

Everybody Be Cool, This is a Robbery!

by Todd Maupin

The tree must have fallen sometime in the afternoon. Governments, regimes and institutions had been toppled overnight; certainly a strong wind could casually uproot a tree during the course of a day. When Wyatt had passed by in the morning - twice - the road had been clear, and now he had arrived in response to an alert on the EMS band. Wesley was already out, enjoying a late drive-thru lunch, when he heard the call and he had offered to proceed directly to the scene. Someone had to inspect the damage, and assess the need to dispatch a crew from Alliant Energy for any eventual power line repair. Fortunately, the tree had not been entangled with any power lines and, with the help of some good samaritans / impatient motorists, Wesley had moved the tree to side of the road to allow traffic to resume. Even more fortunately for Wesley, the tree had not fallen in the morning hours and thwarted his evasion from the bank he had expertly robbed after such meticulous planning.

Wesley had robbed the Duncan Loan & Trust as soon as it opened that morning, using the same efficient method he had employed to rob other banks in nearby counties. The Duncan L & T was in Logan County, as was the Bailey Savings and Loan in Stewartville, that Wesley had robbed five months earlier. Over the course of the previous seven years, he had robbed two other banks in Logan County, as well as numerous banks in Chester County, Morgan County, Van Buren County and Worthington County. The fallen tree was just inside the border of Banning County, where Wesley lived. Wesley did not rob banks in Banning County. Wesley Roberts was the sheriff of Banning County; robbing its banks would have created a conflict of interest. No, he left the Banning banks alone to attend to their own interest, deposits and withdrawals.

While Wesley did not earn a substantial salary, he was paid adequately and was certainly not indigent. Truly, he had collected only marginal amounts from each of his hauls and had not yet spent any of this plunder. He robbed more for the thrill than the fill. Being sheriff was largely unfulfilling to Wesley, who had not selected this occupation and certainly never would have envisioned this career path. However, he felt that his job performance had been satisfactory. Even as he committed crimes in neighboring counties, Banning County remained relatively unscathed. Oh sure, there were misdemeanors, even felonies, speeding tickets, domestic disturbances, and other altercations but the Banning County Sheriff's Department generally apprehended the guilty and delivered them for prosecution. *Law and Order* style. Cue the doink doink transitional sound effect.

Wesley's rise to the role of sheriff had happened very quickly. His predecessor and mentor, Robert Reading, had seen something special in Wesley and brought him into the department to groom him for the position. Truthfully, Wesley had been between jobs at the time and had just intended to pass through Banning County to seek his fortune elsewhere, but Robert had convinced him to stay. Small town administerial minutiae allowed for certain latitudes that Sheriff Reading had exploited in order to pluck Wesley out of obscurity and integrate him as a deputy. Banning's Sheriff was not an elected official so it was at Robert's discretion that Wesley succeeded him when the former finally decided to retire somewhere warm and sunny. Confining his robberies outside of Banning County allowed Wesley to rationalize that his thrill seeking was not a betrayal of the trust that Sheriff Reading had bestowed in him. Not that Wesley had any need to justify his behavior to Robert or anyone else.

Wesley ceased his musings as he watched yet another vehicle zip by on the pavement that had been obstructed by the tree just minutes earlier. Another successful act of public service, courtesy of

the Banning County Sheriff, he thought. After returning to the police cruiser, he switched off the flashing lights, and started his journey back to headquarters. He decided he should follow up with Dispatch to report that no further intervention was necessary.

“Wesley, here. The tree is off the road. There was no damage. I am on my way back. Over.” He always felt especially phony over the radio, as though his voice was just waiting for him to bare his soul.

“Roger, Sheriff. Standing down. I’ll see you soon. Over,” was the crackly reply. Wesley could not blame the radio for distorting the voice. Maude was robotic and choppy in person.

“Thanks, Maude. See you in a bit. Over.” Maude was Dispatch. Dispatch was Maude. This had been the arrangement prior to Wesley, and maybe even before Robert. Maude was ancient, but in the most positive sense, like a vintage bottle of whiskey or a Crackerjacks prize, back before they were junk. Maude knew who to call and how to contact them if they did not respond to traditional communications. When Maude was not working, she monitored the police bands and would send SMS suggestions to Wesley on how to proceed. She was a crackly and choppy godsend.

