

BOOK STORE

At the bookstore Pam sold books the way farmers sold wheat. She would open the store every morning and the "wheat" would be there, ready for the marketplace. She could take a thing of "wheat" out of the ground and sell it to just about anyone. Sometimes a person would even offer to sell her "wheat," in which case she would direct them to her manager, or "wheat foreman." And every night she walked the rows, making sure no one had stolen her precious crops. She was very farmer-like in that respect.

But of course, unlike a farmer, Pam sold books, not wheat. And she didn't actually walk around making sure no one had stolen her precious crops either. Not really. Like if someone took a book, she wasn't that bothered. She just worked there and lived in the back.

One day she saw a guy stuffing a book in his pants. It was a book about the band REM called *It Crawled from the South*. The book tells of the many hard times REM went through in being a band. Sometimes the drummer quit. Other times they released the album *Life's Rich Pageant* to only modest critical acclaim. Pam had actually read the book, but didn't care for it because she hated reading books.

The man was putting the book down his pants with the cover facing in, towards him. If the cover wasn't a cover, but the actual members of REM, they would be getting quite a show right now. They'd all be fighting to see which one would get to slip into the man's underpants first, probably, and his jeans would be as full as a grain silo. Pam often thought about men in this way while she worked. It would get her all keyed up and she'd have to go in the back and cool down. She would sit on the edge of her bed and look at pornography, and that usually did the trick.

Pam came out of the back to see that the man was now waiting at the cash register for her. He was holding another book. She couldn't see the title, but it had an ape on the cover, so it was either a book about apes or a book with an ape as the main character. Pam had seen both kinds, but more often than not it was the former. She didn't see the latter that much.

The man was holding the ape book against his chest. His arm obscured most of the ape's face so only its eyes were visible. They were soft and mild. You might think that Pam was going to start fantasizing about the book being a real ape that the guy was pressing to his breast, but she was more relaxed now and wasn't thinking those things, thank god. She was thinking about whether she was going to bust him for stealing the REM book actually. She could sense that it was still there, buried in his pants like a sweet potato. She'd have to be very skillful farmer to dig it out of him without damaging the roots, or book pages.

Another man walked into the store. This one had a gun in his hand and a mask on his face. Pam thought it would be pretty funny if it was the other way around, if the man was holding the mask and had

a gun taped to his head. It wouldn't be so threatening and scary, Pam thought, like it was now.

The ape-book customer shrieked and ducked behind a bookcase. He held the book in front of him in self-defense. The author photo on the back was almost perfectly lined up with the customer's own face. He could have passed as the author of the book now, if the author was famous for crying and shaking with fear and also had a book shaped head.

The masked man was definitely talking about robbing the bookstore now. This guy robbed stores the way a farm-thief steals from farms, i.e. in the middle of the day while the store is still open. He first demanded all the lettuce, then all the tomatoes, then the beans and cucumbers. He left the watermelons though. The watermelons sat in the register drawer like big pennies. No one wants watermelons/pennies, sighed Pam.

The thief made her put everything in a plastic bag. He was a no-nonsense kind of guy. He kept swiveling to the customer hidden in the stacks, making sure he wasn't going anywhere. He wasn't. Pam wasn't going anywhere either, she had worked at the store for a really long time.

After a while, the man stopped robbing the place and turned to leave, strutting like the fox who had just robbed the bookstore of all its chickens and vegetables. He was right at the door when he slipped and banged his back hard on the floor. He lay groaning and moving. Pam stood there for some time, waiting for the man to get up. When it looked like that wasn't going to happen, she called her manager, who called the police.

When the cops came, the first thing they did was arrest the thief. He was pretty embarrassed. He looked down at the big tomato he had slipped on and shook his head in confusion. He wondered how that got there. Then the cops finished arresting him. They did a very good job, arresting him, except they did beat him up a bit.

The customer came up to Pam. He thanked her for keeping her cool in such a stressful situation and for being his hero. He backed out of the store, still expressing his profound gratitude to his hero Pam. As soon as he got outside he started running. He did end up stealing that REM book after all. And he took the ape book too. Pam watched the man run down the street. She imagined the two books running alongside him, all of them holding hands, going off to the farmhouse to cook wheat and make out. Soon they disappeared from view. She waited for someone else to come into the store. When no one did she went back into her little room. She was very excited.

THE END