

The Bomb Holding Co.

by Ben Hauck

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[A mall kiosk. The sign “The Bomb Holding Co.” in a decorative but legible script above the kiosk. Displays of fist-sized bombs on the counters, perhaps with smaller displays of larger bombs. The early-twentysomething WORKER WOMAN talks to a friend at another Bomb Holding Co. store.]

WORKER WOMAN

[Into the phone, “As if”:] Oh yeah... Like I’m gonna believe that! How could she *remember*, if she was drunk?! “Yeah, so you got drunk and you stayed over at that guy’s house and ‘you wrestled around a bit,’ but you guys didn’t *do it*”--(dry humping)--“but he still came. And you got it inside you and even though they’re like astronomical chances, you got *pregnant*.” And she tells me--yep, yep--she, she tells me all about the suicidal episode by the phone, *and* about her self-inflicted abortion by beating her stomach, after a book told her to *subliminally*?, and all the helicopters and SWAT teams and marine corps, and FBI phone-tappings, and I’m starting to think “Are you *kidding*?!” Whoop hold on I have a customer bye.

[She hangs up. A CUSTOMER enters.]

[Mall-voice:] Hi Welcome to the Bomb Holding Company How can I help you today.

CUSTOMER

Uhhhh. [Short pause.] I’m just lookin.

[He squats slowly to view merchandise in a glass case. This exposes his butt-crack to those behind him. Pause.]

WORKER WOMAN

Okay, well if you need anything let me know.

[She waits for a short time, then impatiently picks up the phone and presses redial.]

Hey. He’s just looking. I might have to go soon. Oh yeah, where was I. Yeah, well, so I say “Are you *kidding*?!” ya know, half “Are you kidding oh my god” and half “You’re so fulla shit,”--

CUSTOMER

[From crouch:] How much is it to hold a bomb?

WORKER WOMAN

[Attention seized:] Uhh-- [Into the phone:] Just a second. [Back to him:] We charge by

the half-minute, with the first thirty seconds free.

[Pause.]

Do you want me to open the case up for you?

CUSTOMER

No I'm just lookin, Thanks.

[Short pause.]

WORKER WOMAN

[Into the phone:] So that's when I You there? Yeah, so that's when I'm startin to think "This girl is a *liar*, This girl is *insecure*, This girl is a *middle child*," and I tell her that, I tell her I find that hard to believe, but she gets all serious overdramatic, "*No. It's true. If you had to go through what I've had to go through in the last year, you'd sound like this too.*" And I'm thinkin "*HA!*--

CUSTOMER

Uhhhh, lemme see this bomb right here.

WORKER WOMAN

[Peeved, Into the phone:] Gotta go. Bye. [To him:] Lemme get the keys, Just a sec.

[She puts down the phone and squats down to get the keys from the bottom drawer. Suddenly,]

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

[Offstage, Nagging:] AAAArtie, NO. N!O! Git yer ass over here before I blow yer ass to the moon!!!

[The CUSTOMER leaves hurriedly. WORKER WOMAN finally gets out of the kiosk, only to watch him scurry off for his wife as she leaves him. WORKER WOMAN's mall persona shifts back to Peeved. She re-enters the kiosk, carefully steps over the box she fell over, picks up the phone, looks at a display of bombs while hitting redial, and notices one obviously missing.]

WORKER WOMAN

[Responding:] Shit. No, not you Hi, someone stole a bomb off display. I dunno, I dunno when, There's one gone. No he left, I don't think he got it, he was crouched down the whole time. *Shit*, that's not gonna look good, someone stole *six* offa me last weekend... *SHIT!* Yeah, I know it's alright, it's just I don't like getting something stolen offa me I feel violated, taken advantage of--

[She spies the CUSTOMER again as he re-enters.]

Hold on, my guy's back. Bye. [Hangs up. Smiling, Mall-voice:] You're back, huh?

CUSTOMER

I want you to hold my bomb.

WORKER WOMAN

Okay, just a second, let me get a work order . . .

[She grabs a sheet of paper, the work order.]

Okay. How long do you want us to hold it?

CUSTOMER

How long?

WORKER WOMAN

Have you set the timer?

CUSTOMER

Yeah.

WORKER WOMAN

How long until it detonates?

CUSTOMER

Uh,

[He pulls the bomb from the inside of his jacket, and he examines it.]

it says twelve twenty-eight.

