

Living Debt

By

Ryan Clausen

Theryanclausen.com

Theryanclausen@gmail.com

INT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Scott sits at his kitchen table staring at a letter.

There is a distinct company logo in the top corner of the letter. The words "FINAL NOTICE" are printed in large bold type. The remainder of the page is filled with illegible fine print.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Scott is startled.

Scott opens the door.

Jeff stands in the hall smiling. He's a little older than Scott, wearing a polo shirt with the same distinct company logo on the left breast. He carries a small bag.

JEFF

Scott?

Scott nods.

SCOTT

Yeah.

JEFF

Have a seat and we'll get started.

Jeff sets his bag on the table and opens the zipper.

Scott sits in a chair.

Jeff zip ties Scott's wrists to the arms of the chair.

Jeff pulls a device from his bag. A sort of scrum cap covered in L.E.D. bulbs with an eye-bolt sticking out of the front.

Scott is sweating. Jeff places the cap over his head and tightens the chin strap.

JEFF

OK, you're gonna feel a big pinch
right here-

Jeff taps his forehead.

Scott nods. His face is distorted by the chin strap.

Offering a rubber mouthguard:

JEFF

Just bite down on this and I'll be
as quick as I can.

Scott can barely open his mouth against the chin strap. Jeff shoves the mouthguard in. Scott is breathing heavy.

Jeff twists the eye bolt. Scott's breath quickens. He lets out a muffled cry. A line of blood drips down his nose.

Jeff takes a pair of large, dark sunglasses from his bag and puts them on.

Jeff flips a switch on the back of Scott's scrum cap. All the lights blink on. The device whirs and the lights intensify.

Jeff takes a few steps back. The room glows blue.

Scott's hands shake and spasm against the ties. His jaw clenches and his eyes roll back.

Sparks shoot out of the end of the eye bolt.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Scott stands behind a cash register wearing a band-aid on his forehead. He's sickly pale and slack-jawed. There's a vacant look in his eyes.

He punches prices into the register and bags items.

A customer watches him work.

Drool runs down the front of Scott's shirt.

The next customer in line takes their cart to another register.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Scott shuffles down the sidewalk.

Pedestrians keep their distance.

A parent drags their child past.

Scott and the child briefly make eye contact.

Scott raises his hood and keeps walking.

INT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The microwave hums. Dirty dishes in the sink. An empty tin can with a plain white label marked "FOOD" sits on the counter.

On the table is an opened envelope with the same distinct company logo as Jeff's shirt.

Scott sits at the table, reading a letter.

The microwave dings.

Scott sets a steaming bowl of a lumpy gray substance on the table.

He shoves a spoonful into his mouth.

He looks at the letter again.

He looks down at the bowl.

He tops it with plastic wrap.

Scott places the bowl in the empty refrigerator.

INT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - LATER

Scott lies on the couch staring at the ceiling.

The lights are off.

The TV sits on the floor displaying silent static.

On the floor near Scott's head, next to his wallet and keys is a prepaid postage envelope with the distinct company logo on the front.

EXT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Scott exits his apartment and locks the door.

He turns around and bumps into Audrey.

She gasps and flinches, then is quickly embarrassed by her gasping and flinching.

AUDREY

I am so sorry.

She studies his face.

AUDREY

Scott?

He is blank.

She is sad. She can't stop staring.

AUDREY

I'm sorry.

She touches his arm.

AUDREY

Hey, let's grab a drink tonight.

Scott shies away.

AUDREY

Well, if you ever need a friend,
I'm just down the hall.

She hugs him. No reaction.

AUDREY

You'll be OK. These next few years
will fly by for you. Just don't
lose yourself in this.

She touches his chest.

AUDREY

You're still in there. They can't
take that from you.

She walks away.

He looks down at his chest.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Scott is pricing cans of "FOOD" and placing them on the shelf.

A Debtor like him shuffles over and takes cans off the shelf 2 at a time. They briefly make eye contact before both parties direct their gaze elsewhere.

The Debtor shuffles off. Scott hears moaning and giggling. He turns toward the sound.

