

TALES OF
ADVENTURE
WITH NAP
LAPKIN

ALSO BY LANCE MANION

Merciful Flush

Results May Vary

The Ball Washer

Homo sayswhaticus

The Trembling Fist

The Song Between Her Legs

What You Don't Understand

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Tales of Adventure With Nap Lapkin

Lance Manion

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ISBN

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Printed in the United States of America

Introduction

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I envy you.

Truly.

You are about to be introduced to perhaps the greatest character ever to grace a page. And believe me when I say that I had very little to do with it. In fact, Nap Lapkin brings to light all my limitations as a writer because there are times where I am literally unable to capture just how awesome he is.

And here you sit about to start reading.

Yep. That's the feeling of envy I'm feeling.

In some ways I feel like a salmon that has just spawned. Spent and lying on a rock waiting for a bear to wander by and eat me. Whatever happens from here, I have spawned this book so my mission is complete. Not sure spawned is the right word but I wanted to stay with the salmon metaphor and spewed seemed a bit off-putting.

Released?

Not sure the introduction is the place to be having this debate. I'm not even sure if I'm supposed to capitalize Introduction when I'm referring to the introduction.

Nap Lapkin and Introductions bring to light all my limitations as a writer.

There's Something Here From Somewhere Else

.....

forward

Saraswati is a Hindu goddess. She is the patron of writers and artists. Known in Burmese as Thurathadi, in Chinese as Biàncáitiān, in Japanese as Bensaiten, and in Thai as Surasawadee, she is also associated with other deities involved with books and learning such as Baalat (Byblos) and Seshatm (Egyptian).

The point being that she gets around. Not some local schmocal legend.

She is usually depicted as a beautiful woman sporting four arms, wearing a white sari and seated on an inverted white lotus. For the record, her four arms symbolize the four aspects of human personality in learning: mind, intellect, alertness, and ego. The color of her sari signifies spotless character and a sharp mind and the lotus represents the search for knowledge.

All standard-issue girly stuff I realize, but stay with me on this next part. It's no accident that she's going to be mixed up in a Nap Lapkin story.

If you're unfamiliar with Hinduism, then this next part gets a little complicated, but I'll do the best I can. It's a bit like some other religions in that there's one big guy who in turn creates other gods and goddesses but in this case, some of them have multiple arms and heads and such. I'm sure there's a good reason for all of these additional appendages but the forward is already getting a little long in the tooth so I'll leave it at that. Here's the part to tuck away for further reference: the heavy hitter of the religion, Brahma, had a dark side and that dark side came into existence as Shiva. Red eyes, menacing growl, the whole show. At some point, Shiva took a good look around at all the corruption

and decadence of the world and decided it was time to destroy it and start again. He eagerly opened his third eye and out popped a terrible fire capable of doing the aforementioned and then some, and just as the shit was about to hit the fan, in stepped Saraswati saying “Do not worry. Shiva’s fire burns only that which is impure and corrupt. I got this.”

With that, she took the form of a river and with her pure waters picked up the dreaded fire from Shiva Badavagni, the beast of doom. A fearsome nickname even a professional wrestler would be proud of.

“So long as the world is pure and man wise, this terrible creature will remain on the bottom of the sea. When wisdom is abandoned and man corrupts the world, Badavagni will emerge and destroy the universe,” foretold the wise goddess.

Or so the story goes anyway.

Got it?

Good. Now we can begin.



Ruth sorted through the large box marked \$1. Large trees cast shade over most of the items that populated the driveway and lawn of the nondescript home located at the address as advertised by the hundreds of “Garage Sale” signs populating every telephone pole and supermarket posting board in the tri-county area. Most of them. Not the table that held the box Ruth was currently rummaging through and as the temperature crept from a pleasant morning sunshine to a sweltering afternoon heat, she toyed with the idea of abandoning her search for bargains and heading back to her apartment... until she remembered her apartment was cramped and without air conditioning so she might as well keep digging.