WORKER WOMAN

Is that hours-minutes or minutes-seconds?

CUSTOMER

I dunno, I just turned it on a minute ago.

WORKER WOMAN

Minutes-seconds.

CUSTOMER

Minutes-seconds.

WORKER WOMAN

Well, we can hold bombs up until three minutes before detonation--

CUSTOMER

What?

WORKER WOMAN

We can hold bombs up until three minutes before detonation.

CUSTOMER

Wait, I thought--You can't hold it any longer?

WORKER WOMAN

No, We don't--

CUSTOMER

Someone just told me you could hold it up until thirty seconds.

WORKER WOMAN

No sir, we used to do that, but we've changed that offer just recently.

CUSTOMER

Well you can't hold it any longer?

WORKER WOMAN

No.

CUSTOMER

Okay then, three minutes.

WORKER WOMAN

Alright, [Writing:] "three minutes till." What's the price of the bomb?

CUSTOMER

I dunno. Someone gave it to me as a gift.

WORKER WOMAN

A "gift"?

CUSTOMER

Yeah, a gift.

WORKER WOMAN

Well, what do you think it cost?

CUSTOMER

I dunno.

WORKER WOMAN

Let me take a look at it.

CUSTOMER

What's it matter?!

WORKER WOMAN

Carry-in fee. We charge a ten-percent carry-in fee for bombs not purchased here, with a minimum five-dollar fee.

CUSTOMER

Five dollars.

WORKER WOMAN

Yes.

CUSTOMER

No, that's what it cost.

WORKER WOMAN

Five dollars?

CUSTOMER

Yes.

[Pause.]

WORKER WOMAN

What's the approximate number of people it can exterminate with explosion?

CUSTOMER

No how the fuck am I supposed to know that?

WORKER WOMAN

It's a question we're required to ask by law.

CUSTOMER

Wha--Why?

WORKER WOMAN

Because we're only authorized to handle and hold bombs under a certain Projected Fatality Number, over that number we have to send it to our Greensboro store where

they're better equipped to hold bigger bombs. But since your bomb will detonate in less than fifteen minutes, we don't have time send it off.

CUSTOMER

Fuck it, It kills forty.

WORKER WOMAN

[Writes:] "40."

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

[Offstage, Nagging:] AAAArtie! Am I gonna have to leash you to the clothing rack? Git yer ass OVER HERE and tell me what you think of this Minnie Mouse brassiere!

CUSTOMER

Jesus! Just a minute! [To WORKER WOMAN:] Here. Here's a blank check, fill it in sign it, see ya. [Sets down a check and the bomb. To his WIFE:] Marjorie, I hate the fuckin Disney Store! [Leaves hurriedly.]

WORKER WOMAN

Wait. Sir. *Sir*, I need your driver's license and a major credit car!*d*. [Sighs.] People are stupid.

[She turns around to the cash register and punches the appropriate buttons, reads the top of the check, stops to fill in the money and forge the signature. Someone enters directly with only a left arm, the right a bloody absence where an arm used to hang.]

[The NEW CUSTOMER waits impatiently, shifting weight, very agitated. WORKER WOMAN finishes the transaction and puts the initial CUSTOMER's bomb in the bomb storage compartment with only a small acknowledgment to the NEW CUSTOMER, certainly not emotionally wrapped up in his armless emergency.]

WORKER WOMAN

[Ready, Mall-voice:] Hi Can I hel--

NEW CUSTOMER

I WANNA REFUND! I WANNA FUCKIN REFUND!!!

WORKER WOMAN

You wanna refund? For--

NEW CUSTOMER

ONE OF YOUR FUCKING BOMBS BLEW MY FUCKING ARM OFF! GIMME A FUCKIN REFUND!

WORKER WOMAN

Okay, Okay. Lemme get the P.O.S. book . . .

[She gets the book of carbons for refunds.]

Alright, I'm gonna have you fill this out--

NEW CUSTOMER

I blow my fucking arm off and you EXPECT ME TO FILL THIS OUT???

WORKER WOMAN

Do you have a receipt?

NEW CUSTOMER

No. No. It was in my HAND when one of your SHITTY, PIECE OF SHIT *BOMBS* made me a DAVE DRAVECKY!

[WORKER WOMAN does not appreciate this abuse. Pause.]

[Calmer:] No. No, I have no receipt.

[Pause. Then WORKER WOMAN takes a deep breath to herself.]

