

AUGGIE'S REVENGE

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Chapter 1

Searching in the Supermarket

First there was Auggie. Jonny November I'd meet soon enough. His trailer is where we hatched the plan. Melony was already in my life, but I'd learn much more about her as we embarked upon the kill. If you'd asked me a year before if I anticipated a life of sex, murder, and sleeping in vegetable patches, I would have replied "no," but all of it led me here. To these cramped quarters, with three hours of sunlight like a beam from the heavens. My friends' visits long ago ceased, but I still hear their voices. Auggie and Melony and Jonny November. Their words inspire me to write it all down. And so I sink into this past. With Auggie, where it all began.

Before I met him, I was a moody but functional philosopher. In grad school, I contemplated the nature of power, and for most of the last decade, I felt it pressing down upon me—against my face, like a cold rubber soul of a shoe just in from puddle hopping. Firm and wet, but causing no burns or puncture wounds. In clear terms, I was an adjunct, a hired man, a brain paid poorly by the contract, but at least it was for a speaking role. I was on the books, eligible for social security, and far removed from the realm of shift work and supervisors breathing down my back. Until Auggie crept into my consciousness like a tropical insect that crawls in through the ear, and into the brain, where it hatches eggs and murders the man.

It began as fall progressed and the cold set in. It was late October, and in the late-night public places, where Auggie would go to meet college girls half his age. It was hours past bedtime, yours or mine, but I was there too. The point cannot be denied. I

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was moping around the supermarket, searching for a late-night snack, oscillating wildly between megalomania and omniphobia, but in particular, I feared death.

Soon we became city dwellers who knew each other. As friendly acquaintances, we would chat at the supermarket or in the park, on public transit or in between. As the holidays approached these meetings would occur when everyone was off with family. We were the ones who'd slipped through the cracks, had avoided the domestic mooring of marriage, and had time and tendencies to drift alone through public spaces on Labor Day or Thanksgiving weekend. And so I endured another fifteen-week semester of teaching general-education classics to job-hungry students—ethics for engineers, and that sort of thing. The undergrads were people of this world, not the more abstract one that I myself had become increasingly skeptical of.

December came, and late in the month, between Chanukah and Christmas, I bundled up and headed out into freezing temperatures for open-all-night shopping. I was searching for a savory snack when I saw Auggie in the aisle for crackers and cookies. He was leaning, unsteadily, against a brick wall of Graham cracker boxes, talking to a tan girl his junior by a score. I smiled condescendingly, pitying this mere mortal who had to prove his manhood again and again. He had to seek out his conquests on a daily basis because he received no regular compensation. My pay wasn't much, but I received it at the end of each month, or in a lump sum for a summer session, and for that reason I could hold my head high, high above Auggie at any rate. Because I knew for a fact Auggie lived week-to-week with little in reserve. Each month, I even had a little left over. I could even save.

But for now I silenced my ego, my feet, my fluttering hands and everything else, all so I could eavesdrop. With Auggie, whether he was speaking to you or not, it often felt like eavesdropping. On the phone, the barrage of calls that came later, he would talk and talk, offering a labyrinth of conversation, which seem less directed at me than it was fully exploratory of his own condition. Talking for his ears as much as my own. This is how I came

to know him. In whispers about abuse and other agonies. The stepfather. A prison bid. Probation. The older girlfriend who led him to crime. All of it jumbled together, in and out. A man of forty-four. A life.

But back to supermarket reality.

“So yeah, next summer, I’m headed out to the coast where I’ll check out this business opportunity.”

“Yeah?” The tan girl nodded and glowed. The promise of warm weather, soft dollars, and Auggie’s youthful optimism were contagious. Auggie, for his part, was perfect at eye contact, occasional soft, shy glances at the girl, nothing below the shoulders, nothing noticeable anyway.

“What I do is I take a business, take it apart from top to bottom, get into the books, troubleshoot, tweak the numbers, massage a deal here and there...”

I drifted away from Auggie’s spiel and more closely examined his *prey du jour*.

No more than twenty-two and quite possibly cute, even according to the standards of the boys in her peer group, she was not merely young flesh to dazzle the minds of middle-aged aisle drifters. Insomniacs grateful for the bright lights of supermarkets with early a.m. visiting hours. In fact, she was quite the specimen. I zoomed in on her ripe mounds like a famished chicken hawk, just as any critical if lazy male mind would.