A couple of kids are playing zombie. They walk around in circles with their arms extended.

Their mother grabs them both by the arm and speaks in a harsh, low mom tone.

MOM

Cut it out.

She notices Scott and eyes him up and down. Disgusted, she pulls her kids away.

MANAGER

Scott.

He looks up.

MANAGER

My office.

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Scott sits at the desk across from the Manager.

The Manager takes a deep breath.

MANAGER

Given your... situation... I think maybe you'll be more comfortable working in the back. Just for now. We'll have you back on register when you recover.

Scott lowers his head.

The Manager drops the boss routine.

MANAGER

You can't be in that deep. How long is it gonna take you? Six, seven years? You'll be fine. You don't have a house, or kids, or a divorce. You don't own a small business.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Jeff stands in the doorway, knocking on the frame. He's dressed in his polo with the distinctive logo and carrying his little bag.

JEFF

I'm looking for the man in charge.
Is now a good time?

Scott turns in his chair and faces Jeff.

MANAGER

Sure. Scott... We don't need you
for the rest of the night.

Jeff smiles at Scott.

Scott gets up and heads for the door.

JEFF

You take it easy, bud.

Jeff pats Scott on the back as he walks by. He closes the
door as soon as Scott crosses the threshold.

A bright blue light shines through the gaps in the door
frame.

The lights flicker across Scott's face.

INT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott stares at himself in the bathroom mirror.

He peels the band-aid off his forehead, revealing a black
scab.

He slowly moves his finger toward the scab. The microwave
dings when his finger is millimeters away. He stops and
lowers his hand.

Scott pulls the bowl out of the microwave. He drops it.

He looks down at the broken bowl on the ground.

He sighs. He touches his chest and looks at the door.

EXT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott steps out of his apartment, hand still on his chest.

He makes a few confident strides down the hall.

He lowers his hand and stops.

He takes a breath and turns around.

INT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott closes the door and leans against it.

He grabs a broom and dust pan and approaches the broken
bowl.

His attention is drawn to the table.

There is an envelope with that same distinct company logo on the front.

Scott sets the broom and dust pan down and grabs a spoon.

The doorbell rings.

Scott opens the door.

Audrey is there with a six-pack.

AUDREY

Hey!

She steps inside.

AUDREY

I thought maybe I'd stop by, we could...

Audrey looks around.

Static on the TV.

Empty "FOOD" cans everywhere.

Broken bowl on the ground.

Spoon in Scott's hand.

AUDREY

We should go to my place and watch a movie.

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Much the same layout as Scott's apartment, just more furniture, knickknacks, and unopened boxes.

Scott sits on her couch and sips his beer.

Audrey is in the kitchen with a beer of her own. She puts the rest of the six-pack in the refrigerator.

AUDREY

Are you hungry? I have a stack of menus somewhere.

She sifts through stacks of papers.

AUDREY

Sorry for the mess. I should probably install a breathalyzer on
(MORE)

AUDREY (cont'd)
my Amazon account. I completely
forget about half the stuff I order
and a week later, POOF! A
mysterious package appears at my
door.

(beat)

Hey, have you ever considered
growing your own vegetables? I
mean, that canned stuff you get
probably isn't good for you.

Scott leans forward and sifts through the papers on the
coffee table. One catches his eye.

There is a distinct company logo in the top corner of the
letter. The words "FINAL NOTICE" are printed in large bold
type. The remainder of the page is filled with illegible
fine print.

Scott stares down at it.

AUDREY
But what do I know? You probably
shouldn't take nutritional advice
from a person with a stack of take
out menus.

Scott grabs her wrist.

She's startled.

He holds up the letter.

Scott stares at her. His expression is blank but there are
tears in his eyes.

She takes the letter from him and balls it up.

AUDREY
Don't worry about that. That's...

He points at his forehead scab.

AUDREY
Stop acting like it's the end of
the world. I know you're still in
there. In there enough to come over
tonight. That's something.

She tosses the letter away. She moves closer to him.