Of course it’s disingenuous of me as the writer to pretend there was a chance she wouldn’t keep looking through the box as the whole story is based on her finding something in the box.

Don't believe me?

Ok, I'll prove it.

Dizzy from the heat, Ruth slowly backed away from the box and began to head to her hatchback when suddenly someone grabbed her arm and dragged her back to the box. "Are you sure there isn't anything in this box you'd like to buy?"

See? I've got a story to tell so from here on out, I'd appreciate it if you'd just let me do my job.

Soon, Ruth's arms were loaded with knickknacks and she was just about to make her way to the next box when she spied a pair of reading glasses at the bottom, stuck underneath a large ceramic Santa that appeared normal in every way except he had six arms. She fished out the glasses between the second and third arms, found they were in perfect working condition, and added them to her collection of items for purchase.

In the movie version of this story, the camera is going to linger on the glasses to lead you to believe this was an important acquisition so I'll save you the time of reading a dozen subtle references to that fact and come right out with it, although frankly I'm not sure why I didn't go with the six-armed Santa as the main vehicle to move this forward because he sounds a lot more interesting. I could have even gone on to mention that over the years, the six swords he had been holding were all, one by one, broken off and that had they still been attached, it would not only have been a far more interesting ceramic figure but it would have been a lot more difficult to have gotten to the reading glasses.

Given that the glasses are apparently the star of the show, I guess you're just not that interested in the other contents of a \$1 box at a garage sale. Adding that the ceramic figure was hot to the touch after sitting in the sun all day would at this point be totally superfluous.

Ok, a few housekeeping issues.

Ruth. Late twenties. Attractive in that Hollywood way that tries to sell you on how she's all frumpy but at the end of the flick, when she becomes the love interest, you suddenly find her very attractive but all along you saw she was cute and had a smokin' bod under the loose-fitting attire. Except that most people to date still found her frumpy.

Weird, I know.

On top of that, she's a librarian so it makes total sense that, given her low salary, she'd be spending her Saturday going to garage sales on the hunt for bargains and then it makes double sense that as a librarian, she'd always be on the lookout for new reading glasses.

She paid for her items and then slid the glasses down the front of her blouse where they caught on the top button and rested happily between her vaguely-plentiful bosoms.

He sat with his head face-down at the kitchen table. Nearby, a bowl of Rice Krispies began their snapping and crackling and popping and because the man wasn't likely to be spending any time camping in the foreseeable future, the sound was as close to a roaring campfire as he was likely to get.

So he sat with his head down, eyes closed, and pretended he was sitting by a fire in the middle of the woods. For a few moments, he could swear he felt the heat rolling off the breakfast cereal and in the distance he could hear a bird ringing.

Loudly. And insistently.

The bird was starting to annoy Nap Lapkin.

Faster than a human eye could follow, he scooped up the spoon and sent it hurtling into the side of the bird. The bird that was a phone.

It rattled harmlessly off the side of the giant plastic relic. Nap knew better than to buy one of those small delicate phones for his home because he had a nasty habit of scooping things up and hurling them

at the device. It wasn't so much that he had a short temper as much as he hated to be disturbed when he was on vacation in the depths of his kitchen.

He braced himself for the coming conversation.

"Hello."

It was some General, no doubt hunkered down in some bunker somewhere. As he listened, he couldn't help hearing the man's voice become more and more similar to how Charlie Brown and the gang hear adults when they speak.

Whop whada wa wum bwop wum wha whada.

"Yes, sir. I'm listening."

He listened. Sort of.

"Yes, I realize the implications but no, I'm not interested."

This reply apparently was not the response the individual at the other end of the line was hoping for because the decibel level of the Charlie Brown-esque participant shot up a few notches.

"I understand all that sir but I have already averted a worldwide pandemic, thwarted a terrorist attempt to spread a neurotoxin through the drinking water of a large North American city, and retrieved lost nuclear secrets from a hostile government. This month. And it's only the 15th."

