

# The Original Bank Robbery Scene

*When I first wrote **The Truth in the Vault**, I followed the outline quite nicely until the bank robbery scene. I thought I had read through it, but I had not, and this was the result. It was a boatload of fun to write, and when I read the outline later and realized that it had nothing to do with the story **J.P.** and I had conceptualized and that I now had to delete all 2,500 words, I died a little bit inside and saved it to a new file. As a member of Ginnie's email family, you can now read what I originally, mistakenly wrote. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.*

~Britney

## Chapter 4

As I look back now, I obviously realize the irony of the conversation I've recorded from the night before. The other discussions of the Thursday night art show have faded from my mind, but Robert's imitation of the Tommy gun still stands stark in my mind because of what happened the very next day. Who says that foreshadowing only happens in novels?

Robert's "rat-tat-tat" was horrendously inaccurate, I remember thinking as I dove around the side of Jerry's desk. The noise was so loud in the confined space that the chandelier overhead shattered into a million crystal fragments - though now that I think of it, that may have been from the ricochet of the bullets that tore through the teller windows, instantly killing Ed and catching Jerry in the arm before he ducked.

I hope I get to tell Clara how brave he is, I thought to myself, crawling toward him. Having dropped to the floor on his side, he was staring in shock at his bleeding arm. He hadn't made a single sound, though the unbearable roar of the Tommy guns was still shredding the air around us. I pulled him under the desk and felt the underside desperately for a weapon of some kind. No such luck greeted me. Instead, I grabbed my knife from my boot with one hand and my handkerchief with the other, pressing the handkerchief to Jerry's bicep and clamping his hand over it.

Surely the bullets would end soon, I thought desperately, casting my eyes about for something to use as another weapon or shield. Sure enough, at that moment, the guns abruptly ceased firing, and a voice took their place. Before I understood the words, I understood the man, for there is a proverb in the *Holy Bible* that describes this type of person perfectly. "For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence." This man was drunk with that wine. In that moment, as I registered his words without comprehending their meaning yet, both dread and pity filled my soul, as indistinguishable from each other as the mist and the rain on a foggy day.

Then his words clicked into place in my brain.

“Where’s the manager? Time to fill ‘er up, old man! Get your sorry self out of the office and open that vault!”

Hoping he and his clients had jumped out the window, I almost groaned as I saw the bank manager, Harry Fordman, crack open his door and then walk staunchly over Ed’s still body to the teller window with barely a shudder. I couldn’t help but admire him as I scanned the room, still trying to find a way to get Jerry out of this alive - and hopefully myself and the other innocents as well.

Perhaps this man who oozed violence would just take the money and go, but if he and his cronies didn’t? What then? Who else had to suffer to satisfy their lust for pain?

Thankfully Jerry was gritting his teeth silently, letting nary a whimper escape his usually jovial mouth. I had him propped up against the wood to keep the arm over his heart, but he needed a doctor, and fast. I laid my knife right beside me and felt for my morsie, sighing in relief when I found it still in my vest pocket.

“Premier Bank STOP SOS STOP”

After my first message to Ward was sent, I typed a second. “One casualty STOP One injury STOP Three auto gunmen in room STOP”

“Our vault locks automatically when the alarm is triggered,” Fordman said, clenching his fists atop the counter and regarding the thugs with the bored tone of a business man unable to do business at the moment.

The robber leader’s sneer was audible. “Try again, old man. I think you’ll find it unlocks just fine, alarm or no alarm.”

Fordman gave a shrug as if to say, “your loss,” but as he turned, I saw his eyes shift with worry toward the big black door set into the wall next to the small safe that held the money for the day. He took his keys from his coat pocket and put out a hand to unlock the small safe, but a volley of bullets to the ceiling arrested his movement. This time, he jumped, as plaster fell on his head, and I saw the sheen of sweat on his brow even as he turned slowly to say, “That won’t be necessary, gentlemen. I assume you are referring to the large vault, the one that I have already told you locks automatically and cannot be opened by these keys?” He jangled them.