WORKER WOMAN

[Disappointed that she has to do it:] I'm sorry but we can't do refunds without a receipt.

NEW CUSTOMER

What?

WORKER WOMAN

That's what the sign says here: [in a very obscure place, barely visible] "Sorry We cannot perform--

NEW CUSTOMER

No, But I bought the bomb here, I bought the bomb here...

WORKER WOMAN

I'm sorry sir.

NEW CUSTOMER

NO, I bought this bomb HERE, At the Bomb Holding Company, See? [Pointing at the kiosk sign:] "Bomb Holding Company." I got this one right here, in the case, this one see, sixty-four ninety-nine--

WORKER WOMAN

I can't do a refund without a receipt.

NEW CUSTOMER

What do you mean you can't??? Go right in the drawer and gimme my money back!

WORKER WOMAN

No, I don't know *how to*... The computer...

NEW CUSTOMER

Who cares? Am I bleeding or what?

WORKER WOMAN

It's just, I don't know how to do a refund without a receipt, the receipt has special numbers--

NEW CUSTOMER

Well make em up.

WORKER WOMAN

Special *codes*, that if I don't punch--

NEW CUSTOMER

Look, Look at me, Look, look look, Here, on this sign, right here, it says "CUSTOMER SATISFACTION GUARANTEED." "*Guaranteed.*" Now I don't look satisfied, do I?

WORKER WOMAN

Yes, but you don't have a receipt, so I can't--

NEW CUSTOMER

Well then, lemme talk to a manager.

WORKER WOMAN

The manager's not in today.

NEW CUSTOMER

Well, I'm not gonna leave until either I get my refund or I talk to a *manager* and get my refund, if that means calling him at home--

WORKER WOMAN

She's not in until Monday and she's on vacation this week.

NEW CUSTOMER

WELL I GUESS WE'RE STUCK.

[A mall CUSTODIAN has just slowly strolled into view, rolling his cleaning cart. He stops close in front of the kiosk and looks at the merchandise. At this point, the NEW CUSTOMER and WORKER WOMAN notice him and WORKER WOMAN tries to tame her inner boiling.]

WORKER WOMAN

Hi Cletus.

CUSTODIAN

Hi there Abby, How's it goin again?

WORKER WOMAN

[Oxymoronically:] Oh, just fine.

[Pause. The CUSTODIAN looks at the display of bombs, then the puddle of blood that has formed beneath the armless NEW CUSTOMER. He mops up the blood. WORKER WOMAN and the NEW CUSTOMER continue after the pause, oblivious to the CUSTODIAN's mopping.]

WORKER WOMAN

Sir, I can have you come back when a manager's in--

NEW CUSTOMER

There's more than one?

WORKER WOMAN

--when *thee* manager's in--

NEW CUSTOMER

There's more than one, I wanna talk to him.

WORKER WOMAN

SIR, there's only one manager.

NEW CUSTOMER

Don't get snippy with me, *Miss*. Don't get snippy. I've had my arm blown off by one of your Bomb Holding Company bombs and I want my money back for your defective piece of shit. Don't think I don't need this arm. I am a *hard-working*, I have to use my right arm to do more things in a day than you have to do in a year. How am I going to fucking Pledge Allegiance now? How am I going to write, or type on a fucking keyboard a letter of complaint to your company about how I wasn't *satisfied* by your service? I'm not. I'm not gonna be able to throw my baby up in the air anymore, I'm not gonna be able to drive stick, I'm not gonna be able to open a jar of spaghetti sauce or peanut butter, all because, all because you sold me a defective, anti-American bomb that blew the right side of my

body to bits. Listen *Abby*, I have a family, I've got a wife and a little baby girl, I'm having to pay for the babysitter right now, I work at R. J. Reynolds, and you're sure as hell that if you don't give me my refund, I will sure as hell write, Have someone write a memo for me saying *instructing* them not to give your company *any business*. Now that's R. J. Reynolds, you got that? Now if you don't give me a refund, this is what you're telling me: You're telling me that I'm trying to scam you by actually getting this bomb somewhere else (which I did not do), which means you're either giving me a refund, or you're calling me a liar.

WORKER WOMAN

No I'm not.

NEW CUSTOMER

Well, that's what I'm going to take that as.