AUDREY

If you're in there, then I know
I'll be fine. People can think
whatever they want, but it won't
matter. You'll know and I'll know.

She takes his hands and places them limp on her hips. She drapes her arms over his shoulders.

AUDREY

It won't be so bad for us, because
we won't have to be alone.

She kisses him. He doesn't react.

AUDREY

(whisper)
Please...

She kisses him again. Longer this time. She backs him up against the wall.

She clasps her fingers over his, forcing him to grab her.

She runs her fingers through his hair. It's impossible to tell whether or not he's into it.

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Scott and Audrey lay in her bed. Audrey sleeps facing the wall. Scott is flat on his back staring up at the ceiling.

Scott rolls over and looks at her.

He can just barely see the curve of her face.

He reaches out to touch her bare shoulders, but stops short.

He rolls onto his back and stares at his hand.

It's pale and deep purple around the nails. He tucks it under the sheet and stares up at the ceiling.

Audrey wakes up smiling. She rolls over and looks at Scott.

AUDREY

Hey.

He glances at her and turns back to the ceiling.

She studies his face. Her disappointment builds.

He's blank.

She laughs and rolls over onto her back.

AUDREY

I'm starting to look forward to not
having to feel anything.

EXT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Audrey holds the door open to let Scott out. She grabs his
arm to keep him from walking away.

He turns back to her.

AUDREY

Maybe we'll find each other again
when this is all over.

She lets go. He walks away.

She closes the door.

Jeff rounds the corner, walking toward Scott. He wears his
polo and carries his little bag. His large, dark sunglasses
hang from his collar.

Jeff smiles.

JEFF

Hey, bud. How ya been?

He pats Scott on the back as he passes.

Scott turns around and watches Jeff walk to Audrey's door.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Audrey opens the door and lets him in.

Scott stands and stares.

A bright blue light shines through the gaps in the door
frame.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Scott stares down at something.

COWORKER

It's simple really. You just sort
out all the good apples into this
box.

Scott is out back with a coworker. They are standing over a
bin of apples.

The Manager, now a debtor, watches for a moment from the back door before shuffling back inside.

He finds a good apple and places it in the good box.

COWORKER

Any bruised or rotten apples go in that bin over there. We send those back to the orchard. They use 'em for compost and knock a couple bucks off our next bin.

Coworker chucks a rotten apple in the bin.

COWORKER

You gotta be gentle with the good apples, but the bad ones... treat 'em however.

Scott grabs an apple. It has a bruise. He stares at it.

COWORKER

Go on. Don't go falling in love with it.

Scott underhand tosses the apple in the bin.

COWORKER

If you're having a bad day...

Coworker hurls a rotten apple. It misses the bin and explodes against the wall.

COWORKER

(laughs)

See? It's not so bad back here.

He slaps Scott on the back.

INT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott shoves a spoonful of "FOOD" into his mouth. He chews it slowly.

Static dances on the TV.

The doorbell rings.

EXT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott opens the door.

No one is there. He looks left and right. Then Down.

There is a mysterious box at his door.

It is postmarked for him.

INT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott opens the box.

He removes the contents one by one. There is a small pot, vacuum sealed soil, and a package containing seeds.

At the bottom of the box is a receipt with Audrey's name on it.

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Audrey is now a Debtor. She sits on her couch eating "FOOD."

She watches static.

EXT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott waits at the door holding the pot. His fist is cocked back, ready to knock.

He lowers his fist and walks back down the hall.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Scott walks down the street. His head is down.

He bumps into someone. He looks up.

It's a Debtor.

They look at each other for a moment before the Debtor shuffles past. Scott pulls back his hood and looks around.

Dozens of them. Hoods up, heads down. Pale faces, blank expressions.

The same parent drags the same child down the street. The parent is now a Debtor.

Scott and the child lock eyes as they pass.

The child is afraid.

Scott stops and touches his chest.

Scott hears laughter.

He looks over his shoulder.

Jeff weaves through the Debtors. He wears his polo and carries his little bag. His large, dark sunglasses are perched on his head. He speaks inaudible niceties into his phone and nods.

