

Dale had never been much of a criminal. Maybe he'd shoplift a donut from the bakery or pickpocket a few, unsuspecting subway passengers—but robbing a bank? That was something he'd not even thought about before. Jeremy bragged the ease by which he'd robbed convenience stores and any random passersby in a dark alley. Dale told him those things weren't nearly the same, but Jeremy had it in his mind to get them both out of debt and rolling in cash. As much as he didn't want to admit it, Dale's job didn't float the bills, and he needed the money.

This would have to do. A quick in and out, Jeremy had said. No one would get hurt—or at least that was the plan.

"You ready?" Jeremy's eyes, affixed on Dale, widened in excitement as his hands jittered and teeth bit his lower lip.

"I—uh... as ready as I'll ever be." Dale wiped his hand over his clammy forehead and weakly smiled.

"Good, 'cause there's no turning back now," Jeremy said, putting a hand roughly on his friend's shoulder. "Let's do this."

The two exited Jeremy's car from the front of the bank parking lot. Jeremy's pale, gray eyes glinted with excitement as he walked ahead of Dale, whose brown eyes reflected his inner worries.

They walked quickly towards the doors, which automatically opened to let them in.

"See," Jeremy said, a smirk on his face, "it's like they are just inviting us in to do what we will."

Dale frowned at this, but he followed his friend in and stood next to the door, waiting for his signal and keeping an eye on the singular guard in the corner of the small bank.

Meanwhile, Jeremy upped his pace to a confident trot and stepped right up to the only bank clerk, shoving aside an old man who had been waiting his turn. The old man protested and so did the clerk, but she quickly silenced when Jeremy opened his jacket to reveal his gun.

"Now, don't get any ideas about pushing hidden buttons or anything, Lady. Just stick the money in a bag and place it on the counter. None of that funny business with those dye packs, either, or I'm liable to pull this thing out and shoot you right here and now."

Jeremy glanced over his shoulder and saw that the guard watched them closely, as the clerk's expression of panic gave away her distress. At this, the gray-eyed man sneered, but he trusted Dale to keep an eye on the guard and instead watched the woman closely as she put the money from her register in a bag.

"That's right," he whispered, "now let's go in the back and put some more goodies in there."

The clerk bit her lip, shaking, and slowly walked out from behind the counter. Apparently, this tipped off the guard enough, and he stepped towards them.

"Is everything alright over there?" he asked, pulling the clasp off his gun holster and eyeing the suspicious man.

Jeremy glared at the clerk, turned momentarily to nod at Dale, and spoke before the woman replied on her own.

"Oh, yes, yes, everything's fine. I just need to see my safety deposit box. Nothing to worry about, right?" he asked the clerk, looking to her pointedly.

The clerk, shaking violently, bit her lip harder and nodded slowly, but everything else about her body language and expression told the guard all he needed to know.

"Alright, turn around; hands in the air!" called the guard, pacing towards the two.

The guard didn't get to far; however, before Dale stepped in his path and crossed his arms into an "X" shape. Jeremy saw this, rolled his eyes, and pulled out his gun with a sigh.

"Now, now, no reason for things to get out of hand," he said, pointing his gun at the clerk, who pulled the money bag closer to her chest, almost as if trying to use it for a shield.

Seeing the gun, the guard, too, pulled his from its holster and aimed it at the man stood in his way. Dale frowned and addressed the guard with an unsteady gaze.

"H-hey, just put down the gun, we just want the money. Don't wanna hurt anyone."

"Son, if I were you, I'd move out of the way before I have to shoot you—and your friend with the gun!" the guard growled, cocking his gun.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, get out of the way!" cried Jeremy, pointing his gun away from the clerk and at the guard. As soon as Dale moved out of the way—although just to give Jeremy a confused look—he pulled the trigger.

A bullet hit the guard in the shoulder, but his gun, too, went off. The bullet hit a more vital mark in Jeremy: his belly. He fell to the ground, covering his abdomen and clenching his gun tight.

"Shit!" Dale said before he turned and kicked the guard in the face.

The guard sprawled back, losing his gun—just as a customer walked in the door. The woman stood in the doorway, taking in the scene, then turned and ran out the door, screaming. Dale felt his heart racing in his chest, and as he ran to his friend's aid, he glared at the clerk, who had run back around the desk and seemed to have her hand under it.