“I’m getting tired of your attitude!” The roar was sufficient to tell Fordman that anything but trying would not be tolerated.

“I will need the latch bar from my office,” he said stiffly. “As you can see,” he gestured to the two knobs in the middle of the door and the handle next to them, “I cannot open it alone unless I have the bar.”

“Tell one of them to bring it,” was the snarled answer. As I could not see the criminals, I can only assume they had seen what I had: the bald head of one of Fordman’s clients had popped up to peek through the door window for just long enough to give away their presence within. I pressed my lips together in frustration. And when he came out? If he’d been fool enough to show himself instead of jumping out the window, was he fool enough to look down at us and

alert the thugs to our presence? I didn't want to be remembered at this juncture, as I still was very doubtful that I could do anything to protect us.

"There's no need for that," Fordman started, but another shower of bullets blasted through the glass to his office and several screams followed them.

"You heard what I want!" bellowed the gunman. "Get it out here before I come back there!"

Accordingly, a heavy gold bar was dropped through the window.

"Oh, no, no," he said. His voice sent shivers down my spine. It now sounded amused, as if the fear he'd just witnessed in that motion was what he'd been waiting for - and not quite getting from Fordman. "Come on out - or we'll come in after you. One, two, three..."

The bald man scurried out, hunched over with his hands pressed over his shiny pate. The light that glinted off his head came only from the desk lamps and the mid-morning sunlight reaching palely through the velvet-draped windows. With the remains of the chandelier hanging desultory, even the light was subdued and added to the menacing atmosphere that would soon choke me with panic if I didn't keep my head. I firmly determined to do just that. The odd thought that came to me then somehow put a grim smile on my face: if we all survived this, I would have one of the biggest stories of my career to write...and one of the most tragic obituaries, I remembered, seeing blood trickling closer to me from Ed's body.

"Anyone else in there?" called one of the gunmen.

"Jus-just me," stuttered the bald man.

"Help him open the vault," ordered the leader. "And hop to it. We've wasted enough time."

Had it only been two minutes? I marveled, looking at the big clock in disbelief. And did the alarm that Fordman speak of alert police nearby? I allowed myself a tiny sliver of hope. With Ward hopefully sending the message on and with the alarm, would help arrive soon? If the vault was locked, perhaps...

Unfortunately, the leader knew what he was talking about.

An inside job? I wondered as Fordman and the other man's combined efforts opened the vault with ease. I could see the shock on Fordman's face as the leaden door opened and the locked grate inside appeared. Hesitatingly, he pulled the key ring from his pocket again and fumbled with the lock. Moving past the shelves of bank records on either side, he approached the second vault door and laid his hand on the gold knob, twirling the combination lock with his other hand. This one opened, too, and the inside made one of the robbers hoot victoriously.

"Go!" the leader growled, and my heart sank as they came bolting around the counter to collect the coins and notes stacked arm deep inside.

"Be dead," I hissed in Jerry's ear, and collapsed with my knife hidden under my arm, my face in a puddle of Ed's blood. I felt Jerry slide so that his body and

head were limp. My thought as I felt the pounding of feet on the floor was that I wished I had a better plan.

Opening my eyes to an invisible slit, I got my first real look at the gunmen as the trio yanked Fordman and his client aside and two shouldered their way in to the vault to pack away the money in burlap sacks they'd stashed under their great coats.

The leader guarding Fordman glanced at the clock and then into the vault.

"Keys," he bellowed in Fordman's face. He tossed them to the second robber, who emerged, holding a small iron box with a triumphant face. "We'll open it later! Go!"

Without a second look, he shot Fordman and his client in the knees and grabbed the slower gunman by the lapel, dragging him after the first robber, who was dashing out with the iron box in his sack.

I sighed in relief as they bypassed Fordman's office and went instead into the meeting room that led to a hallway that had an exit to the back alley.

Wishing I'd gotten to stick my knife into at least one of them, I scrambled up and ran to the door, screaming at the top of my lungs: "HELP! ROBBERY! THREE MEN WITH BAGS! HELP!"