Scott faces forward and allows Jeff to walk past. Scott follows him.

Scott's face twists in pain. He opens his mouth, letting out a hoarse breath.

Jeff keeps walking and talking on his phone, unaware of what's happening behind him.

Scott's breathing intensifies. Each exhale is more audible than the last, building to a low moan.

The other Debtors on the street take notice.

Jeff stops at the corner.

Scott stands a few feet from him. He grunts loudly.

Jeff turns around. The color drains from his face.

JEFF

I have to go.

He hangs up the phone.

Scott's face contorts. He opens his mouth wide. Blood drips from his nose.

SCOTT

... You!

His voice comes out in a dry hiss.

Jeff turns and starts briskly down the street.

The eyes of every Debtor he passes are on him.

He ducks down an alley and starts trotting.

He looks over his shoulder and sees Scott turn into the alley.

Jeff sees a door propped open with a brick. He kicks the brick out and runs in.

INT. BUILDING - DAY

The door swings shut. Jeff turns the corner down a dim corridor and catches his breath.

Jeff hears the door swing open. Scott's moans fill the room.

Jeff softly and swiftly moves down the corridor, constantly looking back over his shoulder. He sees Scott behind him as he turns a corner. The moans intensify.

Jeff slips into a door marked "Stairs" and closes it behind him.

He slides down against the wall and takes out his phone. He dials frantically.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Jeff freezes.

The knob turns.

Jeff scrambles to his feet and bursts out the exit door. His sunglasses fall off his head and skitter across the sidewalk.

EXT. BUILDING - DAY

Jeff stops and looks around.

There is a crowd of Debtors in a semicircle. They are all staring at him. There is no way out.

Scott walks out the door. He steps on Jeff's sunglasses without stopping. The circle closes behind him.

Jeff turns around.

SCOTT

... You.

He shuffles slowly toward Jeff. Blood drips from both nostrils.

Jeff backs away. He looks over his shoulder.

More Debtors are joining the crowd. All are silent and staring.

JEFF

Look, I don't make the rules. This
is just a job. I need to make a
living. I got kids.

He glances around.

There are Debtor kids in the crowd. A Debtor woman holds a
baby.

Jeff stops a few feet away from the edge of the crowd.

Scott draws closer.

JEFF

I do what I have to do to provide
for my family. I don't want them to
end up...

SCOTT

... there's worse... than this...

Scott's nose bleeds again. He sticks his finger in the blood
on his upper lip and dabs it on Jeff's forehead.

JEFF

You're bleeding. Let me just run
the program on you again.

He holds up the bag.

JEFF

You shouldn't be talking. Let me
fix you. Something is wrong with
you.

SCOTT

...you don't decide...

ADDITIONAL DEBTORS

...you don't decide...

The phrase echoes through the crowd one by one. Noses bleed.

Jeff his terrified. He shields his face with his bag.

JEFF

I'm sorry. Please don't hurt me.

He shuts his eyes and braces himself. The voices die out.
Seconds pass.

He opens his eyes.

The crowd has all but dispersed. A few stragglers pass him with indifference and wipe their bloody noses on their sleeves.

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Audrey watches static on her TV.

The doorbell rings.

She looks at the door. Then back to the TV.

SCOTT
(muffled by door)
...It's Scott...

She looks again.

EXT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

She opens the door.

Scott holds a bloody handkerchief over his nose. With his other hand he touches his chest.

SCOTT
...I'm here...

Her lip quivers.

He grabs her hand and touches it to his chest.

Blood drips from her nose.

AUDREY
...Scott...

Scott presses a finger to her lips.

He lowers his hand and leans in.

Audrey meets him for a slow, awkward, disgusting, zombie kiss.

EXT. WATERFRONT - SUNSET

Scott and Audrey hold hands against the railing.

The sun sets over the water.

A Debtor shuffles by with a dog on a leash. It's Jeff.

Scott and Audrey smile.

THE END

Plants sprout out of Scott's pot as well as old cans of
"FOOD."