"C'mon, Jeremy!" he said, looking back to his bleeding friend. "We gotta go, now!"

Dale put an arm around his friend, but he instantly drew it back as he felt how hot the skin had become. He gritted his teeth and squeezed his hands tightly.

"Okay, Buddy, you can't be doing this now! We can't!" Dale's hands slowly grew crusty, then the crusts turned hard, making plate patterns that looked like a lake in drought. He grabbed hold of his friend, again, and picked him up as his own skin all over his body hardened to resist the heat coming off of the bloody Jeremy.

The old man cried out in horror, and the clerk fell back behind her desk, dropping the money and staring, wide-eyed, at the two men in horror. The guard, meanwhile, rose slowly to his feet, shaking heartily as he held his gun and pointed it at them. "W-what the hell are you?!" he shouted, his gun unsteady.

Dale glared at the guard as the hard, plate-like skin covered his face and turned the color of stone. Jeremy, moaning in his arms, had ripples of heat visibly emitting from his body—like the heat waves bouncing off the pavement on a hot road. From Jeremy's forehead exited two, short horns—similar to a gazelle's—which continued to grow in length, just as a pointed tail left his backside and his skin reddened in color.

"This isn't good," grunted Jeremy, gritting his teeth, which grew pointier by the moment. "We... can't leave any witnesses." Jeremy frowned as sirens sounded in the distance and the sounds of the guard's screaming "Get down!" and the clerk and old man simply screaming.

"W-we were just supposed to get the money and go. I-I don't wanna hurt nobody." Dale felt a shiver go down his spine as the gun of the guard went off, grazing his shoulder. The bullet barely made a cut through the stone-like flesh he then had.

At the sound of the gun and sirens ever closer outside, Jeremy rose his head from his friend's shoulder and glared at the guard. His gray eyes—now a fiery yellow—bore hatred towards the armed man.

"F-fine! Hurry—out! We need to get out!" he grunted, baring his teeth at the armed man—spooking him enough to think twice about shooting.

Dale ran for the door while holding closely to his friend, but once he got there and looked out, his eyes widened. At least four police cars surrounded the building, and police exited the cars, guns drawn and ready to fire on the two at the glass doorway.

Jeremy shifted his position uncomfortably and winced as he looked outside. Dale took a few steps back—not listening to the shouts from the police outside—and slowly walked over to a rug and set his friend down onto it.

"I can take a few bullets and... and take them out," he said quietly, his eyes strained as he saw the pallor of his friend's face lighten to an unnatural tint. "We can both make it out of here and .. maybe.. maybe we can go on the lam. Maybe they won't know who we are."

Jeremy lifted his eyes towards the cameras in the corners of the room, and as Dale followed his line of sight, the stone-skinned man frowned.

"Go.. out the back. Take what you can.. before... before I burn out," the yellow-eyed man who wasn't a man said. "I'll take care of all the evidence. Just—go."

Dale looked around at the people in the room: the clerk, huddled in a corner; the old man, kneeled over in prayer; the guard, edging ever closer towards the door. The stone-skinned man sighed and nodded to his friend.

"Okay. I'll ... I'll make sure your family gets a little somethin' from all this." Dale held his friend's hand for a moment longer before he rose and paced over to the clerk's desk. He shoved her seat out of the way—causing her to squeal in terror—and grabbed the money bag she'd filled earlier.

The room, all this time, continually got warmer and warmer. By the time Dale left the desk and headed for a rear exit—the teller's window—the whole bank felt hot enough to cause the people within to sweat and breathe heavily. Dale ignored this, and he broke the back window with a hardened fist. Glass shattered everywhere, and the stone-skinned man frowned, hearing the cries of his friend as he burst into flame—causing the surrounding area to do the same.

Voices behind him screamed, and when Dale touched ground outside of the window, he found himself confronted with two more police cars and the four cops who had come in them—all aiming their guns in his direction. The police shook, uncertain of the man seemingly made of stone, but none wavered.

With death behind him and no future before him, Dale sighed, clenched the money tightly, and ran forward to confront his fate.