A pale, yellow sweater covered the two points of local resistance, a generous v-neck unafraid to reveal ample square inches of tan flesh. Firm, not overly broad shoulders, and a sunny, confident disposition—the optimism and focus of a girl raised on milk and orange juice and fortified by two parents dwelling in one home. Hetero tendencies, no doubt. The parents, I mean. I could not help congratulating myself on these keen observations.

Allow me to apologize for my crasser self. Now, on the inside, I can see that I’ve always been stupidly full of myself, and in particular, I’ve thought too much of my critical powers. I suspect it was a conceited nature that drove me into philosophy, the idiotic idea that someone would pay salary for my cerebrations.

Alas, it was the same narcissism with just a hint of boredom that drove me out of that thinking field as well.

But back to conversation.

“Yeah, just drop ten digits, and I’ll ring ya up, and we’ll check out the scene.” Auggie’s cell magically appeared, and the girl gave a phone number before she disappeared. With the digits secured, Auggie wheeled around, and nearly smacked into a sales display wall of vanilla crème cookies in his efforts to avoid me, the taller man. When he looked up, he recognized my skeptical frown, smiled broadly, and shouted out, “Howdy, Prof! Caught me in the act! Seminar in the frozen food section?”

Auggie was a true middleman, a backpack full of blank exclusive-brokerage contracts, and without a college education. Degreeless as he was, he seemed to enjoy speaking with a genuine professor, if one as tangential to the university as I. His expressed zeal toward my occupation appealed to me, and this was undoubtedly a reason that we’d fallen into friendship.

The disciple of earthly delights led me around several corners and alleys until we were together chilled by a frozen sea of carrots and peas. We stared at each other, Auggie smiling, happy to see me. Frankly, I felt sour, tired, and surrounded by succotash. I was discomfited by the warmth we shared. It was too much, too common and non-professorial. Around Auggie, my eleven seasons of higher education seemed all the more worthless; before I knew him, and learned how meager his winnings truly were, I assumed he made far more than me, wheeling and dealing in brokerage contracts and limited partnerships as it were. I assumed this middleman earned monthly my entire semester’s take. It was only later that I understood that Auggie had about three grand to his name. He was truly close to broke.

“What’s up, Prof?”

“Your spirits.” I noticed that Auggie was in one of his better moods.

“Yeah, I can still get the digits. No prob.” Auggie waxed eloquently about his verbal acumen, his prolixity with the babes. He seemed almost aglow, a forty-four-year-old man in solid physical shape. As a slight Epicurean myself, I enjoyed Auggie’s

crass materialism, his myopic focus on the flesh, and although I would ordinarily, particularly in a room full of undergraduates, preach the life of the mind—as if a brain could survive disconnected from a body—around Auggie, I more freely played with my full hand. Shuffled and dealt, as it were.

“Whatcha got goin’ on?”

“It seems I’ve hooked a twenty-year-old.”

“Ya bang her? Any backdoor action?”

I was taken aback by Auggie’s crass words comingled with my new girlfriend. I felt strange thinking of the twenty-three-year-old in those terms, but that’s truly what she was. Or what she had become since we’d begun exchanging e-mail three months ago. Wild torrents of grammatically incorrect passion, like nothing I’d ever so openly professed to the world. Soon, a first meeting. After that, a date?

I wasn’t certain until we were touching tongues on her couch three weeks later. Before the first kiss, she aired her last suspicions. She wanted to know one last time that I hadn’t slept with an extensive array of students, that she wasn’t merely another young conquest, that I wasn’t a cad.

I ignored my odd failed phone call, sent with longing, or the one one-night stand I’d fallen into with a former student—a flower-power, free-love type—six days after she finished college. Instead, I replied, “No, not at all.” My main reservations, or so I disclosed at the time, were the fact that she was twenty-three, I knew she had her whole life ahead of her, and that I didn’t want to get hurt.

Was she twenty-three or twenty you ask? Why yes, the former, truly, and I felt guilty for robbing the cradle, yet, for whatever reason, with Auggie, I wanted our age difference to appear even more extreme, and I don’t need to know what this says about my character. Or lack of it. Regardless, he was the sole person with whom I’d gotten close to broaching the subject of a girlfriend, and the age in question for such, and he knew that I was thirty-nine.

