

## **Independence Day**

by

Scott William Foley

On a Wednesday night, Selena Epting pushed the grocery cart through the strip mall's wet parking lot. Her legs ached from a long shift, and she wanted nothing more than to simply get home and plop into bed. However, tomorrow morning—her day off—she planned to host a birthday party for her niece, and she'd waited until the last minute to buy the basics: cake ingredients, juice, cookies, ice cream, paper plates, cups, and plastic utensils. Where she would find the time within the next eleven hours to bake the cake was another concern, one she didn't care to think about at the moment.

Though the rain had just ended, its fresh scent lingered in the air. She reached her car, pressed the button on her keys that opened the trunk, and loaded her groceries. When finished, she slammed the trunk shut before shoving her cart into the stall. She'd made sure to park directly beside the cart return so that she wouldn't have to spend too much time walking alone in the dark lot.

Unfortunately, her efforts were futile, for after she had deposited the cart and turned around, a man wearing a hood with a bandana affixed over his nose and mouth blocked her path.

He hissed, "Shut up and gimme your purse!"

Time stopped for Selena. Darting her eyes over the mugger's shoulder to the storefronts, she searched for help. Lucky Larry's Pizzeria had recently gone out of business, Frey's Tae Kwon Do Academy was lit but vacant, Lost Soles Shoe Repair had

been closed for hours, but the grocery store—Fresh Food and More—remained open and even had a man walking out and an old woman making her way in.

Before she could stop herself, Selena screamed, “Help me!”

The man walking out of the grocery store glanced up, saw the mugger, and then trotted off into the shadows; the elderly woman gave no sign of having heard Selena and simply moseyed along into the store.

The mugger hurled Selena down to the soaked pavement between her car and the cart return, growling, “I told you to shut up!”

Landing hard on her back and elbows, pain seared throughout Selena’s body.

The mugger reached under his sweatshirt and pulled out a long hunting knife, snarling, “That’s gonna cost you. I was just gonna take your purse, but now you went and made it hard on yourself.” He jabbed the tip of his knife at her and demanded, “Gimme your keys! We’re goin’ for a ride.”

Although she hated to give the creep any satisfaction, Selena couldn’t control her blubbering while she tossed him the keys. Unspeakable possibilities raced through her mind as she imagined her immediate future.

But then a calm voice from behind said, “Leave her alone.”

Still on the ground, Selena looked past the mugger and saw the old woman who’d been entering the grocery store when she cried for help.

“Please,” Selena whimpered, “please, go away, ma’am. I don’t want anything to happen to you ...”

The mugger barked through his blue and white bandana, “Yeah, lady, you best listen to her. Beat it before you get hurt.”

The woman sighed before stating, "I'll be fine."

"Are you crazy?" the mugger asked. Then, while tossing his knife from hand to hand, he took a step toward her.

At that moment, the old woman took hold of the stall's railing with her left hand and used it for leverage while swinging her right leg up and around, crashing her foot directly into the mugger's left knee. Howling in pain, he twisted and fell, bashing his head against the return's rail and knocking himself out cold.

The old woman crouched and confiscated the mugger's knife. She slid it through her belt loop, offered Selena a hand up, and said, "If you've got a cell phone, I'd call the police."

Still sobbing, Selena gasped, "That was amazing! How did you do that? I didn't even think you heard me, much less—"

"—Oh, I heard you," the woman interrupted. "I pretended I didn't, though, to retain the element of surprise against Mr. Big Blade here." After noticing Selena's lack of movement, she prompted, "The police, young lady. Call them."

"Right!" Selena exclaimed. Taking the old woman's hand, Selena got to her feet, wiped her cheeks, and then rifled through the purse in search of her phone. "I really can't believe—"

"—Do you have any jumper cable?" the old woman intruded yet again. "I can use it to bind him until the police arrive."

Dialing 911, Selena asked, "What? No ... Wait! Actually, I have these little bungee cords in my trunk, you know, to keep it closed when—"

"—Perfect. Pop the trunk."

Selena did so, and as the woman ensnared the assailant, Selena called the police, informed them of the situation, and gave her location.

When both were finished, Selena asked, “Where did you learn to do that?”

Pointing across the parking lot, the woman replied, “Frey’s Tae Kwon Do Academy. I’m an instructor.”

Digging into her pocket, she handed Selena a card that read, “Luna Denton, Sabeom.”

“Sabeom?” Selena pronounced. “What does that mean?”

She revealed, “It means I’ve been at this a long time, and I do it well.”

“Oh,” Selena responded. “Well, listen, Luna—”

“—Mrs. Denton,” she corrected.

Taken aback, Selena said, “I’m sorry—Mrs. Denton. I just want to thank you so much—”

Mrs. Denton interjected anew, asserting, “—I want you to take my self-defense course. I’ll see you this Saturday at nine in the morning—yes, we’re open despite the holiday. Don’t be late.”

Wailing sirens filled the air as the police neared.

Selena stumbled, “W-what? Oh, no, I’m afraid that ... I’m not really—”

“—Do you understand what could have happened tonight if I hadn’t gotten involved? You can be sure that your life would be very different right now.”

Unable to meet Mrs. Denton’s eyes, Selena instead gawked at the unconscious mugger.

Mrs. Denton divulged, “You’re not alone, young lady. I endured this scene thirty-three years ago, only no one came to my rescue. Soon thereafter, I started studying tae kwon do. After that incident, I didn’t want to live in fear. What happened to me couldn’t be changed, but I’ve since taught many students how to protect themselves, and I want to ensure that you don’t have to depend on being saved anymore.”

Regarding the old woman, Selena nodded and said, “I’ll be there, Mrs. Denton.”

And then, as the police cruisers careened into the lot amid a salvo of screaming sirens and flashing lights, Mrs. Denton concluded, “Good. I’ll see you on Independence Day.”

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