Wesley's return to headquarters took him through Waverly, the largest city in Banning County. Was 15,000 people enough to be a city? City or not, Waverly had grown and now boasted the larger population by a few thousand souls, over the stagnating numbers of Banning, the county seat. There was probably no one boasting about this in Waverly, but Wesley supposed the inhabitants needed to latch onto something while they waited for the construction of the new Rural King to be completed.

Elvis may have been the King, but Wesley could have been considered bank robbery royalty, And not only because he dressed like a king when he robbed banks. Wesley would have been the first

to admit how ridiculous he looked as a king strolling into the banks' lobbies and demanded money at gunpoint. Yet, the absurdity had always worked in his favor; the witnesses had been so taken by his costume, they had noticed little else about him. A few had recalled his royal blue eyes and thick glasses, details that might have worried Wesley had they not been due to contact lenses and phony glasses. His crown was simply one that he had obtained from the Burger King in Banning before it had closed, and then reinforced with fiberglass. The white wig and cape came from one of those Halloween superstores that, every autumn, pop up like mushrooms and thrive on the same nourishment. The buckled fur coat was actually the top half of a Santa Claus costume. His gloves left no fingerprints and he came and went promptly, only taking what the tellers could quickly give him. In the event that he lingered longer than desired, Wesley had taken care to disconnect the silent alarms on the outside of the building in the days prior to his kingly visits.

For Wesley, these robberies were kitten play and would have been so even for the Lion King. Information sharing between the counties in the state was laughable, and the state police were amazingly standoffish, and not in a police standoff kind of way. The nearest state police barracks was in Crawford County, three hours away, and unless someone had been killed, or was caught with an embarrassing amount of drugs, the state police washed their hands and their handcuffs of local crimes, leaving them to each county's jurisdiction. The total amount that Wesley had pilfered had grown to six figures, but it was still not enough of a king's ransom for the state to intervene. Additionally, by staying within state lines, Wesley had deterred the involvement of the FBI, Federal Marshals or some other dysfunctional taskforce. Thus, Sheriff Wesley Roberts had enjoyed seven banner years of low crime in Banning County while he had treated the neighboring counties less than neighborly.

Arriving back at the station, Wesley was dismayed to see that the civilian car of one of his deputies was parked in its usual space.

Generally satisfied with his duties and extracurriculars, Wesley's working environment was specifically soured by his deputy, Wilson Peters. Wesley was not alone in his disdain for Wilson. Frieda Calloway, the other deputy, also despised Wilson. Even Maude, who Wesley often suspected of having no emotions, exhibited a palpable displeasure in every interaction she endured with Wilson. Wesley regretted the day four years earlier in which he had not trusted the instincts he felt towards Wilson during his initial interview for transfer to Banning. Wilson came across as smarmy during the interview, but was highly qualified and not a local hire. Given that few others had applied for the position, Wesley, after consulting with Maude who had been typically indifferent about Wilson at that point, decided to offer him the job. Frieda's hiring a few months later rendered the workplace more tolerable, but Wilson's indelible presence tainted the atmosphere beyond the balance that her pleasant demeanor could achieve. Wesley hoped that Wilson was already out on patrol.

No such luck. Yet, could someone who just committed a successful bank robbery complain too much about luck? Wilson looked up coolly from his desk as Wesley entered. Wilson had the air of someone who was gleefully writing up violations and citations he had issued.

“Good afternoon, Sheriff!” Frieda spoke first, in the process of putting on her coat and attaching her gun belt. It must have been her turn for the second afternoon patrol.

“Hello, Wesley,” Wilson added disrespectfully. Wesley had not insisted that anyone call him Sheriff, Sheriff Roberts, or anything else. Wesley or even Wes would have been fine. Any way that Wilson addressed him would have been off-putting. Wesley was certain that Chief Justice Roberts would have felt the same way.

“Good morning, Frieda. Wilson,” he replied, changing his tone for the bitter taste that uttering Wilson's name yielded. He changed his volume, calling out to Maude in the side room. “Maude, I'm back!”