Well, you can imagine she found me vulnerable and thus desirable when my last reservation was disclosed, and so, at once, to alleviate my pain, after she said, “You’re so sweet,” we

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made out on the couch. Frenching. Fondling. Petting. The new, improved first base. By contemporary scoring standards, I was leaning toward second, in danger of getting picked off. Even daydreaming that I could steal third base when she pulled out the blindfold. I got scared! But after tying it on and tying me down, she tickled, pinched, examined, and explored while I imagined myself as a philosopher who shared secrets with a second-base umpire and shortstop.

After that night of being tied down and tickled, I knew I was involved. This elevated my confidence to the point where I'd primp and pose in front of my full-length mirror. It hung on the wall in my bedroom next to my bookshelf. I'd offer the glass a wink and a smile, upon occasion, a bow or box step, but never a belly dance. To be candid, I knew my looks were above average at best, and that my khakis and sweaters were unexceptional, most outfits procured from bargain racks or as online specials. But the man I saw in that mirror was stylish and handsome—no doubt, somewhat delusional as well.

Was I flying too close to the flame with the unpredictable younger set? I knew it would be exhilarating and exasperating all at once. At times, I feared I wouldn't manage my affairs well or even survive at all.

* * *

Back to Auggie, it is still unclear as to how or why his phone calls began. I remember the first message, "Professor, it's Auggie, you know the guy with the dog, the really short, really neurotic Jewish guy." I would have recognized the voice even without the name or explanation, a raspy quick-paced word producer. It seemed odd that he would refer to himself as "the Jewish guy," particularly if communicating to a fellow Heb, a half-breed albeit, but a *landsman* nevertheless. It took me a couple weeks before responding to that call, and at the time, I certainly didn't realize it would lead to regular calls, too many calls, and for a while, I screened my calls, for fear it would be Auggie intent on entrapping me in a late-night conversation cum therapy session. After a long day of my own problems, I was often too tired to listen. There was too much give and take, rambling bullshit,

and requests that Auggie repeat himself because his words came out in such hurried bursts. He spoke so quickly he'd skip over syllables and articles, and I, the articulate, if long-winded "professor," could not comprehend. These climactic moments of Auggie's speech patterns were like a spoken version of instant messenger, a linguistic efficiency all his own.

So the phone would ring, the machine would pick up, and Auggie would give a quick version of the days events—three phone numbers from girls under twenty-five; a deal termed "done"; an asshole who aborted a brokerage contract; or a combination of all of the above. If I questioned whether or not he was working hard enough for his dollar, he'd tell me he did something positive for his future each day.

But although I knew Auggie from these phone calls, that had stretched on for over a year, I had known Auggie, or at least known of him for much longer than that. I'd seen him in the center city parks and bookstores. Walking his dog, Schlomie, and wielding his anti-Semitic humor. It was hard to call it Jewish self-loathing when in his prolonged giggling, his jokes seemed so self-pleasuring. When not attacking his own, he expressed his animosity toward the *schvartzes*. Always some story about an ignorant black person whose antagonism, or at least perceived antagonism, was somehow the bane of Auggie's experience. Auggie's imagined blacks were always either simpleminded or belligerent or both; that was the extent of their human complexity. He'd tell me Schlomie would prick up his ears when a "negro" approached. This was Auggie's favored term, and Schlomie could sniff fear and rage from sixty yards away. Auggie didn't take the dog to therapy, but the psychologist described Auggie's racism as the acutely base-level, instinctual kind. Auggie claimed he had a right to his racism, because of all he'd suffered in his life.

In the more recent phone calls, he referred to Southern California as *schvartze-free*. He insisted he'd read this in guide books about the coastal towns. Southern California was the dream, the place he could pick up and go to, begin anew, start all over again. In Philly's parks and bookstores, Auggie seemed superficial, a character yes, but a secondary character in the drama

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of my life. But the phone calls rounded his character, gave him shape and texture. Over time, I felt I knew Auggie's cravings and needs, as well as his hatreds and phobias, better than my own.

Yes, it started with venting over the phone. Badmouthing. Rage. Neuroses. Insanity. Directed at Auggie's mother. The stepfather. The older girlfriend, the witch. Even the therapist he had paid to listen for so many years. I would sit prone on my couch, phone close to my ear. Dog-eared copies of self-help and guides to writing screenplays were spread-eagled over either thigh. My notes were scribbled all over the place. I scrawled movie ideas in the margins of *The Feel Great Handbook*, and jotted down my physical symptoms—real or imagined—in *Lew Hunter's 434, A How To Write a Hollywood Screenplay*. I doubted very much that in Auggie's ranting I would find the cure, but he could take my mind off things. I could become entranced, or at least ensnared, in Auggie's labyrinth of twenty-something girls and financial ambition. Yes, it took my mind away from Hollywood yearning and psychological need.

