dad’s shop. I didn’t know which was for what, so I took ‘em all.” Alex shrugged. He had a bad habit of borrowing his dad’s equipment, using it once or twice, and selling it on the Internet.

“What do they do?”

“They’re supposed to unlock doors, but I’m not entirely sure how to use ‘em. All the different shapes on the ends there fit to different kinds of locks. There aren’t a ton, so--”

“Shit!” Matthew started towards the bushes. “Alex, Noah, get your asses over here!”

I gathered up all the hooks, put them into the plastic bag, and slipped behind the bushes, with Alex at my heels. “What are you so worked up about?”

“Look.” Matthew pointed towards the courtyard.

Ten yards away, an older man was walking towards us, his face buried in his phone and a brown paper bag in his left hand. His brown, long-sleeve flannel was flowing behind him as he walked, and his jeans were frayed at the knees. The brown hair atop his head went down to his shoulders. From a distance, he looked to be no older than 40, but his balding head and the gray wisps of hair on his face said otherwise. He sat down on the bench nearest the baseball field and brought his lips to the paper bag.

“What is he doing? Any of you guys ever seen that guy ‘fore?” Alex snapped a picture with his camera.

“Nope.” Matthew and I replied in unison.

After a few moments of staring out onto the baseball field and drinking, the mystery man got up slowly from the bench and walked away, brown paper bag still in his hand. His shoes dragged across the payment, and he swayed slightly from side to side.

We were all silent for a few moments, waiting for the man to go out of sight. “Alright, what next?” I was under the impression that the plan would go off without a hitch, and I had butterflies in my stomach. A whole swarm of them.

“Get those hook things ready, and let’s get this show on the road.” Matthew stood up and started towards the snack shack.

Alex and I followed, taking out the hooks, pliers, and plastic bags. The sun had risen over the treetops now, and deep red permeated throughout the sky. When we arrived at the shack, Matthew was already fiddling with the oak bar, attempting to pry it free with a crowbar. The crowbar was old, its body brown with rust.

“Don’t hurt yourself there, Matt.” Alex constantly warned others against the dangers of woodworking and other sorts of crafting, claiming that it was an acquired taste that ‘doesn’t take kindly to others.’

“Just trying to...to get this damn piece of *wood* off! Christ!” Matthew had the crowbar hinged underneath the slab. His face was beet red, and the veins on his arms and neck bulged out slightly. The wood bent slightly under the pressure, but did not snap. Matthew kept trying, leaning his entire body on the crowbar.

I cleared my throat. “Matt, I’ve been thinking. I just...I just don’t think this is gonna work. I mean, first the mystery man, now this…this….”

Matthew unhinged the crowbar. “Let me stop you right there, before you stutter yourself to death. We talked about this *yesterday,* and we agreed that we’re in this for the long haul. You said yourself, it’s our last week at this place, and we have the right--hell, the God-given *duty*--to stick it to all of the adults that treated us like trash for four years. *This* is how we are going to repay them, whether you’re here or not.” After a few minutes of trying, the wood exploded under Matthew’s weight, torn asunder from the iron door. Matthew was thrown back, the crowbar ripped from his hands. Wood chips flew everywhere. My heart skipped a beat.

Matthew regained his footing. “Okay then. *That* was dramatic.”

I leaned down, picked up the crowbar, and kicked the broken chips of wood aside. The remaining wood attached to the door was held by a thick screw secured into the concrete. Near the top of the door was a window. I looked through the smudged and greasy glass into the shack. What I saw excited me to no end. The shelves were lined with candies and chocolates of all varieties, some of which were completely foreign to me. Two refrigerators stood on the back wall, no doubt filled with frozen pizzas, sandwiches, and every brand of soda imaginable. I could taste the ice cream, chocolate and vanilla swirled together in harmony.

“Noah, you want to give it a try? I’m beat.” Matthew flashed a quick smile. Ever since he found out about my severe underperformance in physical education, his jests were unrelenting.

“Good luck, n’ try not to hurt yourself.” Alex chuckled. “It’s a *steel door*, yeah? No *way* you’re breaking’ it down.”

I made my best attempt to knock the door down, the three-inch thick iron behemoth it was. It was Matthew, though, who did the heavy lifting, and I was left with a bruised shoulder and tears welling in my eyes. I had a few moments to recover while Alex jimmied the lock--what was left of it, anyway--with the tumblers and the set of pliers. Though he claimed he didn’t know how to pick a lock, he was proficient. With a loud click, the door swayed open, a burst of cold air shearing my face.

“Alright folks, let’s do it.” Alex stood up and handed out the bags.

“Aye aye, captain.” Matthew stepped up into the shack. “Holy hell! X marks the spot!”

I was speechless, part from the pain in my shoulder, part from the butterflies wreaking havoc inside my stomach. *What if the mystery man comes back, and catches us red-handed? What if a teacher stops by? What if--*

Alex patted me on the shoulder. “Noah, you comin’? Matt’s already grabbed half the goods. I’m certain you don’t want to lose your share, now do ya?”

“No, of course not.” I followed Alex into the shack, and we looted as much as we could, limited by what each of us could carry. We stuffed every piece of candy, chocolate, drink, and miscellaneous food that we could find, not bothering to keep the place tidy. We opened boxes, cleaned out most of the refrigerators’ contents, and swiped clean every shelf, nook, and cubby. I filled the three plastic bags that I brought, plus an old carton that I found in the back, its cardboard damp with moisture. Taking stock, we were able to carry three plastic bags and one box apiece, leaving only foreign candy bars and expired goods. Our bikes were rendered useless, as riding a bike with nearly twenty pounds of weight along a busy road was a bold feat. Too much risk for a petty reward, we all agreed.

In the end, we decided to walk home and deposit our takings before school started, leaving our bikes in the bushes, as hidden from view as possible. Our plan went off without a hitch, save for the mystery man drinking from his brown paper bag.

“Who was that guy anyway? And what was he drinking, do ya think?” Alex balanced his box on his shoulder.

I chuckled. “Apple juice?”

We all laughed in unison, filling the morning air with child-like zeal.