“Okay, Sheriff!” The metallic response was soothing in its detached sincerity.

“I'll be back in a few hours, guys,” Frieda announced. She did a final examination of her gear and uniform as she reached for the door handle.

“Be safe out there. I did not see anything unusual driving back from the fallen tree, but even so,” Wesley said, making eye contact with Frieda and hopefully eliciting solidarity.

“Thanks, Sheriff. Catch you later,” Frieda smiled warmly at Wesley, and stuck her tongue out at Wilson who was once again engrossed in his paperwork.

Wesley finished hanging up his coat and fetched his favorite coffee mug from the drying rack. He chose the yellow carcinogen as his sweetener du jour and added just enough milk to cover the bottom of the “Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.” mug before pouring coffee into it. As always he filled the cup too full and had to lean over and sip from it before it could safely be transported to his office.

The delay proved to be a costly one, as it gave Wilson time to initiate a conversation. “Sheriff, did you hear that the Duncan Loan & Trust over in Logan County was robbed this morning?” he asked. Even though he had called him Sheriff and not Wesley, the question oozed condescension. Or maybe that was precisely why it seemed condescending.

“Hmm, no, I did not have time to catch the local news today,” Wesley reasoned that his efforts may have been newsworthy.

“Yessir, it was the same king robberies that have been happening all around the area. Except here,” Wilson finished menacingly. Probably he did not mean to be any more menacing than usual, Wesley thought, but is it difficult to overcome inhuman nature.

“That guy again! He certainly has made the rounds. It's only a matter of time before he strikes here. We have been lucky in Banning!” Wesley surmised. His brain noted smugly that he was not lying about most of those statements.

“Yes, lucky. You're right about that, Wesley,” Wilson observed. Wesley noticed that he had reverted back to his first name. It felt like when his mother called him by his full name at eleven years old, after he had broken a window in the living room with a baseball. Wesley braced himself for more but Wilson mercifully stopped talking and resumed writing and typing. Wesley continued on to his office, and still managed to almost spill some coffee. For the thousandth time, he told himself he should buy a larger mug. And the inevitable reply to himself was that the mug had been a gift from Sheriff Reading and carried sentimental value as well as coffee.

The rest of the day transpired much like they normally did in Banning. Frieda returned, shared some anecdotes, and then Wilson departed for his patrol. At that point, Marge emerged from the side room and they all shared some anecdotes about Wilson. It was like cathartic therapy for the three of them. They imagined that Wilson reached his catharsis by carving wooden shanks at home, or something even more creepy like popping bubble wrap. If he were not so objectionable, they may have felt bad for him and guilty about speaking ill of him in his absence. Or not.

The weekdays became weekend days and another week started without fanfare. Until Tuesday, when the First Federal Savings and Loan in Waverly was robbed, by a perpetrator dressed like a king. A king had robbed a bank in Banning County, and this king had not been Wesley. Someone had conducted a robbery using Wesley's M.O. along with his mojo on his home turf. Wesley felt as though he had been robbed personally. Who would dare?! It was imperative that he found the culprit, both for justice and his own pride. A force, a course, my kingdom for a source!

The grand revelation arrived shortly and while lacking suspense, it was nonetheless sinister. Wesley and his two deputies had spent most of Tuesday interviewing the witnesses - mostly bank employees and a pair of customers - and reviewing the surveillance footage that the DVR had captured. Frieda had dusted for fingerprints and had sent the findings to the regional crime lab in Manchester for analysis. It had been a trying day all around, and most of all for Wesley whose every step seemed to him as treading on egg shells nestled in thin ice. There was probably a banana peel there too. Wilson had been adamant about collaborating with the jurisdictions in the neighboring counties and was so insistent that Wesley was surprised to unearth an even deeper level of dislike towards him. After going home, Wesley took a deep breath in the relief that he would be spared the sight of Wilson Peters until the morning. The desired reprieve was not meant to be. The offensive spear, the sight of Wilson Peters, struck at his front door. And with him came the aforementioned revelation.