His constant flux of negativity and optimism was overwhelming. Auggie was shockingly upbeat and high on life the one moment, in pained neuroses and memory the next. Sometimes, complaints about the stepfather would trump the ecstasy of a new deal, a coffee contract that could make him a millionaire. He dreamed of selling hemp-based coffee as a novelty item; stoners near and far would eagerly sip such *haut café* according to the dollar signs flashing in his pupils. He would suddenly change topics, right after one of my brief interjections—an “Is that so?” or “Good for you, Auggie”—a few words to let him know I was listening. The topic would change to the older woman, the theme of the savior as conniving seductress, once more the adult come to help him only to make his life worse.

He would tell the story as if she were thirty-four and he only fifteen or sixteen. As if it were like what one hears regularly on the news, tales of thirty-five-year-old female teachers seducing their high-school sophomores. The new feminism of social engineering. Take the male young and teach him hands-on how

to treat a lady, how to behave like a gentleman. Perhaps it would only be a matter of time before this version of pedophilia would be acknowledged as just and legal. Indeed, I cannot say for certain that these women should face severe jail terms for their acts; in several instances, the loving couple married after the leading lady completed her bid. A few are known to have children. But Auggie was twenty-three when he met his seductress. And she was thirty-one. They were consenting adults, and their years were not so far apart.

But allow me to introduce how Auggie would tell it.

Chapter 2

Auggie's First Adult Crime (No Time)

She came on to me at the club. They call 'em "cougars" now, but back then, they didn't have a name for it. Let's just say that chicks dug it even more than the guys. The young stuff. I was minding my own business. Yeah, I was a drop out. So what? I'd left school a few semesters before we met. I hadn't really dropped out; it was just that I hadn't enrolled in three consecutive semesters. I was always so bored at Urban State. It was like nothing was happening. So that first night, we fucked on the rug. I liked that. She knew what to do. She did everything. I was seduced. She let me bang her whenever I wanted. Stick it wherever I wanted. You can't do better than that. It ain't a score if it's not backdoor.

So I told her all my shit. About my mother and my stepfather. She listened. She was sympathetic. Somehow she got me believing in all these plans we concocted. We were going to embezzle the death benefits. She believed what I believed, that the money was mine. My stepfather didn't deserve it, but the courts could never be trusted to set the record straight, and pay me my inheritance. Besides, by law, he was in the right. Money goes to the spouse—no matter how fucked up the spouse is, no matter how much he fucked over the children. Which was only me. Anything criminal he did was a separate legal matter.

But she was the first adult in my life to take my side. She convinced me what we planned was okay. Moral even. Like I had a moral duty to myself, like selling the house out from under him was my karmic due. My duty.

So I did it. And for a while we were living on easy street. I leased a cream-colored Cadillac, and we drove all over the

country. To the party places, anyway. Stayed in fancy hotels. Sped down to New Orleans, and all the way over to Vegas. She made me feel happy. She taught me to enjoy my life. Made me feel like a normal, decent person. Not just like my stepfather's whipping boy, or my mother's pain in the side.

She got me interested in going to school again. Had me studying for the MCATs. See, that was my dream. It was part of the plan. I was going to become a doctor. I was going to use the money for good purposes. To pay for medical school. When the Feds showed up, that's how they found us. I had the Princeton Review MCAT book open, and I was studying for the test on the black leather couch. With the dough, we'd bought furniture—real fancy, okay, pleather, not leather—but soon after we sold the house, we got good at not overspending. Keeping it in the bank to pay for the nicer things. For the test, I was really good at the analytical section, but I had to brush up on biology and organic chemistry. I had passed my science classes four years previously at Urban State, but I needed to review the material. The Feds laughed when they saw me with the book. Just a nice Jewish boy studying to go to medical school.

“So this became a federal case?” (With Auggie's tendency to produce tangential information, at times my queries steered him back on track.)

Yeah, it was crazy. A twenty-three-year-old Jewish kid with no priors involved in a federal investigation. At the center of it, really. I was the suspect. When they checked to see if the Caddy was stolen, they only looked into my priors. I would naturally say “we” and “our” when describing the plans, but they never took much interest in my girl. Or woman, I should say. We weren't married, and it was all in my name. Plus, I was no longer a minor, so I could be held as an adult. “Personal responsibility” was how the judge put it as he handed me my sentence. But it was just like my mother and stepdad; she was the one in charge, guiding me along.

