

Dealership (sample)

"Are you... Caraway?"

It's Saturday, early in the evening, and I'm at this little coffeehouse called Java's Witness. The massive fellow sitting across the table from me looks like someone I would've hanged out with in high school: black T-shirt, black overcoat, black ponytail and goatee, stained fingernails, unsweetened coffee. His b.o. and Axe body spray are in an epic battle for domination.

"Cassowary," he replies after slurping from his cup. "Like the razor-taloned flightless bird of Papua New Guinea."

"Uh-huh." I lean in close to ask him the next question, partly because a chubby poet at the back of the shop is telling a microphone how much better life would be if she had a penis, but mostly because of the question's private nature. The last thing I need right now is for some respectable member of the local customer base to hear me ask a member of the Trench Coat Mafia, "can you help me sell my soul?"

Cassowary leans in close, either because of the wannabe tranny or because he wants to mock my concern for privacy. "Yeah, I can help you with that, Cal Worthington."

I snap back into my chair, just as the six other people in the shop applaud the end of the poem. "Relax," Cassowary says, "you're not the first car hawker who's rolled his way into my services. Plus, my brother bought a hatchback from you guys."

I lean forward again upon hearing this, reverting to my default salesman manner. "How's that working out for him?"

He shrugs. "Hasn't killed him yet. Seems to be a problem with you guys lately. You got the money?"

I pull an envelope from my back pocket and place it on the table. "All right here. I was told I also needed a quarter-pint of blood drawn, but I can't get that 'til the end of the week. How soon can we do this?"

"Not until the full moon phases back to a new moon. Moonlight is just reflected sunlight, so it'd be the same as performing it at high noon."

"Red rivers spew, it's déjà vu," the poet recites.

Pocketing the envelope, Cassowary asks, "so are the '97's covered by that gas pedal recall?"