

The Devil Always Wins

By

Kirsten James

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FADE IN

INT: KITCHEN - DAY

Eighties and nineties décor. JAMES, late 30s, short dark hair and thick beard, casually dressed, sits at his kitchen table staring into his coffee.

AYDEN, 8, a young version of Dad, finishes a bowl of lucky charms.

AYDEN

Is mum gonna go to the doctor?

James breaks his stare, looks at Ayden. His words slow and dead.

JAMES

What did you say son?

AYDEN

Are you gonna take mum to the doctor?

He gazes back at his coffee.

Beat.

JAMES

No, she just needs some rest.

Ayden shrugs and gets up from the table.

AYDEN

Okay.

He looks at Dad not sure what to think of his mood. Grabs the school bag off the chair, hooks it over his shoulders.

AYDEN (CONT'D)

Bye Dad.

James looks at Ayden.

JAMES

Aye?

(beat)

Yeah bye.

Arms wrap around James, a kiss on his cheek. Ayden leaves.

James takes a sip of coffee.

INT: BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

JOY, early 30s, lies lifeless under the bed covers. Her gaze fixed on the ceiling, lips icy blue. An empty pill bottle sits on the bedside table.

INT: KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

James slowly, almost forced, reaches for his cigarettes. Picks up the packet, pulls one out, lights it, leaves it in his mouth.

He picks up his car keys, and moves to the sink, crouches down and opens the cupboard doors.

Keys CLANK against a small metal box as he opens it. He takes out a small handgun, gets up and heads through the kitchen door into the..

HALLWAY

Turns on the light, opens a door to the left that brings him into the back of the..

SERVICE STATION SHOP

Early morning sunlight streams through the large windows that surround the shop. Two rows of stocked shelving take up most of the room.

The gun CLUNKS onto the service counter.

Denial forces him into the morning routine. Doors unlock, sign turns to OPEN, fluorescents flicker on.

He unlocks the register, drags a stool over, sits with cigarette in hand and stares at the gun.

JAMES'S P.O.V.

A Grand Marque pulls up close to the shop. An older woman gets out, moves to the passenger door, opens it, reaches in and gets something out.

BACK TO SCENE

MAVIS, 79, a little hunched, long white hair tied up in a bun, pushes her back into the door opening it.

She walks in with a large chocolate cake in her hands and a beaming smile across her face.

MAVIS

Hello Dear.

James grabs the gun, hides it on a shelf under the register.

MAVIS (CONT'D)

(at his cigarette)

I thought you'd quit those things?

He grabs a piece of paper, stubs it out.

She puts the cake on the counter.

MAVIS (CONT'D)

This one's for Joy and Ayden. I know this isn't your favorite. I was going to make banana cake for you as well but I didn't have enough bananas. You'll get yours in a couple of days.

James nods, makes no eye contact. She looks at him with motherly concern.

MAVIS (CONT'D)

Are you okay dear?

He scratches the back of his neck, glances at her then focuses on the cake.

JAMES

Yeah, I just didn't sleep well.

She reaches across the counter, gently puts her hand on his.

MAVIS

(quietly)

You haven't heard news have you?

He looks at her and pulls his hand away.

Embarrassed, Mavis moves hers back.

MAVIS (CONT'D)

I'm prying. I'm sorry. It's just hard for me not to worry.

He endures a smile.

JAMES
Everything's fine.

JAMES'S P.O.V.

A beat-up car pulls up beside the gas pump, a person gets out wearing a tan cowboy hat and blue plaid shirt. Heads towards the shop.

BACK TO SCENE

The door opens and in comes BRET, early 30s, skinny, medium height.

He's dressed like a cowboy; dark blue jeans, snakeskin boots and a rhinestone bolo tie. His clothes are too clean for him to be a real cowboy.

He nods over at James. Mavis turns, takes a quick look.

He moves towards the shelves, checks out the goods.

MAVIS
Well Dear, I'll leave you be.
Don't forget...yours will be here on
the weekend. I've got to let those
bananas ripen. Tell Joy I'll pop over
tomorrow after lunch to get the plate.

She taps on the china under the mound of cake, gives Bret a polite smile and nod on the way out. He ignores her.

James re-lights his cigarette, sits back on his stool, and stares into the cake.

The wrapper on a Snickers Bar RUSTLES in Bret's hand. He checks the expiry date, puts it back. Picks up another, checks the date then holds it out towards James.

BRET
You got any fresh ones of these out
back?

James looks up.

JAMES
Sorry?

Bret looks annoyed.

BRET

Ahhhh, you got any fresh Snickers out the back? This lot here's gonna' expire in six days and I like mine fresh.