“Did you go to jail?”

Nah. The Feds sympathized with me. They understood and said they were just doing their job. I got five years probation.

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“So a criminal record, but no jail time?”

Exactly. That's why I'm in small business. A middleman. Figure it would be hard to get a regular job so I've been hustling on my own.

* * *

Another conversation turned into my own fact-finding mission. I had no boots on the ground, so I needed to interrogate the source. I needed to find out what happened, why he almost went to jail, and how he avoided it.

“But what did you actually *do*? What was the crime?” In Auggie's disjointed ranting, I would find myself lacking basic facts.

“We tried to get money out of my stepdad's account.”

“How'd you do that?”

“How'd we try? Forged checks.”

“So forgery?”

“One count of that I had removed. The bank robbery charge is what stuck.”

“You robbed a bank?”

“I was young and vulnerable. She had huge knockers and a spectacular ass. She told me she had the tits done by a professional. I was twenty-three, and she was thirty-one.”

“So she got you to drop out of school?”

“I dropped out six months before I met her. I usually blame my Mom and Stepdad for that one, but she can take some credit, too.”

“But you told me she got you studying for the MCATs and enrolled in Organic Chemistry.”

“Enrolled is a strong word, Prof. Once or twice a week, I'd sit in on lecture. But I had no dough for college. My stepdad got Mom's money. That was the problem. After she locked me in the closet, he fucked me in the ass and stole my inheritance. The second part legal and legit in the state of Pennsylvania.”

“Did you take a job?”

“I could work, but only if I could get work. This was 1989. The economy was collapsing into the ocean. What was I gonna do? Work behind a counter at Mickey D's like Leroy, from 53rd

and Negro?” I ignored Auggie’s demographic slang and his use of such an archaic pejorative. It was clever, the first time he turned a phrase, but by now, I felt a slight embarrassment every time I heard his racist words. It was easy to attribute to his childhood abuse, Auggie’s need to place himself above the black man.

“But you could rob a bank.” I was catching on.

“Exactly.”

“I see.”

“She disappeared as soon as she could. Sure, she stood by me, held my hand at the trial, and cried at the sentencing. But she was never charged with a damn thing. It may or may not have been her idea completely, but she was older and she liked it. It thrilled her.”

“Turned on by your brazen criminality?”

“I was in shape back then, Prof. I could perform.”

Auggie raised his fists and eyebrows over his head. He made a muscle-man face. It was an comic Incredible Hulk he-man grimace, yet enough to remind me of my own fading promise. My fallen arches and aged knees, and around the middle, a slowly inflating spare tire. Thank god, little was visible with my clothing on.

After a pregnant pause, another “I see” was the best I could do.

“But don’t think for a moment I can’t still perform.”

Auggie winked.

This was another area that I’d have to evaluate another time.

“Back to the robbery. Was there a lot of planning?”

“Yeah, lots of plans. Big plans. We’d escape in a fighter jet across the Pacific. An amazing theft after the fact. She’d lean over, planting her rack in my back, and I would plan away. It wasn’t hard to get to aircraft.”

“Any realistic plans?”

“That’s the thing, Prof. She had me dreaming big. I could see myself flying away off the top of the bank in a stolen fighter jet.”

“How did she get you thinking you could rip off the American Air Force?”

“Full throat stardom. Amazing head. She’d get the whole thing in her mouth. The tip would slip down her throat, and the

balls would bounce off her tonsils. She'd brush her hair aside, so I could watch. A woman who made pole work look easy. I couldn't see it at the time, but I was wrapped around her finger."

"You had to realize you were responsible for your actions? Or at least know that a court of law would see it this way."

"Responsible? Who the fuck was responsible for making me the way I am? My stepdad ramming me in the ass? My mom who locked me in the closet? The state who sent me to live in a cage with abused and abandoned black kids intent on taking their suffering out on me? The social engineers who gathered under one roof all the single-to-no-parent neglect and delinquency? Is it my fault they stuck me in juvenile detention with *schvartzes* whose only punching bag became pale molested me?"

I didn't know, no, I did not. Who was responsible for how Auggie turned out?

Where was personal responsibility in a world where Auggie had been screwed from the start? So to speak.

