

# **High Noon for Samuel**

**A short story by:**

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The lights flickered in the hazy atmosphere of the old packing warehouse as Samuel L. Gibbons entered through a small side door. The quite awful smell of old fish still haunted the air all around him. Samuel glanced around to take in his unfamiliar surroundings while pondering his next move. He had a trap to set and there wouldn't be much chance of success if the others were already here.

As quietly as he could, Sam placed the small attaché briefcase he was carrying onto the ground next to a large shipping crate. Then, he tiptoed towards a ladder that ascended up to a narrow gantry. The sharp black pinstriped suit and matching fedora he wore was still several sizes too big for him, and the trouser bottoms dragged along the dusty floor creating a trail behind them. The gantry certainly was high enough, but it did not provide the required cover – he'd be spotted and caught straight away. Sam looked around to see if anything else nearby would work. There were stacks of huge packing crates, many of them covered in a variety of dark colored, dusty looking tarps, but each one was useless for setting the trap. It was no good, despite his best intentions, he'd have to just make the trade and get out.

Sam paused. He could hear footsteps approaching in the distance; they were here and that meant he had little time to hide. Grabbing the briefcase, Sam ran over towards one of the tall crates and ducked down behind it. Shaking, he brushed back his short blond hair with thin, stumpy fingers, readjusted his fedora and steadied himself. Kneeling down with his trousers now completely covered in dust, Sam peeked over one of the crates and stared at the main warehouse entry.

The distant chatter and footsteps grew louder as perhaps three or four people approached. Sam checked to make sure no one was sneaking up without him knowing, and then returned his gaze back to the door. He was nervous, or maybe even terrified. The noise finally stopped and now an eerie silence hung throughout the warehouse. Sam scanned all around him and scratched his short button nose which, because of all the dust, had been itching like crazy. The pungent aroma of old sardines didn't help either.

The steel handle creaked and moments later the door opened and slammed into the warehouse wall with a crash. A thick beam of bright light shone in from the dockyard opposite. Silhouetted against the dazzling beam, casting long thin shadows across the warehouse floor, there were three dark figures. The first outline, which was slightly taller than the other two, took a slight step forward. The two shorter figures followed a couple of seconds later and began to fan out on either side. Sam was silent.

“Sammy boy,” came a loud shout from the leader of the group. “Sammy, we’re here just like you said.”

The leader of the group stepped forward, leaving behind the bright light from the dockyard, and walked into the warehouse. Sam’s eyes grew wide as he recognized the figure immediately: it was Biff, Sam’s arch enemy. The round chubby face, the dark brown hair, and beady eyes were all unmistakable; there could be no doubt it was him. Sam swallowed hard as Biff came into full view.

“Come on Sam,” came another menacing shout, “we know you’re in here. Hobbsey saw you come in through the side door.”

Sam’s heart sank. He had tried so hard not to be seen.

At the front of the warehouse, Hobbsey closed the door with a loud thud and now all three of them made their way towards a center row of packing crates. Sam could do nothing but watch as Biff, Hobbsey, and Stig joked with each other as they crossed the floor. Annoyingly tall and lanky, and with very scruffy hair, Sam hated Stig the most. He scowled at them both. They had fought once before, but the fight had been broken up and he had just ended up with a torn shirt and ripped uniform. Biff was leader of the gang. He owned most of the town, and delighted in stealing from others for his own ends. Now though, Sam had something he wanted, and it was time to get even.

Sam grabbed the briefcase lying next to him and gripped the handle tight in his hand. It was his lifeline after all, and the only way he'd escape unharmed.

Clearing his throat, Sam stood up from behind the packing crate he had been hiding behind, and with all four foot six of him, he tried to look as intimidating as he could.

"I'm over here Biff," he called out as he revealed himself to the others. "And I've got the gear."

Almost completely synchronized, Biff, Hobbsey, and Stig turned to face Sam. He gulped as they stared directly at him – three sets of piercing eyes all peering at him, and him alone. Sam could see the anger and frustration in Biff's brown eyes as he took a confident step forward towards the makeshift table in the middle of the warehouse.