He held the phone a few inches away from his ear as the reply thundered away.

"Well sir, if I can be honest, saving the world is becoming a bit tiring."

A tiny sprinkle of additional thundering.

"Yes. Bored stiff, sir. Let someone else handle one of these for once."

Nap heard nothing on the other end of the phone and realized that he had come to the eye of the storm. No doubt on the other end of the

telephone the General was unbuttoning his collar and taking a large gulp of air in order to put himself in a proper state of readiness for his rebuttal. I apologize for using “no doubt” twice but I tend to do that when describing Generals and their actions.

Nap hung up. He turned off the bird.

And returned to his Rice Krispies.

The first time Ruth wore the reading glasses, it so happened she was rereading one of her favorite books, *The Plague* by Albert Camus. It seemed very different than the first time she read it. It made a lot more sense and when she mentioned it to one of her coworkers, they ended up in a rather heated discussion about what Mr. Camus had meant by much of the content. Ruth began to cite examples from the book and her coworker just looked at her.

“That’s not what he meant,” said the coworker sternly.

Ruth objected as politely as she knew how. “He comes right out and says it.”

“No he doesn’t.”

“He certainly does.”

This droll back and forth exchange continued until her coworker retrieved a copy- one of the benefits of arguing literature in a library- and asked Ruth to point it out. After a few hapless minutes of flipping through the pages without her new glasses, Ruth had to admit that she couldn’t find the part she had read.

In fact, several of the sections she saw didn’t read the same as she had remembered the previous evening. She let her coworker stomp off the victor and believed she must have gotten hold of some strange translation of *The Plague*.

She remembered to take home another copy of the book that night so she could compare the two side by side.

After listening to his third box of Rice Krispies, Nap finally stood up from the table and thought about getting something to eat. He glanced down to where his watch should have been but it was only then he realized he was totally nude.

As a male writer, I don't want to go overboard in describing a nude Nap Lapkin but let's just say if you shaved off the pubes on the statue of David, you wouldn't be overstating it. All of which made the fact he'd never lifted a weight in his life all the more difficult to believe. That's not to say he was a stranger to the weight room. He liked to drop by so every man in the gym could wonder to himself about just how much weight he could put up. The women in attendance would run on their treadmills to the point of exhaustion and he would often have to step over their unconscious bodies as he exited. He stopped sporting a mustache because whenever he did, every man he came into contact with saw the majesty of facial hair and decided to grow one as well. Such was the perfection of his 'stache. He singlehandedly made it more difficult for people to figure out who the highway patrolmen were.

If you don't by now have a good idea of the man I'm trying to describe here, I think you're just being difficult and I'd suggest you stop being so pigheaded about the whole thing. I know you're attached to your dear 007, but he is strictly amateur hour compared to Nap Lapkin.

A man's man's man is not putting too fine a point on it.

He stretched and realized what he needed was to get away. You'll forgive him if he wasn't accustomed to getting away like the rest of us but as soon he'd decided to get away, he threw on a pair of pants and a shirt and hurled himself through the front window.

Of his third story apartment.

Before I start describing what Ruth is up to, I just want to point out that the events transpiring in Nap's life are not happening at the exact same time. I know a lot of authors are able to pull that off, but get that right out of your head. It might be happening at roughly the same

time, give or take a day, but don't hold me to it and certainly don't be one of those readers that gets all excited if they catch some small detail that doesn't coincide with the other character's timeline. I can't be bothered to sync everything. It's no coincidence that I haven't told you what year this is or even where this is taking place.

I haven't decided yet and the last thing I need is to give you some arbitrary detail that you will later ram up my ass.

“How could it be that style of wristwatch in 1998 when they didn't make them until 2003?”

If that's what you enjoy doing, then just put this down and go terrorize a Dan Brown novel already.