James stares at him, doesn't know how to answer.

Bret shakes the candy bar it at him.

BRET (CONT'D)

Well!

The stool CREAKS as James sits upright, face deadpan.

JAMES

(matter-of-fact)

I'm sorry Sir but that's all we have.

Bret throws the Snickers back on top of the others.

He scans the shop.

BRET

You got ANYTHING fresh in here?

An awkward LAUGH from Bret.

He picks up a can with a dent in it, holds it out towards James.

BRET (CONT'D)

This ain't good.

James puts the cigarette down, rises off his stool. Hands pressed firmly on the counter.

Bret looks at more cans, picks one up, another dent. Arm stretched he shows James then turns the can and looks at it.

BRET (CONT'D)

You ain't much of a grocer are ya?
Maybe you oughta just stick to sellin' gas.

The phone RINGS, James doesn't answer, he's watching Bret.

Bret casually strolls down the isle towards the back, dragging his finger along the shelf, looking at the items along the way.

He picks up a small bag of sugar, checks the date, HMMMF, throws the bag back.

The fridge door opens. He pulls out a six-pack of beer and heads to the front.

James takes a drag on his cigarette. His eyes stay firmly on Bret.

The beer SLAMS onto the counter inches from the cake. Glass CLINKS against glass.

BRET (CONT'D)

Punch me in ten bucks for gas. It's...

He looks out the window... smirks.

BRET (CONT'D)

The only car out there.

Smoke from the cigarette drifts towards Bret. He fans it away.

BRET (CONT'D)

Ain't it illegal to smoke in service stations?

James ignores him, puts the cigarette on the counter, moves to the till, punches keys.

JAMES

Eighteen ten.

Bret hands him a twenty, checks out the cake.

BRET

Is this fresh?

JAMES

It's not for sale.

James's attention is on the register.

A finger slowly runs through the cakes chocolate icing.

Bret glares at James as he licks the icing off his finger.

The till SLAMS shut. James looks at Bret, looks at the cake, then lunges forward.

Coins CLINK all over the counter. He grabs Bret's shirt and pulls him in, their noses almost touching.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What's your problem?

Eyes lock, each waits for the next move.

James pushes him away.

Bret steps back with his hands up.

BRET

Whoa, hey, didn't mean nothin' by it. It just looked so good.

His eyes stay on James as he picks up the beer. He grins arrogantly.

BRET (CONT'D)

Keep the change.

He heads to the door. James moves to the front of the counter and watches.

Bret stops and turns.

BRET (CONT'D)

Ya wife and daughter look real pretty in that photo ya got back there. Wouldn't mind a piece of them myself.

He spits on the linoleum and exits.

EXT: GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER

The door flies open. James runs out.

JAMES

You sick fucking piece of shit.

He grabs Bret by the arm, turns him round and with everything he has, slams his fist into Bret's face.

Bret's hat flies off his head, beer falls to the ground, SMASHES, Bret follows.

He's on the ground looking up, nose bloodied, stunned.

Meters away a MAN, early 50's, tall, tanned, wearing a white shirt and cowboy hat, puffs on a cigarette and watches.

James grabs Bret, pulls him up and lays into him, punch after punch, he's going to kill him.

The Man throws his cigarette to the pavement, runs over and grabs James.

MAN

Come on fella, that'll do.

A lot of GRUNTING and SCUFFING as the Man wrestles James off his punching bag.

Bret breaks free, pushes himself back along the ground to get some distance. Gets up, grabs his hat, and stumble-runs to his car.

BRET

(yelling)

Crazy son of a bitch.

James is ready for more, but the Mans grip is strong.

Bret gets in the car and drives off. James breaks free and rushes towards the car like a torpedo.

MAN

It's done fella. Just leave it.

James stops on the sidewalk, out of breath, and watches the car become a spec in the distance.

He heads back toward the shop, past the Man. Enters the store, locks the door and turns the sign to closed.

The Man shakes his head and walks off down the road.

INT: GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

James leans into the glass and rests his head on an advert for Beyer's Ice cream. He caresses the piece of tape holding up the poster, tears flood.

INT: GAS STATION - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joy is smiling and singing to herself as she hangs up the Beyer's poster on the door. James is behind her, his

arms around her as she pushes her finger along the tape securing it to the window.

BACK TO SCENE

He slams his hand on the door, pushes himself away. Goes behind the counter, grabs the gun from the shelf. Puts it to his temple. Turns and looks at a photo on the back wall.

The faces in the photo smile at him. He drops the gun to his side and moves closer to the picture. His finger gently strokes Joys face, then 5-year-old HANNAHS, then Ayden's.