Do we blame his mother? His stepfather? The state that allowed such a predator to roam free? On the streets and able to seduce a nut job like Auggie's mom? It was the state who had nothing more than a jail for kids as a way to "save" the child. I had to ask what was on my mind.

"How come your stepfather never went to jail for all of this?"

"It's the laws and the courts. The judge stated that the spouse would inherit. But even if there were a disagreement or room for interpretation here, what money does a kid have for pursuing litigation?"

"I don't know."

"Zilch. And how would a kid know he could do this anyway?"

"I don't know."

"That's right, Prof. You don't know squat. Never forget that."

"I see."

"But don't sweat it. I was stuck with legal services for the poor. I got snoring lawyers and yawning judges. Folks who called it in years ago and were playing out the string with a hand extended on pay day. This was in the early 1980s. Bad recession. Everyone had problems. No one cared. No one ever cared. That was my

life. That's what I know. That no one would ever care, so I better look out for number one, but no one ever taught me how to do that well."

I had to admit I was out of my league when evaluating Auggie's life. Sure I was short of money at the end of most months, but I'd no experience with the trauma he'd known. The closest I came to it was interacting with the occasional disturbed student.

And there was always that unanswerable question lurking behind it all. How do things like this happen? Not only here, but especially here. How and why and when will it ever end?

* * *

Auggie's disjointed ramblings, discursions and tangents are too much. I cannot stand it anymore, that voice, that voice that still visits me, even in here, some days the only foreign sound to penetrate these bare walls. On some days, the voice lingers, vibrating in my brain far past lights off. But Auggie was not the only man who led me to crime. Allow me to introduce our most valuable player and our leader in crime, so to speak. Jonny November. His voice comes to me, too, and much more often than Auggie's or Melony's. He was Auggie's other role model in youth, and his role cannot be underestimated in leading me to this current confinement and its bleak routines.

Jonny was a mentor who took Auggie under his wing and helped him survive. When Auggie was a teenager, they lived in apartments facing each other over a narrow piss and rain-soaked alleyway. This was up by the university, just a few blocks from admissions. In aged brown and red brick four- to six-story buildings, the rotting units came with water-stained ceilings, broken fixtures, leaking toilets, and creaky hardwood floors. These are now almost exclusively pan-Asian grad-student ghettos, but back then they housed many working Philadelphians meekly subsisting and enduring meager lives. Jonny was a man missing moral scruples and half a leg. He was a stump at the knee, but in some matters, he saw clearly, without doubt or pangs of conscience. We couldn't have plotted to kill Auggie's stepfather without him.

Life Lessons from Jonny November 1

Here's how to run the scam. You locate a Rite-Aid or CVS or Walgreen's to do your work. Avoid Fat Sammy's big box empire. Those fuckers are litigious and frugal. You'll wind up getting the poor clerk shit-canned or worse, and you'll end up doing time for stealing a chocolate bar.

So here's what you do. You get a partner, a girl, you know, the opposite sex. The scam works best if the person isn't your age or race, isn't dressed like you, and can't be associated with you in any way.

OK. You have your partner.

You go to the bank in another town or another part of town and get yourself a hundred dollar bill. On the bill, you write, "Happy Birthday, Grandma." When you enter the retail chain, you buy something cheap but not the cheapest. Buy a few items; try to spend around seven or thirteen dollars. Seven because it's a lucky number and thirteen because it's unlucky, but we're unlucky too, right? And that's why we do what we gotta do.

So anyway, at the counter you pay with the birthday hunchie, grab your stuff, collect your twenties and change, smile "bye bye," and leave the store.

Your partner enters the store a few minutes later. Remember, if you're an older guy dressed like cheese blintzes, she needs to be younger wearing lamb vindaloo. You know what I mean. So she picks out a couple items, goes to the register, and evens up with a ten. When she gets her change, she says, "I'm sorry, but I paid with the wrong money. I just gave you the hundred dollar bill I was going to give Grandma for her birthday."

The hunchie you paid with should be right on top or in a worst case scenario, under the change drawer with the return

receipts and personal checks. The clerk is a good person and underpaid enough that she isn't paying close attention. Even if she thinks it's weird, it's so unexpected, it's disorienting. A retail prole isn't paid enough to figure it out. She sees the bill and says, "Happy Birthday, Grandma," and hands it back to your partner. Your partner returns the change she received and pays for her stuff with other money from her purse. Only in America.

Have a nice day.