WORKER WOMAN

Look, I've helped you all I can--

[The CUSTODIAN looks up, ready to go, having inconspicuously swiped some bombs from the display. He expresses disgruntlement at the NEW CUSTOMER's behavior. WORKER WOMAN acknowledges without suspicion the CUSTODIAN's leaving, going off pushing his cart.]

--I have, I can do no more for you. If you choose, you can come back on Monday to talk to the one manager. I'm not *guaranteeing* she'll refund your money, but you can discuss it with her. I have nothing more I can do for you.

NEW CUSTOMER

Yeah yeah yeah, whatever. I'm bleeding here and you can't even bend the rules for a fellow human being. You're sick. You'll learn, sweetie. You'll learn that everything's not black-and-white, refund-or-no-refund. You'll learn that rules are made to be broken. In fact, you should take my advice: Don't smirk like that to a customer when they have a complaint. They're liable to rip your head off. Don't think I'll won't remember your name, Abby. Your manager's going to hear about this on Monday. Monday morning *sharp*.

WORKER WOMAN

[Firm:] Thank you.

NEW CUSTOMER

Yeah, "Have a nice day." [Leaves.]

[Another customer has entered and seeks WORKER WOMAN's attention.]

WOMAN CUSTOMER

Do you sell replacement wicks?

WORKER WOMAN

No.

WOMAN CUSTOMER

Replacement wicks for candles?

WORKER WOMAN

No.

WOMAN CUSTOMER

Do you know where I can get some?

WORKER WOMAN

You can try Elfie's, or CandleMan, or maybe Arco Drug.

WOMAN CUSTOMER

Okay. [As she leaves:] Thanks.

[The WOMAN CUSTOMER leaves. WORKER WOMAN starts to cry. She calls the upstairs store.]

WORKER WOMAN

[into the phone:] hey, do you have a moment? hey, i just had a bad customer his arm was blown off and he didn't have a receipt [noticing:] Oh no not again.

ALRIGHT, [Standing on a stool:] WHO'S THE FUCKING ASSHOLE IN THE MALL WHO'S STEALING MY STUFF! GIVE IT BACK! *GIVE IT BACK!* [Beat.] YOU LOUSY ASSHOLE!!!

[Silence. She hears the person on the phone barking for her attention. She gets down and picks up the dropped phone.]

hey. n? okay, call me back.

[Silence again. A person who whistles while he shops enters and looks along the back of the kiosk. He whistles something cheerful and casual, and looks to have no intention of buying anything. WORKER WOMAN does not turn to acknowledge him initially, but then she suddenly feels suspicious and whips around abruptly. The WHISTLER meets eyes with WORKER WOMAN, pausing his whistling. WORKER WOMAN's head turns away from him as not to stare so obviously, and the WHISTLER resumes whistling and browsing. WORKER WOMAN gradually turns her head back to watch the WHISTLER. He again senses her watching him, looks up, and stops whistling. Again,

WORKER WOMAN turns her head away from the WHISTLER, the opposite direction, and the WHISTLER's paranoia mounts. He instead hums as he browses. WORKER WOMAN and the man now humming make eye contact one more time, and the man holds the eye contact and continues humming. He feels totally not wanted in the area, and backs off, leaving.]

[The phone rings. WORKER WOMAN picks it up on the first ring.]

WORKER WOMAN

[Into the phone:] Bomb Holding Company Your bomb-holding headquar Hi Mom.
[Beat.] Ooooooh, alright, let's not talk about it, What do you need? [Pause.] No, you'll be home before me, I can't take out the garbage I work until nine, you'll be there before I'm there, you take it out. [Beat.] No, you take it out. I'm tired, I'll be tired when I get home, I'm going right to bed. I have a long day tomorrow. I'll sweep the sidewalk when I get a chance, okay?, I'll get it. Look, someone's stealing my stuff I need to watch the kiosk, You take out the garbage and I'll sweep the sidewalk, Okay? Alright. Bye. [Beat.] Bye.

[She hangs up. WORKER WOMAN goes over to the bomb storage compartment and examines the CUSTOMER's active bomb. She notes the time on the bomb.]

JESUS! A minute thirty! I hate when they're late. Where *is* that loser?

[Frenzied, she looks around for the CUSTOMER. He emerges, casually.]

CUSTOMER

I'm ready to go, Puppie. You can get out my bomb--Oh, I see there it is.

WORKER WOMAN

[Politely firm:] There's a late fee of twenty-percent of the price of the bomb.