"Hold it right there Sammy boy," said Biff with more than a hint of anger in his voice. "You take another step and we'll paste you."

Sam didn't quite know exactly what that meant, but it didn't sound particularly pleasant. He decided to follow Biff's advice.

Another blast from the lighthouse foghorn smashed through the silence and Sam jumped. Luckily, he wasn't the only one and both Hobbsey and Stig had been caught off guard by the deep bellowing horn. Biff did not seem at all impressed.

"What are you two like?" he said, scorning both of his low-rate henchmen. He pointed to Sam while still shaking his head.

"Go pat him down then!"

The two of them looked at each other, shrugged, and then shuffled over to Sam. They did their best to pat him down, and while Sam wasn't quite sure exactly what they might be looking for, he played along as best he could. It wasn't like they knew what to do anyway. After a few moments, Stig signaled that all was clear, and Biff motioned for Sam to approach the table.

"So you've got the goods like we agreed?" he said.

Sam nodded, but said nothing. Despite the heavy gaze upon him, he did his best to look calm. He knew that Biff wasn't convinced and that, if he became sufficiently worried, the deal was blown. Stig meanwhile had placed a small holdall on the table. It was black with a sport logo on the side, and was zippered closed. As Sam approached, Hobbsey scratched his head like some sort of caveman and looked longingly at Biff for the command to attack.

"Show me then," said Biff as Sam reached the table. Sam lifted the briefcase and slapped it gently with his free hand. Biff grunted and pointed to the table but Sam shook his head.

"You show me your stuff first," he said.

Biff snorted, snapped his fingers and Stig promptly opened the holdall, and pulled out the pack of twelve gold wrapped chocolate bars – each one gleaming, even under the dim haze of the warehouse lights.

Sam nodded, and placed the briefcase on the table. He was okay so far, and the trade looked good from his point of view. Adjusting his fedora slightly, Sam motioned for Hobbsey who was deliberately in his way to move. With an indignant snarl, Hobbsey backed away a few steps. Sam adjusted the codes on the front of the case to read the correct number and he pressed the side openers. With a satisfying click – just like in the films – the case hinges snapped open. He swiveled the case around to face Biff and then opened the lid.

Wide-eyed with excitement and greed, Biff stared into the case and licked his lips. Inside, were twenty-four cartons spread across four rows of six each and Biff quickly motioned for Hobbsey to examine them. The scruffy no-good henchman nodded and approached the briefcase. Hobbsey's suit was even bigger than Sam's was, and his trousers dragged along the floor, leaving a trail of cleared dust along the floor twice as long as Sam's. Hobbsey removed one of the cartons, and slowly opened it by breaking the top seal, pulling the lip out, and then squeezing. Stig, who was not to be left out, contributed to the strange arrangement by providing a small clear glass cup that had, until just moments ago, been in his jacket pocket.

As the chocolate brown liquid poured into the small cup, leaving a cloudy residue on the side of the glass, Stig lifted it and sniffed. He then passed it to Biff, who took a small sip. Sam waited in silence, as another blast from the foghorn rang out through the warehouse. The incandescent lights swung gently on the long wires, making the sort of

creaking noise that was so easily recognizable as rusty metal on even more rusty metal. Biff swished the liquid around in his mouth for a second, and then swallowed.

“Ahh, the sweet, glorious taste of chocolate milk,” he said a moment later. “We have a deal, Sammy.”

Sam nodded. He was relieved that everything was going to plan. Now came the tricky part though, as he wasn't quite sure if Biff would stick to the agreement and honor the trade. His hands were still on the case, and all three of the others watched him closely. Stig's long narrow face and deeply set brown eyes stared right at Sam, as did Hobbsey's. Only Biff seemed somewhat indifferent to Sam keeping hold of the case.

“There's more where that came from,” said Sam quietly, as he pushed the case across the table to Biff.