He pulls the photo off the wall and heads through the

HALLWAY

into the

KITCHEN

Puts the gun on the table then heads into the

LIVING ROOM

to the sight of a bloodied Bret sitting in a recliner, gun resting in his lap.

James stops, puts his hand out instinctively.

JAMES

Whoa.

A beat.

Bret points the gun towards James.

BRET

I see ya wife didn't take the news to well. What was it like sleepin' next to a corpse James?

James stares at Bret, his eyes still red from crying.

Bret leans forward, looks hard at James.

BRET (CONT'D)

Owww, he's been cryin'. Hey Roy, come in here, tough boy here's been cryin'.

The sound of footsteps.

The Man (ROY), with the white cowboy hat, slowly walks into the living room holding a photo in one hand and a banana in the other. Looks at James, nods, doesn't care that James has been crying.

ROY
(at the photo)
Yeah, this one was a real cutie.

He hands the picture to Bret, sits on the sofa and takes a bite out of his banana. Bret studies the photo.

Hannah, 5, long brown curls and big brown eyes smiles at Bret. He smiles back, memories of his time with her written on his face.

BRET
Took em a while to find her... what
(looks at Roy)
about 2 months?

Roy nods.

BRET (CONT'D)
Yi know, I thought this one was gonna
be an easy find. Is it me? Or are
cops just gettin' more an' more
stupid?

James's face is red, his veins bulge, he can't run, the gun is on him.

Bret gets up and walks to James, puts the gun to James's head. He leans in close.

BRET (CONT'D)
You wanna know ya little girl died?

JAMES
Just leave, please, please go.

Bret leans in and whispers in his ear.

James looks ahead, his expression full of rage, he is ready to kill. He grabs Bret's hand, photo flying, and wrestles for the gun.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Where is he!

They struggle, the gun goes off, the bullet SMASHES through a picture hanging on the wall.

Bret pushes James back. Points the gun at him.

BRET (CONT'D)
Feisty fucker aren't ya?

He gets close, aims the gun directly at his forehead. With a WACK he slams the gun across the side of James's head knocking him unconscious.

BRET (CONT'D)
Come on lets go.

ROY
Aren't you gonna kill him?

BRET
And put him out of his misery?

Bret walks out of the lounge. Roy follows, throws his banana skin at James.

INT: KITCHEN - LATER

The handle on the back door jiggles. The door opens. In walks Ayden, school bag on his back. He runs to his mum's bedroom door, stops. He pauses, realizes barging in isn't a good idea.

He runs into the lounge, stops suddenly at the sight of his dad on the floor.

He races over, kneels and pulls his dad up towards him. Sees the blood in his hair.

AYDEN
Dad, dad, wake up.

James is out cold. Ayden shakes him.

AYDEN (CONT'D)
Dad!

James's eyes open. He looks around, squinting like he's just woken up to a nasty hangover.

JAMES
Ayden.

AYDEN

Dad, what happened?

James slowly sits up, touches his head. Looks at Ayden, grabs him and squeezes him tight.

JAMES

Oh God, I thought you were dead.

He frantically searches Ayden for cuts and bruises.

JAMES

Did they hurt you? What did they do?

AYDEN

Who?

JAMES

The two men that took you.

AYDEN

No one took me. I came home cause you looked really sad this morning and I don't like Mrs. Hamry's class.

JAMES

So no one took you? No men took you?

AYDEN

No dad. Hailey came home too, I saw her coming back, she said she had a headache, I thought she was lying to get out of math class, that's why I didn't think you'd get mad if I came home.

JAMES

Hailey isn't here.

INT: SERVICE STATION SHOP - DAY

A family snapshot of James, Joy, Hannah, Ayden and Hailey, 14, hangs on the wall behind the counter next to the space where the other photo - now on the living room floor - use to be.

Hailey looks just like her mum, brown hair and smiling hazel eyes.

EXT: BRET'S CAR - LATER

The car sits in an empty car park.

MUFFLED SCREAMS can be heard from the trunk. The car doors open, Roy and Bret get out, look around, Roy SIGHS.

ROY

I'll sort her out.

He walks to the trunk, opens it. There lies Hailey, arms and legs bound, a bandanna tied around her mouth. She SCREAMS as loud as she can at Roy.

Roy's fist plunges into her head, she falls back. He SLAMS the lid, spits on the ground and gets back into the car.

INT: BRET'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Bret opens up a fast food bag, pulls out a couple of burgers, hands one to Roy. Opens his, takes a bite, chews, spits it out.

BRET

Ah, Geezus Christ! God Dam it!
I said no fucking ketchup!

FADE OUT