CUSTOMER

A late fee?

WORKER WOMAN

Yes, since we held your bomb past the three-minute time limit.

CUSTOMER

Alright, you tear up that check I gave you and I'll write you another one.

[WORKER WOMAN goes to rip up the check. The CUSTOMER pulls out his checkbook.]

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

[Offstage, Nagging:] AAAArtie!!! What did I tell you?! We're leaving! I'm leaving without you if you don't come here!

[WORKER WOMAN rips up the check. The CUSTOMER hurriedly opens his checkbook then rolls his eyes.]

CUSTOMER

Oh shit. I wrote my last check at Disney. Tell me, What business does Disney have selling lingerie?

WORKER WOMAN

You can pay for it with a credit card.

CUSTOMER

No I can't, my wife has the credit card--Oh wait, yes I can.

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

[Offstage:] AAAARTIEEEEEEE!!!! Do you want me to come down there and pull you home???

CUSTOMER

Uh Dear, you're gonna have to if you're gonna be that impatient.

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

[Offstage:] I WANNA LEAVE!!!

CUSTOMER

Just a second, Jesus!, I'll be there in a minute.

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

[Offstage:] I'M COMIN DOWN THERE!!!

CUSTOMER

Good, and bring the credit card. [To WORKER WOMAN:] How much time we got?

WORKER WOMAN

Sir, I need you to pay. You have only... [Looks:] *Nineteen seconds!* Ma'am, back off! Back off from here! There's a bomb that's *about to explode!*

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

Well, diffuse it. [Beat.] [Entering:] What do you need the credit card for, Artie?

[The CUSTOMER'S WIFE enters, concealed and loaded down with bags. She walks with difficulty because of the bags.]

CUSTOMER

Just bring it here.

[Other CUSTOMERS start to enter.]

WORKER WOMAN

[To the entering CUSTOMERS:] *BACK OFF!*

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

I WANNA GO HOME MISSIE!!!

WORKER WOMAN

Ma'am, there's a BOMB that's about to EXPLODE!!!! [Dives into the depths of the kiosk for protection.]

[The other CUSTOMERS run off.]

CUSTOMER

Um, Marjorie?

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

Artie?

CUSTOMER

[Aiming his bomb at her:] You're a nagging bitch, in Three, two, ...

[Beat.]

CUSTOMER'S WIFE

[Exposing face, Through the explosion:] AAAAARRRRRTIEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!

[The actors freeze. The lights dip to black, then come up to brighter than ever with a loud explosion. The characters, including WORKER WOMAN who has risen with the explosion, all have frozen expressions of shock coming to their faces the moment of the explosion. The explosion triggers other explosions from other bombs on display. With the detonation of the other bombs, the lights fade. As the explosions fade out, mall Muzak fades in, playing softly in the black for a moment. A spotlight slowly comes up on the CUSTODIAN, standing away from the area of the kiosk. He leans on his mop, listening to the music, a puddle of blood beneath him.]

CUSTODIAN

[Pensively:] You ever thought about the word "arms"? "Arms." When you first hear the word you think naturally they're talkin about yer *arms*, yer hands and yer elbow. The muscles. Yer bicept and yer tricept--*triceps*. But then there's that other meaning, the right to bear arms, Firearms, Weapons, weapons to *arm* you. You get the sense that whoever came up with that word meant that they were there to take the place of yer arms

when you can't use em, like when fighting, in war.

I like to keep busy. This mall that I work at doesn't get nearly as dirty as I'd like it, there's so few people comin here and so few little piles of trash. So most of the time I end up wanderin aimlessly around the place. And I learned long ago that you can't fake cleaning up. When there's not a mess is as clear as when there is, in this place. So when there's no mess, it's either fake cleaning it up which I won't do, or make a mess to clean.

That man was a mess. His relationship was a mess. When he walked into the Disney Store was like a black cloud drifting into a clear sky.

Can anyone tell me, When do yer messes leave yer responsibility and become someone else's problem? [Beat.] I ask that question to myself everyday, as I sweep up people's gum wrappers and cigarette butts.

[Pause.]

The rest of the mess. [Refers to himself. Reaches into his uniform jacket and pulls out a bomb that he stole. Holds the switch.] Sometimes, you gotta give a little "gift" to yerself. [Flips the switch. Ticking.]

[The Muzak stops. He stands, looking out to the audience, as the spotlight on him fades patiently to black.]