Even the knock at the door had an unpleasant sound. After glimpsing Wilson's snide visage through the peephole. Wesley had a moment to prepare himself before he opened the door. Wilson's grin was abominable and expectant. He was holding a large brown paper bag.

“Wilson, what can I do for you?” Wesley asked, sensing that his question was only a formality prolonging the encounter.

“Hi, Wesley. Can I come in? We need to talk,” Wilson said. No doubt he had inevitably heard the same sentence from every woman he had ever known, Wesley thought.

“Okay, come on in.” Wesley stepped aside, and allowed Wilson to pass. Wilson deftly held the paper bag closed denying Wesley's intention to sneak a glance at the contents.

Wilson headed directly for Wesley's kitchen nook and pulled out a stool, sitting without invitation. “Do you have any beer? Or wine?”

Wesley bit his tongue and retrieved two beers from the refrigerator. The placement of the fridge and the angle made it impossible for Wilson to know that Wesley had better beer than the Schlitz Gusto that was served to the unwanted guest. Wesley placed Wilson's beer and a bottle opener on the counter within reach. He did not sit and popped the cap off his own beer using his thumb and forefinger. It was not a twist off.

Wilson opened his own beer and took a healthy swig. His eyes lit up as he said, “Long live the King!” The gesture to toast with Wesley was not reciprocated. Wilson was not offended; he actually seemed to enjoy the tension. “Wesley, I know that you are the King who has been robbing banks for years. I also know that you did not rob the First Federal Savings and Loan in Waverly. Because I did.” He took another sip and studied Wesley's reaction.

Wesley remained impassive. “Wilson, you just confessed to a crime after raising an empty accusation against me. I could arrest you right now.”

“But you won't, Wesley,” Wilson was giddy as he reached for the paper bag. He dumped the contents out on the floor. It was a fiberglass-reinforced crown, a cape, a buckled coat and a white whig. “Oh, these are yours. You can go check your hiding place under the floor panel in your bedroom if you don't believe me.” Wilson was more self-satisfied than ever.

“What do you want, Wilson?” Wesley knew that denial was no longer an option, and was hoping for negotiation over appeasement.

“Ah, good. That was easy. I am glad that you are not the type to waste time carrying on with some pointless, self-righteous and indignant charade. I know we have our differences, but you have always been a straight shooter, Wesley, and I respect that.” Wilson paused, possibly awaiting a counterpart compliment that did not materialize.

“Go on.” Wesley prompted, squeezing the Schlitz bottle more firmly.

“I want the two of us to rob the Banning Central Bank on the last day of the month. Next Thursday. I've done my research. This is when they will have the most cash on hand and the vault will be opened all day as a matter of protocol,” Wilson stated, evidently proud of himself as a mastermind.

“Why should I help you?” Wesley asked, regretting how cliched he must sound.

“If you don't, I ruin you, even if it means I serve time along with you. However, if you help me, I will put in for a transfer and be gone from your life forever. Naturally, I will take all of the Banning Central Bank haul with me.”

“Naturally. All right. I'll do it, but I call the shots. We will do this my way. Getting rid of you makes this all worthwhile, Wilson.”

If Wilson felt affronted, he did not show it. “Don't you even want to know how I discovered that you are the King?” he asked maliciously.

“No. No, I don't.” Wesley replied. He may have already been screwed, but he would be damned if he gave Wilson that satisfaction.

Never one to need an invitation, Wilson started anyway. “I took your costume when you were babysitting that fallen tree. You see, I had my suspicions for months had followed you from...”

Wesley cut him short. “We'll discuss this tomorrow. I'm done with you for tonight. Show yourself out.”

Wilson, defiantly, left his bottle on the counter and did not push in his stool. He started to collect the King costume but a stern look from Wesley stopped him. Wilson shrugged. “You may as well keep it. Have a good night, Sheriff.” And then he left.

Wesley had retained his composure during the confrontation with Wilson but he allowed his shoulders to slump once he was alone. He was truly was perturbed. He returned the King costume to its hiding place and then drank another beer. A good one this time. He sat in his home office and looked at the plaques on the wall. Most were his, but one had belonged to his predecessor, and had been forgotten in a drawer when he retired. “Sheriff Robert D. Reading, Lawman of the Year, 2009.” Wesley hoped he could persevere and get through this without tarnishing not only his legacy, but also that of his mentor before him.