So... Ruth.

She put the two copies of *The Plague* right next to each other. Covers looked the same. She flipped them open and found they had all the same publishing info. She started to flip through them and compared random pages.

Identical.

She wondered what she was missing. She reached between her slightly-heaving breasts and removed her reading glasses. After putting them on, she noticed that the books were still identical. But different.

Different from when she read them without the glasses. Obviously with the glasses, the words were less blurry- do you think I would have made them the focal point of an entire story if all they did was make words less blurry? They also changed the words on the pages. It wasn't the books, it was the glasses.

She took them off and read a paragraph. She put them on and then read the same paragraph.

With the glasses on, the pages stated exactly what the author intended to say. Gone was all the subtext.

Ruth's head swam. A pair of glasses that allowed her to understand exactly what was going on without the hidden meanings or metaphors.

After a few minutes of letting that sink in, she ran to her bookshelves and located a few books. George Orwell. Oscar Wilde. Voltaire.

She had some reading to do.

Nap roared down the highway with the windows down and the sun roof of his '78 Le Mans open and, at ninety miles an hour, the wind created such a deafening noise, the only way for him to hear the selection currently residing in the cassette deck was to turn the volume up to a level that would sterilize most humans. Miles away, mothers could hear him coming and would gather their children close to them. Hedgerows developed a bustle as he drove past.

Baby, it's no good. We're just askin' for trouble.

I can touch you, but I don't know how to love you.

It ain't no use! We're headed for disaster.

Our minds said, "No!" But our hearts were talkin' faster, Leah!

Ah! Leah! Here we go again!

Ah! Leah! Here we go again!

Ah! Leah! Leah, Leah, Leah!

Ah! Leah! Here we go again!

It was if Donnie Iris was sitting shotgun instead of an actual shotgun. Nap was on vacation and already he could feel himself unwinding.

Now the obvious question is why I would go to the trouble of including a snippet of the song he was listening to, so I'll go ahead and answer that right now. If this is ever made into a movie, I don't want them to have Nap roaring anywhere listening to any of the crappy stuff you hear on the radio these days. It wasn't an accident that I said cassette as opposed to CD. The last thing I want is to have Nap associated with some limpdick Justin Timberlake song and I'll never change my opinion on that unless the price is right.

Nap glanced down at the shotgun sitting shotgun and found it reminded him of work so he picked it up and tossed it out the sunroof. It felt somehow liberating. He was only dimly aware of the car behind him swerving to avoid hitting the hurled weapon and completely unaware of the fact that the car then slid into a half dozen other cars as it tried to regain control. If the sound of that ruckus thought it could somehow make its way into the ear of Nap Lapkin, it was sadly mistaken and the last time he'd checked his rearview mirror was about never. Checking the rearview mirror reminded him of work.

He was completely aware of a half dozen or so tracking devices planted in his car and he was also aware that there was probably an equal number he was unaware of but he breathed out a long sigh and felt that although satellites from a dozen countries were following his every move, it was nice to be off the grid.

There was a slight uptick in the number of people reading Ruth's book review blog. Typically, she had between three and five readers visit a day. After her last critique of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, she had nearly a hundred thousand. The literary world was abuzz over her insights into some of the most celebrated and difficult pieces of literature. Seemingly out of nowhere, she was being asked to read books by the likes of *The Atlantic* and *New Yorker*. Academics from all over the world were flooding her with questions and invitations to speak at some of the most renowned universities began to trickle in.

Although she had never spoken in front of a crowd before, she decided to accept one of the offers because the campus was only a short drive from her house. Although nervous, she found the idea exciting and what's more they were paying her a nice sum so there didn't seem to be any reason not to at least give public speaking a try.

She began to have second thoughts as she peered around the curtain at the standing-room-only crowd gathered to hear her. As soon as she began to speak, she had third and fourth thoughts about the endeavor as the crowd began to pepper her with questions regarding her pedigree

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