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about 1,500 words

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You Can't Be Serious

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“We are going to jail,” says Arturo like a chant to himself.

Their jeep pulls to the side of a dark country road, then swerves into a spot under a literal forest of trees and shrubbery. The passengers face a pitch black void of greenery with no clear sign of where they had stopped.

Marcus, the driver, peers out his side window, trying to spot the source of the siren. Duncan, the backseat passenger, wakes up to the panicked chants of Arturo in the front. He yawns, looks around the vehicle, then spots the red and blue flashing lights pulling in behind them. A State Police cruiser parks a short distance away with its high beams shining through the back window.

Duncan reaches into his pockets almost instinctively and pulls out a surplus of marijuana, a Ziploc bag of cocaine, and a few foil wrappers of Percocet. Arturo and Marcus follow suit, revealing a treasure trove of drugs themselves. They add a literal mountain of evidence to his. Arturo's chants become louder as he stares at all the jail time. Duncan bursts out into laughter while Marcus buries his head into his hands. A sigh falls over the jeep.

“Marcus, are we going to jail?” asks Arturo again, this time hoping for a response.

Marcus answers by repeatedly punching the steering wheel and nods his head.

“No, Arturo. We’re going to prison, two very different things,” says Duncan, still not over his laughing fit.

“Where are we exactly?” Duncan asks.

Arturo’s eyes well up with tears. Arturo doesn’t speak, instead he gathers as much of the contraband as his hands will allow him and stacks the enormous pile neatly under his seat. He stuffs it under a pile of empty beer cans on the floor. He forgot there were beer cans on the floor.

“Who wants to bet the DUI is what he notices first?” wagers Duncan.

“My money is on the colored angle,” Marcus says, breaking his silence.

Arturo asks, “Is that all we have in the car?”

Marcus looks around for a moment, then gestures to the back. Duncan scoots over his seat and peers over, finding a large blue tarp over top of the seat.

“What is it? Bodies? Weapons? More drugs? Please let it be more drugs,” says Arturo, banging on the dashboard.

“Knock that shit off right now,” says Marcus.

Marcus yanks the keys from the ignition. He motions for Arturo to open the glove compartment. Arturo opens it and pulls out a small revolver. Arturo clasps the gun in his hands and looks back at Duncan, who shakes his head.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” asks Arturo.

Duncan turns his head, but when he does, he spots a green sign embedded between some branches. He loses track of the conversation and tries to make out the letters.

“What do you think?” says Marcus, putting his keys on the dash.

The cruiser's red and blue lights die down behind them. An officer steps out of the vehicle; a clipboard attached to his hand. He studies the jeep, then adjusts a baseball cap on his head.

"Arturo, how bad do you want out of this?" asks Marcus.

Arturo gives a look at the cruiser in his rearview, then back to the gun.

"Mount... Mount what?" mumbles Duncan from the back.

Arturo weighs his options and scrapes up the drugs. He considers what to do but can't think while surrounded by the mess upfront. Arturo rubs his head, then says, "Fuck it," he throws the pile of drugs full force to the backseat. Baggies of weed, wrappers of pills, and an unfastened Ziploc of cocaine right into Duncan.

A loud gasp echoes through the automobile. Duncan sits, shellshocked, covered in white powder from head to toe, with even the good fortune of some finding its way into his mouth.

Duncan stares at Arturo in disbelief. Marcus reaches for his recently discarded keys, knocking them under his seat. Arturo places his hand over his mouth. Duncan rubs the years of incarceration over his face.

"To answer your earlier question, we are going under the fucking jail!" Duncan shrieks.

"Seriously, man, this is getting ridiculous. How are we not supposed to go to jail with this much shit?" says Marcus.

The three men stop moving for a while. Duncan simply reclines back and breathes in deep. Arturo's water filled eyes turn to full on tears and Marcus' search for his keys ends. The vehicle is silent.

This silence is short-lived as the officer finishes with his clipboard and advances on them. All the heads in the car divert to see officer casually waving to them.

The temperature in the jeep boils over. Sweat drips from Marcus' forehead. Arturo juggles the tiny pistol into his boxer shorts. Duncan stares forward with his eyes, cautiously gazing out into the rearview mirror.

The officer, a skinny man, previously cast in shadows, stands at the window. The officer makes the signal to roll down the window, and Marcus unfortunately complies. A flashlight shines into the jeep. The light helps illuminate the situation for all parties involved. The floors reveal fast food wrappers, dirty clothing, weed, beer cans, a bullet casing, a bazooka gum wrapper, an empty bag of cocaine, and a ghostly black man cocaine painted white. The officer takes stock of the situation and exhales.

"You guys can't be serious?" says the officer in a heavy southern accent. Duncan turns with familiarity, now having a clear view of the officer, notices an unmistakable green and yellow cap on the officer's head. Arturo raises his hands up, giving up on the murder plot.

"I know what this looks like. We can explain?" says Arturo.

"You can explain. Really? This? You can explain this?" says the officer bluntly, hands now on his weapon.

Duncan composes himself and gives a slightly reassuring chuckle. Marcus notices this.

"Well, come on, storyteller. Tell me a story. Spin me a yarn, or is Tony Montana over there just covered in flour?"

Duncan's smile widens. He catches the officer's attention. Marcus remains frozen while his eyes hover over the keys. Arturo carefully starts lowering his hands in a last-ditch effort for the gun. Duncan slowly sticks his head out the window. He looks on with certainty, having put it all together, the sign, the officer's attire, and the southern accent. The officer steps back with his gun at the ready.

“You got something to say, Scarface?”

“Yes, I do,” says Duncan.

The officer unfastens his sidearm.

“Well, go on and say it, boy.”

“West Virginia!” yells Duncan.

The officer pulls his hands away from his weapon and stares directly into Duncan’s cocaine covered face. Everyone in the car freezes. An uncomfortable energy comes over the vehicle, with only Duncan meeting his gaze.

“Fuck Yeah,” replies the officer.

The officer, without saying another word, smirks, and then heads off to his vehicle. Marcus and Arturo stare blankly at the road, too afraid to move. Duncan reclines back in his seat.

“What just happened?” asks Arturo, with confusion on how they were still free, let alone alive.

Duncan simply replies, “It’s West Virginia.”