

Killing Earl

by [Armando Simón](#) (December 2024)



A Cell in Arbroath Gaol (Patrick Allan Fraser)

I'll tell you why they got me down for this time around. It's a real long story.

About three years ago—I'll never forget the day—I had just stopped by my PO to report. I was just driving home thinking what a joke that was—parole I mean. Report once a month. Pay twenty bucks. Tell them I'm still living in the same place and working at the same job. That's supposed to keep me straight, right? Right. Sure. If he knew how many jobs I had pulled that month alone I wonder what he'd say.

Anyway—I got off the subject—I drove on home. Showered. Put on some fresh clothes. Watched TV. Waited for the old lady to come on home, told her we'd be going out that night, meet Larry, Earl, Jim at Tom-Tom's. They'd bring their old ladies with them.

I had a lot of money on me and me and my old lady, we'd been partying nearly every other night.

Now Larry, Earl and Jim were my running partners. Which is to say we pulled jobs together—but only in pairs. Say, me and Jim, Earl and Larry, Larry and me, we'd go burglarize a store or a house we'd cased, but only two of us would pull the job and there was no telling who'd work with who, it all depended on who got the information and who you felt like having with you at that particular job.

Now let me tell you something about these three guys—the best kind of guys you wanna be around with. But deadly. Don't cross them. At the same time, if they tell you they'll do something for you they will, any one of them. Their word is their bond, and they expect you to do the same. If for some reason you're short of cash, they'll give you some to tide you over til the next job.

We met regularly at Tom-Tom's for drinks and shoot the breeze

and dancing. Larry and Jim, they're shacked up with their old ladies, but Earl's been seeing this married gal for a while now, Tammy's her name, and here's where the story kicks in. She's married to this bookie and she tells Larry that her old man keeps close to forty grands in the house. Won't put it in the bank 'cause the bank will report anything over ten thousand dollars to the IRS and he doesn't wanna pay taxes. So she tells this to Earl and Earl invites me to go with him in a couple of weeks from now and burglarize the place. We drive by, he shows me the house, right? Now she knows what Earl does for a living, all the gals do, they think it's exciting, mine told me one time.

So, anyway, here we all are at Tom-Tom's—I don't remember who got there when—drinking, cutting up, dancing the two-step. We been there for hours. Earl leans over, says to me, "Let's go outside. I gotta talk to you about something."

So I step on out with him to the side door, I'm walking ahead of him, like so. And he hits me! Hits me with the butt of his gun. Full force too! The whole side of my head is covered with blood and the gun discharged. Well, I thought I'd been shot. I'm woozy as all get-out and I see Earl kneeling over me, pointing his gun at my face, and it's cocked. I also see a whole buncha stars. He says to me, "I oughta kill you for what ya did!"

"For what? What did I do?" I'm still woozy. Didn't know what he was talking about!

"You know for what, don't give me that!" He gets up. "I oughta kill you, but I won't on account we be associating for so long."

"Well, you better kill me," I says, "'cause after this, I'm sure as hell gonna try to kill you." Shouldn't have said anything, but shows you how woozy my head was. He turns around and goes back in and when he did so it occurs to me that I can

shoot him in the back from where I'm laying at, but don't you know, I left my gun at home.

I staggered back in. Earl and Tammy are gone by now and the rest of them look at me and wanna know what happened to me and I tell them. Now what I didn't know then, and I came to find out much later, was that somebody had broken in and burglarized the bookie's place. Knew what they were looking for, too, it wasn't just any regular old burglary. They went in the attic, they looked in the dirty clothes basket, they turned over furniture, they slashed the sofa. The knew what they were looking for, all right.

But, in the meantime, I don't know this and neither do Larry and Jim. My old lady wants to get me home or to the hospital and they help me get out the door.

And who should happen to come back, but ole Earl? He's decided he let me off too easy, and he's coming out of the truck. I'm in no shape to defend myself and I got no gun, so they get in front of me. Larry steps forward and tells Earl that's far enough, he's got a gun. Earl tells Larry that it's between him and me. Larry says, "No more."

Ole Larry—he's skinny as a rail—is standing legs apart with hands at his side and Earl's the same way. Straight out of the Wild West. Must have crossed Earl's mind cause he said, "Your move, Quick Draw."

Now the gals see what's coming down and I have to hand it to them, they defused the situation right quick, somebody was to gonna to get hurt, probably killed. Larry's old lady wraps herself around him and starts pulling him away and Tammy does the same way with Earl—and they're putting their whole weight behind it, too. Ole Tammy gets Earl in the truck and they drive off.

Well, they take me to the Emergency Room and I get stitched up and we drop off the gals at the house. Then me, Larry and Jim

we figure that the best thing we oughta do is take him out right away. Now, Earl had moved a while back and Jim thought he remembered where he said he'd moved to, so we go on to this apartment complex. Jim and Larry have got a gun and by now I got my shotgun with me. So, I go up to this apartment door and knock and an old man answers.