The days passed. The fingerprints from the robbery in Waverly came back inconclusive. Wilson had overlooked nothing, it seemed, and there were no traces of him, just as there had never been of the King in other counties. The investigation had reached a dead end and was likely to remain so, without clues, leads and the complete lack of interest from the sheriff and one of the deputies in solving it. Frieda continued to be vigilant while on patrol. Ironically, her patrols were the only working hours in which she was not closing in on the main suspects. Maude did her thing in precisely the same way she always had.

As agreed, Wilson deferred the planning to Wesley. He only cautioned the sheriff from attempting something foolhardy. "I have watched enough heist flicks, all of the Ocean's ones, even Ocean's 8. Don't try to pull some clever outwit the villain ruse on me. This is not some movie. Make this go smoothly and you'll be rid of me." This was not to say that Wilson did not offer suggestions and insights. In spite of himself, Wesley had to admit that Wilson had indeed researched well, and so he incorporated the most intelligent of Wilson's ideas into the plan to rob the Banning Central Bank.

And just like that, it was the last day of the month. The Banning Central Bank was robbed as soon as it opened. Wesley dressed as the King again and decreed that he would blindfold the bank employees to prevent them from knowing that it was a two-man job. Just in case someone inadvertently saw something, Wilson would also dress as the King. Wilson entered a few seconds after Wesley had confirmed the dismantling of the security cameras and that the silent alarm had been cut. Wesley created enough commotion at the cash drawers and teller windows that no one heard Wilson slink into the vault to literally rob the bank blind. A total of five minutes and the King, along with his invisible accomplice, were gone from the premises. Once outside, they effectively vanished. When the bank's president showed up - he did work banker's hours after all - he quickly called the Sheriff's office, and Maude alerted Wesley, Wilson

and Frieda that the King had robbed in Banning. The Banning Bugle's headline: "Banning: King Bank Robbery; Police Throne for a Loop Again."

The investigation unfolded in much the same way as it had in Waverly: fruitlessly. The witnesses' vague descriptions of the King were likely more influenced by what they had read, seen and heard throughout the past several years. Frieda collected fingerprints again, half-heartedly, expecting it to be another thankless effort. It was another long day in the Banning Sheriff's Department, but Wesley was not stressed this time. There were no unknowns. Unlike in Waverly, he knew exactly who the King was this time. Kings, rather. Wilson had told him that he had cleared \$120,000 in the robbery. Not enough to retire but certainly a nice parting gift. As agreed, Wilson applied for a transfer that very evening. Wesley approved it and faxed the request to the state's central administration the following morning. There was inter collaboration among the departments in the state but only for hiring and red tape, never for urgent matters.

Three days after the Banning robbery, Frieda and Maude were alone at the office when the results of the fingerprints came back. It had already been an exciting morning for Frieda. She had just returned from the Banning Central Bank to pick up the DVR recording from what the vault surveillance cameras had themselves picked up. In all of the pandemonium in the aftermath of the robbery, the bank's president had forgotten about the very recent installation of those cameras. In fact, Sheriff Roberts himself had supervised the mounting of the vault cameras just two days prior to the robbery. Frieda made a mental note to chide Wesley about failing to remember this crucial detail. She had been about to view the DVR footage when the courier delivered the envelope from the regional crime lab in Manchester. She was so astonished by contents of the envelope that she momentarily forgot about the DVR. If a jaw drops in an office when no one is around, does it still make a sound?

Frieda was shocked, and gasped. The gasp was audible, and jarring enough that Maude peeked inquisitively out of the side room.

“Frieda, what's wrong?” Maude asked, emoting genuine concern. If Maude showed concern in the office when no one was around...

“These fingerprints results, from the Banning Central Bank. They are all Wilson's... at the cash drawers, teller windows, all over the vault. They matched what was in the police officers' database.”

“Could he have touched something during the investigation?” Maude wondered.

“No, he and Wesley interviewed the witnesses, while I was on fingerprint duty. I did not see him touch anything.”