“I'm sure there is,” said Biff. He snapped his fingers again, and the holdall was pushed over towards Sam.

Sam was about to take the holdall when the warehouse side door opened with a crash. Standing behind the door was a very tall, menacing looking figure with a long face, a short black moustache and narrow round glasses. At the same time, the main warehouse sliding door started to open with a piercing, horrible grinding sound.

“Stay where you are,” came the shout from the tall man at the door. “None of you move a muscle.”

“Henderson,” said Stig in alarm.

Sam looked up in panic at Biff. He too looked taken aback by the sudden intrusion. By now, the main warehouse door had opened fully, and behind it stood a

dozen or more tall people – several men and a couple of women. All of them had a look of intense anger on their face, and some were slapping long rulers against their palms, anxiously awaiting the next move.

“You set us up,” said Biff finally, as his eyes desperately searched for a way out.

“No way, man,” said Sam, frightened now. “I’m clean. I never squealed to Henderson”

There was no way out, and Sam knew it – they were trapped.

“So, you thought you could pull a fast one on the institution did you,” said Henderson, as he calmly walked into the warehouse closing the door behind him. “Well, we’ll soon see if you’ll ever do something like that again once we’re finished with you.”

Sam watched in terror as Henderson approached the makeshift table with a long cane in his hand. His confident, aggressive demeanor was proof that he wasn’t kidding, and as if to back that up even further, the other people guarding the warehouse main exit started to move in.

Sam took a step back, as did Biff and Stig. Hobbsey, being the opportunist he always was, decided to make a break for it. As he tried to dodge Henderson and reach the only open warehouse exit, the swinging of the vicious cane found its home on the back of his head. The wild swing made contact with a bone cracking snapping sound, and Hobbsey fell like a rag doll to the floor. Biff and Sam both watched in horror, unable to move an inch. There was no way out now, and Henderson was going to kill them all.

As the giant people moved to surround them, some armed with long sticks, and Henderson with the long cane. Sam sank to the floor in resignation. It had all been going so well, and now it had become his worst nightmare. As Sam closed his eyes, and

covered his face with his hands, he heard another crack and scream in pain as Biff fell to the floor next to him. Sam whimpered.

“Sam,” came a high-pitched holler. It was a woman’s voice, and was somehow strangely familiar.

“Sam,” came the voice again. It reverberated around the room, echoing and resonating against the walls. Henderson, who was just about to unleash the cane on Sam stopped and searched for the source of the voice.

The warehouse started to fade away; the briefcase had already vanished and so had Biff and Hobbsey. Only Sam remained, with Henderson and the others, however even that was quickly changing.

“Sam,” came the call again – this time louder. Everything around Sam was dissipating and being replaced with somewhere entirely different. He was being rescued, and not a moment too soon.

“Sam, it’s time to get up,” came the voice, as a tall dark haired woman opened a door and walked passed Sam’s prone figure. Sam shuffled around and poked his head out from under the covers of the duvet.

“Come on Sunshine,” said Sam’s Mum as she reached for the curtains before yanking them open without let, hindrance, or apparent care for Sam’s eyes.

“You’ll be late for school again if you don’t hurry up”

Sam shrugged. He pulled his legs out of the bunk bed and casually dropped to the floor. With no obstruction to block it, the sunlight blasted into the room. It was a fast jolt

from being fast asleep to wide awake, but he was glad to be awake. Sam's Mum left the room, carrying a rather large pile of dirty laundry with her as she went.

“And you don't want to be late twice this week. You know what Mr. Henderson said last time about schoolchildren that can't be on time.”

“Yes, Mum” said Sam, and he grabbed the dressing gown that was hanging behind his bedroom door. His stomach rumbled.

“Breakfast's ready – it's cereal today. Honey nut cornflakes,” came the reply.

“Maybe next time Biff,” muttered Sam to himself as he wondered towards the bathroom to clean his teeth. “Next time.”

THE END