

Promises



By Ocean

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So I says to her gimme the guns Margaret I always called her Margaret when she was being unreasonable gimme the guns Margaret and lets just forget all this nonsense about killing someone and go home. It ain't you talkin', it's the tequila. And she says don't call me Margaret and I ain't forgetting nothin' and she's blinking her eyes real hard like theys really hurting her and I know they are cause they're all red and swollen from the cryin'. Cryin and the tequila.

Where'd you get them guns anyway I says and she says it don't matter where I got the God damn guns but I stole 'em from my brother. She held one in each hand and looked them over and says they're nice ain't they Mud? See she's called me Mud since we first met in first grade did I tell you we went through first grade together? Yep both times we did. So anyway then she says they're nice ain't they Mud? If you ain't the one to die here today, you can have 'em if you want. They was stolen anyway so my brother can't make ya give 'em back or nothin'.

I don't want any God damn guns I says and besides no ones gonna die here today. See at this point she's starting to piss me off with all this foolish talk about killing me or killing herself so I decides it's time to get firm with her so I says Maggie Thompson you give me them guns right now you know you ain't gonna kill me and I sure as hell ain't gonna kill you or let you kill yourself though I ought to. And it was right then at that very moment that something in her eyes told me this time was different. Sure she'd been a fool before and plenty of times the liquor'd made her crazy but I never seen a look in her eye like I seen right then. She looked real wild like one of them trapped tigers you see on tv when they back up in the cage and their ears are pinned back real tight and low and you know they're spittin' mad cause they are in that cage. You can see it in their eyes. Well anyway that's what her eyes reminded me of so I figured that maybe the tough approach was not the best this time and that maybe I should try being nice.

Come on girl I says and I tried to make my voice real soft and sweet you know filled with kindness like I was someone's ol' Grandma, that kind of voice. I says we promised each other forty years ago not to fight over a woman, remember? And she nodded. You see we was both in the fourth grade together, remember I told you we went through first grade together? Well when we was

nearin' the end of first grade and I heard the teacher telling Maggie's mother that she should repeat a grade cause she couldn't read or write too good so I decided right then not to read or write too good either so I could repeat a grade with Maggie. So anyway, that's why we was in the fourth grade together and when we was in the fourth grade we both fell for Jenny Lou Baxter. Me and Maggie never liked boys. No siree, never did. We knew we liked girls better even back then. So we both fall hard for Jenny Lou and we decided we had to fight over her cause we figured that would be the way to win her heart. And after we was all done fightin' and all the pushing and scratchin' and bitin' and kickin' was done wouldn't ya know it but dang Jenny Lou walks home with that bratty little Jimmy Lewis. So we decided right there and then that no woman would ever come between us again. And no woman ever did.

Until this thing with Laura.

You stole her from me she says with that wild look in her eye but for some reason she ain't blinking no more. She's just staring at me. Oh Maggie for cryin out loud I says I didn't steal her from you. Did I tie her up and kidnap her?

No she says.

Okay then I didn't steal her. It was over between you two and you know it. You was always fightin' anyways. You told me your very own self what a good-for nothin' lazy woman she was. Them was your very own words? Right Maggie? Did you or did you not say them exact words?

Yea so maybe I did she says but I didn't mean it. I loved her Mud. You know how much I loved her. For eight years I loved that woman.

Ah come on Maggie I says cause by now I'm tired and just want to get the guns and bring Maggie home so she can sleep it off and so's I can go home and go to bed. I'm thinking Laura's gonna be mad enough at me coming home this late and she's not gonna believe that Maggie has two guns and is talking about killing me or killing herself. And I'm thinking about how tomorrow Maggie is going to have the worse headache that she's ever had and that someday soon we'll laugh about this but right now we sure as shit ain't laughin'.

Okay I says I'll tell ya what just gimme the guns and you can have Laura back. I swear to you that I'll never talk to her again. No woman is worth this ruining our friendship. Heck Maggie we done went through all eight grades together that counts for something don't it?

Too late for swearing Mud she says to me you should've thought of that before you kissed her. Kissed her! I says back to her you know how bad I was bit by the tequila that night Maggie. *You* left me passed out in the corner after playing pool and you know that she sat on my lap and was the one who kissed me. Heck Maggie I don't even remember kissin' her that first night so that shouldn't count against me or nothing.