“He is a jerk, but I don't think he is a criminal. There has to be some explanation,” Maude reasoned.

“Just a second. I was just about to watch the footage from the vault surveillance cameras. Let's give it a gander,” Frieda suggested. She anticipated that Maude would lose interest and return to the dispatch radio. The radio unit was like her crow's nest and the ship could not sail without her up there. Maude pulled up a chair, however.

“Let's watch,” she said, inviting Frieda to play the recordings. Her delivery was no nonsense, as always, as though she were playing blackjack and instructing the dealer, “hit me.” A bust was imminent, and she could smell it.

Twenty minutes later, Wilson Peters arrived at the station. He was surprised to see Maude sitting out in the main office, at Frieda's desk with her. Frieda and Maude peered carefully at him. This was

their first time seeing him in person that day, but they felt as though they had been watching him in the King costume all morning. They had in fact been watching Wilson in costume, but only for twenty minutes, engaged in unceremoniously ransacking the vault of the Banning Central Bank.

“What's going on, ladies?” Wilson asked. He walked to the fridge to stow away his homemade smoothie, protein shake or whatever that foul gunk was that he brought from home each day.

Frieda and Maude exchanged a nod. Instantly, Frieda was on her feet, her Glock 22 unholstered and pointing at Wilson. It was not without satisfaction that she uttered the following words. “Wilson Peters, you are under arrest for the robbery of the Banning Central Bank...”

Wilson was so startled that he made a spastic jump, jostling the drying rack, and knocking Wesley's Inigo Montoya mug onto the floor, where it shattered. Wilson feebly put up his hands and looked down in Agent Dave Kujan style disbelief at the jagged fragments of the mug while Frieda continued with his Miranda rights. Wilson remained silent while Frieda escorted him to the holding cell.

Both Frieda and Maude were anxious to share the discovery with Wesley, but he was unusually late that day. There was still no sign of him by the time that the state police had taken Wilson into custody. Wilson left fuming and struggling, but still silent. Maude had attempted to reach Wesley on the police band, and both she and Frieda had called him on his mobile phone and landline phone. There was never any answer. Frieda opted to drive to his house to check on him. Knowing that he would be interested in the day's happenings, she decided to take along the results of the fingerprint analysis.

As she perused these another time, she noticed another fingerprint match that she had missed the first time. The name was unknown to her but the individual was in the system. Plugging the name into the central database, she learned that he had priors in Los Angeles as recently as eight years earlier. "Mitch Seaver... Maude, does the name Mitch Seaver sound familiar to you?"

Maude, who had returned to the side room, replied with her typical verbose eloquence. "No."

Frieda scrutinized the grainy photo of Mitch Seaver. Could she trust her judgment? The traumatic events of the day had her doubting herself. "Maude, could you please come look at something on my screen?"

In short order, Maude joined Frieda in studying the photo of Mitch Seaver. "I think that is Sheriff Wesley." Frieda's judgment was confirmed.

* * *

Mitch Seaver could almost feel the tepid sand between his toes as his taxi arrived at its destination in Belize. The villa was just as Tommy had described it when Mitch had called him from the payphone bank at the Miami International Airport. The villa was inviting, welcoming, well-kept, elegant but also understated and anonymous, demonstrating the strategic choice of abode that Mitch expected from Tommy. The taxi driver popped the trunk and hustled to the rear of the car to procure Mitch's suitcases. Mitch expressed his gratitude with a high-percentage tip and watched the driver depart, in search of his next fare. Mitch could he see him talking to his mobile phone, no doubt excitedly telling someone of the gratuitous gratuity he had just received.

Mitch collected his suitcases and took them to the villa's front door. Before he could knock or ring the bell, Mitch was greeted by Tommy, standing just inside the door jamb. Tommy was tanner and with longer hair than Mitch remembered. This was understandable, given that he lived in Belize and was no longer subject to the regulations and expectations that came with being Sheriff Robert D. Reading.

Tommy grinned, and stepped forward to offer his hand, but then switched to a full on embrace. "Wesley! It's incredible to see you here!" He pulled back the hug, apologetically. "Sorry, Mitch. Old habits, right?" Tommy then completed the hug.