Picture this: I got my shotgun ready, Jim and Larry are behind me, legs far apart, aiming their guns at the door with both hands. And this old man answers the door. Nearly had a heart attack! I ask if this is where Earl lives and he just shakes his head with eyes popping outta his head. So we leave. Apologized first. No sense sticking around. We got no idea where he's living. I decide it'd be a good idea for me to move too, seeing as he can come up to my house and blow me away any time he feels like it and they help me move. That same night.

Anyway, to make a long story short, the word was out in the streets: me and Earl was trying to kill each other. We both changed our routines and we didn't tell other people where we could be found, but we was both on the lookout for each other.

This went on for six, nine months. Then, one day, driving down the highway, who do I see driving in front of me but ole Earl? And Tammy's with him, too. I follow them and they don't notice me, way behind them, and they pull up to this bar and go in. I park nearby and thinks things through: they're gonna be there awhile; then, again, maybe not, but either way, this is my chance. I look over the place and the way they parked and the way the parking lot was set up and the position of the street is such that when they leave, they gotta pass through a particular section. And that's where I park, with the car facing the opposite way. I get my shotgun ready, lay down on the seat and wait.

Well, I waited two, three hours and they finally come out. By now, I know exactly what I gotta do. Afraid Tammy's gonna to get it too, along with Earl, but, hey, that's life. They get

in their car, they pull up, I lift the shotgun and I fire through the windshield. Never saw me. I then got outta there. Didn't even look back.

Come to find out later, neither one got killed, just scratched, don't you know it! The windshield absorbed the impact. Didn't see them again for a while.

A few months later, I get arrested while pulling a job and they give me a nickel and send me to the joint. I'm there five, six months and one day they bring in a new guy and they put him next door to mine.

And I hear a voice.

"Hello, Tim? Know who this is?"

I says, "Earl? Is that you?"

"Yeah, how you doing, buddy?" and sticks out his arm and we shake hands.

"What you doing here?" I ask him and he tells me. Seems that he also got arrested while pulling a job, they gave him four years and while in county jail he found out where I was from mutual acquaintances and when he came up here he managed to get assigned to my wing and by sheer luck got the cell next to me.

Anyway, we talk for the better part of two hours, friendly as can be, like nothing ever happened, and time comes for chow time and we start to get ready and I ask him, "Well, Earl, what's it gonna to be?"

"What you mean?" he asks.

"Well, last time we saw each other we were trying to kill one another. When they open these here doors for chow are we gonna to try to kill each other?"

"Aww, man, that's dead and buried!"

"You sure, now?"

"Yeah, I'm sure!" and the door opens and, sure enough, nothing happens, we don't go for each other. We go down to the chow hall and everything is as if nothing ever happened.

Well, before too long, we arrange it so that we're cellies and the way we are, it's like old times, the best of friends. I tell you, prison's a great place for bringing people together.

Then, one day, Earl gets a letter from Tammy and he comes back to the house looking mad. I'm on my bunk and I see him coming and I know him well enough to guess at what all it could be. One of several things.

He comes in and tosses the letter to his bunk cussing and I ask him what's wrong and he won't say and I keep asking him, and I finally get it out of him. One of our mutual friends, who I told about my taking out Earl's windshield, told a friend of his, who told another friend, who told Tammy that it was me who did it. And, see, Earl never knew! And I know ole Earl well enough to know that the situation just got real dangerous.

"Aww, man, are you gonna to start back on that again? I thought we put that behind us."

"We did! I just wanna know if you was the one that did it."

"No, I didn't! Just like I didn't pull the job on Tammy's old man!"

"Look, nothing's gonna change between us! I just gotta know. It's something I just need to know, just for my own peace of mind, nothing more."

Well, I know Earl well enough not to fall for this line and I keep reassuring him and he keeps asking me. He's still not

satisfied and I'm nervous as all get-out.

In the morning, just before he goes to work, he says to me, "Well, I'm gonna think about it at work and then I'll know what to do."

Well, that sounded ominous!

I went to work, too, and decided that the situation had just become too unpredictable for me. I simply could not relax and sleep in a cell with a guy who was totally capable of killing me. Or in the same wing. I mean, when is he gonna to do it? At chow? While I sleep? After a confrontation? So I decide to get the jump on him. I simply can't rely on his goodwill. I just can't.

There was a place at work where I had stashed away a shank in case I ever needed it at work and I was able to smuggle it back into the building and into the wing. Earl hasn't come back from work yet, so I wait in the Dayroom and he comes into the wing with a buncha other guys.

Well, it's pretty crowded in the Dayroom and he doesn't see me. He goes up closer to the TV to see what's on and I walk on behind him. I pull out my shank outta my pants real quick-like and hold him with my other hand-like so-and I stab him four or five times in the chest, real quick like.

Well, old Earl died. He stumbled outta the Dayroom and they took him to the infirmary, but there was nothing that they could do for him. I was kinda sorry, really, and everybody else was shocked 'cause we were so tight, but, I mean what else could I do?

Oh, yeah. They gave me a dime behind it. But, hey! I've served a year on it. In four more months, I'll be out on parole and back out on the streets. So, til then, I'll hang on tight and stay outta trouble, don't you see.

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