Then Maggie gets kinda quiet and looks out the window and sorta whispers then you should've thought of that before you started screwin' her. Well she had a point there maybe I should've but I didn't and now I don't know exactly what to say to that but I really did think they was through with each other honest I did at least that's what Laura told me.

So after a while I says Maggie. It's late. Let's get some sleep. Tell you what, I won't go home to Laura. I'll sleep right here. And tomorrow, tomorrow I'll tell her it's over between us. Just like that Okay? Just give me them guns. She ain't that good. There ain't no woman worth losing my best friend for forty years over. We can both get another woman Maggs.

There ain't no other woman like Laura Mud she says and her voice is all filled with sadness.

Right then she takes another swig of tequila and that tequila's looking pretty good to me by now cause I'm awful dry from talking so much but I didn't say nothing cause she started staring at the guns and talking and she says Mud? I made a promise to myself that tonight I was either gonna kill you or you was gonna kill me or I was gonna kill myself because I can't live anymore with the thought that my best friend stole my Laura from me. So I didn't lose one woman. I lost two. I made myself that promise and you know I always keep my promises.

Well I says and right about now I'm trying to think real hard and real fast cause she's really scaring me bad well I says Maggie if you do keep the promise that you made today then you'll be breaking the promise we made forty years ago never to let a woman come between us so I guess you don't always keep your promises now do you?

She thought about that for a few minutes then says so if I break one promise Mud, one promise in an entire lifetime is that so bad?

I didn't know what to say cause one promise broken in an entire lifetime is not so bad so I says no Maggie it ain't so bad but if you're gonna break one then break the one you made today. I mean it is the newest one. Don't break the oldest one.

No she says I want to keep that one.

Then for the first time all night she smiled and then that's when she tossed the gun to me. She threw it in the air and it was spinning and I caught it and said Jesus Maggie! It scared me to touch it cause I sure don't like guns. They scare the heck outta me but I caught it and the gun was cold but the handle where her hand had been was warm. And that's when she says okay Mud the time has come and she took another swig of the tequila and held the bottle out toward me.

I wanted to grab that bottle and tip the bottom straight up and let that fiery tequila slide right down my throat but instead I shook my head and she put the bottle on the floor. It tipped over and some tequila poured out and that's when I knew I was in trouble because she looked at it but didn't care and just let it flow out of that bottle and onto the floor. Maggie always cared about not wasting tequila.

And this is when she stares me right in the eyes and pulls the gun up that she's holding and points it right at me and says Mud either you shoot me or I shoot you what's it gonna be? And I tell you if you could only have seen the look in her eyes then you'd believe me that she was not joking around. I ain't ever looked a cobra in the eyes but I bet if I ever did it'd look just like how Maggie looked at that moment.

So I says Maggie I can't shoot you so she says okay then I guess I'll just have to shoot you and her finger is twitching like it's itchy or nervous or something on the trigger. NO! I says real loud. Come on Maggie quit this this ain't funny.

It ain't supposed to be funny she says.

Then she's having trouble talking now and swallowing hard like she's real thirsty or something and her tongue is slowly licking her lips okay she says then we'll let Jesus decide. My gun has six bullets in it. Yours only has one. When I count to three if you don't pull the trigger I will. But if you pull the trigger and Jesus wants me to live then the gun won't go off and I'll live. So you don't have to nothing to say about it Mud okay? That's fair, right? Jesus will decide.

But promise me one thing she says if it is me that goes tonight then promise to tell Laura that I loved her okay? Will you promise me that?

And I'm thinking real hard and trying to think real fast about what to do and what to say but I'm having trouble thinking because the God damn pounding right here in my head won't stop and then she says real loud and real slow...

ONE.

Maggie No! I says and my gun is pointing at her and hers is pointing at me and our eyes are both opened way wide and we're staring at each other. Her face is all red and the veins in her neck are bulging out and she starts cryin' again and the tears are making her cheeks all wet and the snot is running down her nose but she wasn't wiping it and some white foam had gathered around the edges of her mouth and it kinda spit out when she talked and her finger was shaking a little, tapping against the trigger.

TWO.

And that's when I started to pray to God. And I prayed to Mary and Joseph but mostly I prayed to sweet baby Jesus. I prayed as hard and as fast as I could and I promised if they'd give me luck with the bullet right then that I'd trade all the luck I'd ever have for the rest of my life...

THREE.

I closed my eyes and pulled the trigger.

You may not believe me but that is exactly what happened.

I promise it was.

~ The End ~

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