

Pay Dirt

written by

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(C) - 2022

FADE IN:

EXT. GRASSY FIELD - DAY

Lush greenery. An idyllic blue sky. Soft breezes.

Alone amid this splendor is MEL MEYERS (40s). He guides a sleek, premium-grade metal detector over the ground.

The device's lettering says "Bounty Hunter Platinum Pro."

The beeps and clicks from the detector blend with the bird chirps and the stridulations of the grasshoppers.

The device's tone changes. Whooh. Whooh. Mel's got something.

He pinpoints the spot with expertise.

Mel's knees pop softly when he squats down. He tilts his faded ball cap to get a better look.

A small bit of digging. Mel comes up with an old lug nut, rusted and grody from decades in the soil.

He spits on it, rubs away the dirt, mutters.

MEL

You're a long way from the road,
pal.

Mel shrugs and drops the lug nut into his shirt pocket.

He resumes his leisurely sweep. Several yards later, his detector sputters with electronic delight: something huge!

Back and forth Mel goes. He sizes up this treasure carefully.

From his pack he grasps a shovel. The digging begins.

LATER

A small mound of dirt. Lots of sweat. Awestruck Mel stares at the pay dirt he's partially uncovered--

An unexploded World-War II-style bomb. Old, gray, deadly.

MEL

How the fuck?

He searches the sky for long-gone bombers.

MEL

How'd this get here?

Sweat trickles as he theorizes.

MEL
Target practice?

Mel steps respectfully back from the bomb.

MEL
Training runs?

He looks upward again, wipes his brow, takes a deep breath.

Cold realization sets in. If he'd struck that bomb the right way with the shovel, he could've been killed.

Still, he's got to get a picture of this.

He inches closer to the bomb, aiming his cell phone at it. Slow. Careful. Easy does it.

But he nudges too far. The lug nut slips from his pocket.

It hits the bomb just as Mel snaps his shot. Click! Boom!

LATER

A miracle. Mel lives.

Blown back and knocked unconscious, he awakens.

He's dazed and burned. Parts of his skin are charred or reddened. His clothes are torn.

One more thing: Mel's cell phone is lodged in his head.

Three inches of it protrude from his forehead. The rest is in his brain, slammed in by the force of the blast.

Mel's survival is completely fractional and arbitrary. A tiny bit one way or the other, and he'd be a goner.

He crawls, tries to stand, staggers.

After muttering nonsense, Mel finally realizes what he needs.

MEL
Gotta call...phone.

He searches. He barks out a command.

MEL
Locate phone!

The cell phone in his forehead lights up.

The "find phone" feature on his device functions perfectly despite its absurd positioning.

Horror flashes across Mel's face. With trembling fingers, he explores his bizarre and grizzly protrusion.

MEL

My God!

Total freak out. His scream echoes across the lovely field.

MEL

Help!

Bloop. A Siri-like woman's voice springs to life on Mel's phone. This is CHERI, a knockoff voice-activated assistant.

Her cheerful, slightly robotic voice echoes in Mel's head.

CHERI (V.O.)

How can I help?

Mel stammers.

MEL

It's an emergency.

CHERI (V.O.)

Dialing emergency services!

Strange tones in Mel's head.

Mel seizes the phone. He's about to yank it out of his skull when Cheri happily intervenes.

CHERI (V.O.)

Removing this device will release brain fluid and generate certain death. Would you like to proceed?

MEL

Nuh-No.

CHERI (V.O.)

Financial services reached.

A man's voice sounds in Mel's head. This is NOT an emergency dispatcher. It's Mel's financial planner TOM TALCOTT (60s).

TOM (V.O.)

Tom here. Hello.

MEL
Send a motherfucking ambulance!
I've blown myself up!

TOM (V.O.)
I'm sorry?

MEL
Send someone now!

A pause on Tom's line.

TOM (V.O.)
Is this Mr. Meyers? Mel?

MEL
Ah.

TOM (V.O.)
Mel, It's Tom Talcott, your
financial adviser. It sounds like
you're in some trouble. What can I
do to help you?

MEL
I tried to call an ambulance.

TOM (V.O.)
I'll call one. Where are you?