"No worries. It may take a while for me to get used to calling you Tommy, Tommy. It's really good to see you. Belize agrees with you," Mitch said, clasping his old friend, predecessor and mentor on the back.

"Please, come in, Mitch! I'll take you to your room. Are you hungry? Something to drink?" Tommy was already gripping one of Mitch's suitcases as he led the way into the villa. Mitch grabbed the other bag and brought it inside, closing the door behind him, before following Tommy down the hall.

"I'm not hungry right now, but I will take a drink, thank you."

"Excellent. I want to hear all about your final days in Banning. Everything you could not tell me over the phone. This all happened so fast. You contacted me out of the blue a couple of weeks ago, and now here you are!"

An hour later, Mitch was in flip-flops and laughing as he wrapped up his story. Tommy had been listening with wide eyes and a wider grin the entire time.

“... so when I was supervising the install of those vault surveillance cameras, I took along fingerprint gloves I had made from Wilson's prints that were in the police officers' database. Of course, no one had bypassed that step for him like you did for me when he was hired in Chester County before coming to Banning. Anyhow, it was easy to put his prints all over the gloves and touch everything. If anyone at the bank had been paying attention that day, they would have wondered why my pockets were bulging out so much...”

Tommy finished the thought, laughing. “So many pairs of Wilson gloves! Ha ha!”

“Yes, exactly. Heh, and while he was in the vault on the day of the robbery, I touched everything out front too. Not only did he get caught but he looked like the sloppiest thief ever. I read about it on the Banning Bugle's website before my flight. They roasted him, especially after the King had been so careful robbing all of those other banks in other counties,” Mitch wiped away some tears of laughter. It was clear to Tommy that Mitch had enjoyed Wilson's downfall.

“I don't know, Mitch. This all sounds so far-fetched, like in some movie. And very high-tech for Banning!”

“A lot has changed since you retired, Tommy. It is very easy to learn how to do this stuff on Youtube or Reddit. Everyone is an expert.”

“Or an ex-con. Okay, Mitch, I admit, I am impressed. This was your master stroke. All I did was have some cake when I retired, but, you, my friend, you made an exit. A tremendous one.”

“I may have left one of my own prints behind, when I was switching gloves. I stumbled and had to brace myself, and before I

could wipe it down, Wilson was out of the vault. It would have been suspicious since I was supposed to have been wearing gloves the entire time.”

“Oh well, Mitch. They'll just be confused. I never even booked you when I caught you red-handed that first time in Banning. I knew right away that you would be an excellent protégé.”

“You were always too kind, Tommy. I feel bad for Frieda and Maude. I did like them.”

“Good old Maude. Sometimes I wondered if she knew about me. A tough cookie to read, that one. As long as I responded to calls on the radio, I don't think she cared what I did on my own time.”

“No, Tommy, I suspect that if Maude had known that you were the one who stole so many cars in those other counties, she may have not even have batted an eye.”

“Bat an eye? Does she even blink?” Tommy asked, trying to remain serious. But he lost it, and his laughter was contagious. Regaining composure, Tommy continued, “Anyhow, the arrogance of that Wilson. I can just see him blathering on about Sheriff Wesley Roberts being the true King,” he mused, chuckling.

“It's funny. He warned me that he had watched enough heist movies and would know if I were trying to double cross him. Maybe he should have watched *The Princess Bride* instead. Do you think robbing those banks as a pirate would have been too obvious and on the nose?”

“Ha, probably, Mitch. Probably so. Come on, I want to show you the beach.” Tommy was already on his feet.

“As you wish,” Mitch agreed, following him outside.

Copyright 2020 by Todd Maupin

* * *

“Roberts had grown so rich, he wanted to retire. He took me to his cabin and he told me his secret. ‘I am not the Dread Pirate Roberts’ he said. ‘My name is Ryan; I inherited the ship from the previous Dread Pirate Roberts, just as you will inherit it from me. The man I inherited it from is not the real Dread Pirate Roberts either. His name was Cumberbund. The real Roberts has been retired 15 years and living like a king in Patagonia.’”

- The Princess Bride (1987)