This stirred up the passerby enough to send young boys yelling the message down the street, two young men running around the back with excited looks, and one old woman jogging down the street, clearly intent on spearing the robbers with her umbrella. A no-nonsense woman who'd been at the grocery next door asked me if anyone had died, and when I told her there were three injured men inside, she barked orders to the grocer to flag down a cab and, after determining that the blood coating my head was not my own, pushed past me to examine Jerry and the others.

Following her back inside, I saw the client shouting obscenities and weeping as he held his legs and rocked, but Fordman had already removed his coat and was tearing the wool of the sleeves and back into long strips. I took the one he offered me and batted his client's hands away, wrapping it quickly and firmly around the shredded skin above and below his knee while the woman checked on Jerry.

"Tommies aren't the best for aim," Fordman said, giving me a tight smile that didn't reach his eyes as he wrapped his own legs. "The police should be here any moment; though, if the alarm didn't lock the vault, perhaps it didn't get to the police either..." he frowned.

I jumped to my feet, torn. If I ran, maybe I could see which direction they went, but if they caught sight of me...and three wounded men lay before me.

Remembering the other men in the office, I opened the door and called, "Anyone here? The robbers are gone."

Silence greeted me.

"They got out the window," the bald man groaned. "I couldn't...my back..."

I sat back down beside them, sorry that I'd judged him a fool earlier. The no-nonsense woman was fixing my bandage on him.

He swore loudly. "If this is the treatment I get at your bank, Fordman, you can bet we won't be working together in the future."

Sure he was cracking a joke, I glanced at his scowling face and decided my earlier assessment wasn't so far off.

"I sent a morsie to a detective friend," I said. "And someone outside is getting a cab to take you all to the hospital."

The bald man's answer was another non-witty unprintable remark, and it seemed that both Fordman and Jerry had lost too much blood and energy to do anything other than nod and close their eyes in pain.

Comfortable with the woman staying with them, I went outside to wait for the cab, which arrived at the same time as Ward and several police officers.

When Ward drew near me, his face whitened. "You need the hospital, now."

"Me? No, I - " I realized he was looking at the side of my head and face. "Oh! No, this isn't my blood; it's...it's Ed's." I felt my own face go pale as the reality of the situation finally sunk in. We were safe now; it was someone else's job to take care of the wounded and find the men who breathed violence. I could just... what? Relief and uncertainty rushing to my head, I wobbled.

Ward caught my arm and held me steady. "Are you injured? You're sure none of this blood is yours?"

I nodded, absently patting my matted hair and running through the events in my mind. "Yes, I'm sure, and no, I wasn't wounded. But a teller died, and Jerry and Harry and another man - there." Supported by a cabby, Jerry stumbled to the car, followed by four policemen carrying Harry and his client.

"I'll go with them, sir," one of the policemen said to Ward, and hopped onto the back of the car. Ward nodded to him.

"Any word on the coroner?"

"He'll be arriving within half an hour," another said, checking his morsie.

"Good. Let's get to work. Miss Harper, you come with me. I'd like you to walk me through exactly what happened. Let me keep hold of your arm, if you don't mind. I don't like the way you look."

"What's wrong with the way I look?" I joked weakly.

He raised an eyebrow at me, and I consented to lean on him, glad for the support now that everything that *could* have happened was overtaking my mind. Thankful that I had a useful role to fulfill, I pushed all the "could have's" from my mind and described those three tense moments in detail as we slowly walked through the room, hugging the wall so as not to disturb anything.

"And you never saw their faces?" he asked, squatting to check the wreckage on the floor.

I shook my head. "They were masked: black masks that covered their hair, faces, and necks. They wore gloves, too. But the voice...if you can find them, I'll remember the leader's voice forever."

“And what was this Fordman said about the vault being locked? Do you think he was bluffing?”

“No. He was actually surprised when it opened: I saw it on his face. Were the police alerted?”

“Yes. When I contacted the precinct after I got your message, they were already on their way. I met them here.”

“So why wouldn’t the alarm have worked to lock the vault?”

We turned to our notes in tandem. “We’ll have to ask Fordman.”