MEL
A couple miles from the road maybe.

TOM (V.O.)
Okay. Can you give me the name of
the road? The nearest town?

Mel thinks.

MEL
I should know this, but I can't
recall. My head.

TOM (V.O.)
No worries. I'll get help to you.

MEL
Please call my daughter.

TOM (V.O.)
I will. What's her name?

Mel's eyes widen.

MEL
I...can't remember.

Panic. Tears form.

MEL
I don't know.

Tom's voice is the model of compassion.

TOM (V.O.)
It's okay, Mel. I'll track her
down. Stay on the line. Keep
talking to me, if you can.

MEL
Tell her I love her. My daughter.

TOM (V.O.)
Stay calm, Mel. I've got help on
the way.

MEL
I'm all that she has. My wife died
ten years ago. Her mom.

A sob.

MEL
My daughter goes to school at
Northern Arizona University.

TOM (V.O.)
I'll get hold of her.

MEL
I can picture her. She has brown
hair. She loves strawberries. But
what's her name?

The phone clicks. The call with Tom ends.

A new voice seeps into Mel's brain via the phone. It belongs
to a mobile phone PITCHMAN.

PITCHMAN (V.O.)
Did you know that you get extended
coverage anywhere when you're
connected to Wi-Fi? Calls and texts
to U.S.-based numbers...

Mel cries out.

The pitchman is drown out by beeps, clicks, and whoops--the same sounds that came from Mel's metal detector.

MEL

Cheri, help me find my car.

CHERI (V.O.)

A cow is a fully grown female animal of a domesticated breed of ox, kept to produce milk or beef.

MEL

Car. Not cow.

CHERI (V.O.)

At the light, make a right.

MEL

There's no light.

CHERI (V.O.)

Too much light makes the baby go blind.

A frustrated grunt from Mel. He trudges through the field, in search of his car. After several moments, Cheri chimes in.

CHERI (V.O.)

Trust your instincts. Turn right at the light.

Mel grits his teeth and staggers along the field, desperate to find his car. Desperate to survive.

LATER

The sun is low in the sky. Exhausted, heavy-legged Mel stumbles. He's been walking for hours.

He searches his surroundings. He speaks with a raspy voice.

MEL

I'm dying, right?

A long pause. Cheri blurts to life.

CHERI (V.O.)

To die is different than anyone supposed, and luckier. Walt Whitman, Song of Myself.

Mel nods. He stares at the waving grass.

A small pulsation.

CHERI (V.O.)
Incoming call.

Mel groans.

A worried voice fills the line. This is KIMBERLY MEYERS
(20s), Mel's daughter.

KIMBERLY (V.O.)
Dad?

Joy spreads across Mel's face.

MEL
Oh, baby. Kimberly. It's dad.

KIMBERLY (V.O.)
What happened? You're hurt. They
called me and said you had an
accident.

MEL
I love you. I had to tell you that.

KIMBERLY (V.O.)
Help's coming.

MEL
I'm sorry that I forgot your name.
It was only for a second. My
brain's a little screwy right now.

A sob from Kimberly.

MEL
All this was caused by a lug nut.

He tries to chuckle, but wheezes instead.

MEL
You'll laugh at what I did to
myself. So stupid. So unbelievably
stupid. It's gonna be in the
papers, I'm sure of it.

KIMBERLY (V.O.)
I love you.

MEL
It was the lug nut.

KIMBERLY (V.O.)
I love you.

MEL
I hit pay dirt, kid. I love you,
too.

He gazes at the orange sun. Cheri chimes in.

CHERI (V.O.)
Power low. One percent.

Click. Click. The call with Kimberly is dropped, and replaced
by a random message from the Pitchman.

He calls out in Mel's head.

PITCHMAN (V.O.)
Did you know that your protection
plan includes mobile security with
ID protection?

Enough of this.

Squelch! Mel pulls the phone out of his skull.

He tosses it. Fluid leaks from his wound.

Mel whispers to himself as he soaks in the swaying grasses
and the deepening navy sky.

No more Pitchman. No more phone. No more Cheri.

Just a sad, quiet, absurd moment in the field before death.

FADE OUT: