

What You Don't Understand

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Merciful Flush

Results May Vary

The Ball Washer

Homo sayswhaticus

The Trembling Fist

The Song Between Her Legs

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Introduction

I don't like the arrogance of people who claim "Youth is wasted on the young."

It implies that they would somehow do better if given another opportunity when in reality every time I've faced conflict, I've choked.

I remember one time before a fight waving my fist and threatening to give someone a mouthful of teeth.

That's what youth is to me... a mouthful of teeth.

Tales of the Supernatural with Nap Lapkin

When the Triple-A baseball team, the Duluth Dragons, folded last year due to low attendance, their mascot, amongst many other poor souls, was sent packing. The problem for fired mascots is there aren't a lot of other teams named "Dragons" and even those are rarely looking for a new mascot. Getting a new gig is next to impossible.

So difficult that it might drive said fired mascot to turn to the dark arts. If a small tingle just ran up your spine after reading that, it's perfectly understandable.

Like so many terrible things such as Meister Brau beer, it began in Milwaukee. At a Milwaukee Brewers game specifically. Right after the beloved seventh inning stretch ritual of the Famous Racing Sausages. Brat (#1), Polish Sausage (#2), Italian Sausage (#3), Hot Dog (#4), and Chorizo (#5) made their dash from left field to home plate. They had no sooner departed the field then a loud roar emanated from the bowels of the stadium.

An unlucky security guard that had gone to investigate was the first one on the scene. He flung open the double doors that led from the public walkways to the catacombs beneath the ballpark and fell back in horror. Chunks of sausage and bodily fluids littered the ground and an eight-foot-tall dragon in a blood-soaked sweater with two large Ds emblazoned upon it crouched between the tattered remains of Brat and Italian Sausage while Hot Dog squirmed in its slavering jaws. Chorizo, blind with terror, comically stumbled and bumbled down the hallway, its entrails protruding from a gaping wound as his terrible transformation was underway. (At this juncture you don't know exactly what transformation I'm referring to, so don't get too fixated on it.)

Polish Sausage was nowhere to be seen.

As the dragon gulped down Hot Dog and set off in pursuit of Chorizo, the guard later grudgingly admitted that the scent hanging in the air smelled delicious.

I realize that this is a lot for you to process. Usually you're not asked to just jump in like this, so take a moment to digest what you've just read.

As far as the guard could tell, the dragon was a real dragon. If dragons existed. Teeth, claws, the whole show. And the terrible transformation I spoke about?

That's the weirdest part, and the primary reason this story is called *Tales of the Supernatural With Nap Lapkin* as opposed to *Another Tale of Adventure With Nap Lapkin*. The corpses of the deceased mascots were made entirely of whatever meat they represented. There was never any trace of the people who had previously inhabited the outfit. They simply disappeared.

I know, right? Pretty supernatural.

* * *

Why would something like this attract the attention of a super-spy like Nap Lapkin? I guess the real question is whether or not you'd rather read a story involving a super-spy or a story about another lame crime-scene investigator. You know the kind, the ones clogging up TV with horrible shows riddled with initials and starring some vaguely-attractive yet somehow insipid actor rattling off statistics while still giving the audience a weekly peek at his heart of gold. Of course he's surrounded by the obligatory cast of stereotypical characters who will understand his frustration with the newest case and not rest until it gets solved. We get it, we get it, TV. There are a lot of serial killers out there, so in case they get stuck for new ideas on how to murder people, you'd better keep churning them out.

Is that what you as the reader want?

I didn't think so... so stop your bellyaching and just appreciate the fact that within minutes you're going to be ass-deep in a Nap Lapkin tale.

If you're looking for a story involving a secret agent who has a laser in his shoe or a female operative with a fire-belching diaphragm, then you're out of luck. Believe me; I'm not happy about it either. As a writer, I'd love nothing more than to introduce a gadget like a fire-belching diaphragm, but

Nap will have none of it. He won't even bring a knife to a gunfight. The chances of him arriving with a laser are slim to none. He just wouldn't find it sporting.

Now Madonna Axiom on the other hand... perhaps you could convince me to get her involved in this little narrative. While it's true she doesn't currently own a fire-belching diaphragm, she is the proud owner of a plasma-spewing vibrator. I shouldn't have to clarify this but for the sake of those readers that might be confused, the plasma in question is weaponized ionized gas and not the colorless fluid part of blood in which fat globules are suspended. I mean really, if I need to spend time making that clear, perhaps you might consider reading less challenging material.

Who would possibly think that a vibrator spewing the colorless fluid part of blood in which fat globules are suspended would in any way provide a female agent any protection? Please don't make me regret considering her for this story.

Anyway, it was only after a string of these gruesome and supernatural mascot murders started occurring that Nap was asked by his superiors (in name only) to get involved. There were few leads and with the enormous number of mascots inflicting themselves on crowds on every college campus and professional sporting event, all they could do is calculate the body count as the dragon moved westward.

The first thing you might be asking yourself is why a hardened secret agent would believe all of this supernatural tomfoolery. An outstanding question; there's hope for you yet.

The thing is... it's not his first go-around with supernatural situations. Allow me to digress a moment and I will let you in on a little secret that nobody outside of Nap knows.

When Nap was a young man, he lived in a variety of orphanages. Having never read *Oliver Twist*, I can't say for certain that it gives an accurate portrayal of life as an orphan but I'm led to believe it does not give it a glowing review, with plenty of unscrupulous characters and "Can I have some more?" moments, so if you spent your youth reading Charles Dickens instead of Douglas Adams and PG Wodehouse as I did, you can use that as a jumping off point concerning Nap's youth.

It was at one of these homes that he ran into something that can only be termed "supernatural." Although looking at Nap now, it might be tough to believe but when he was twelve he loved nothing more than fishing. He would rise early, slip out of his window and disappear for hours casting his line into some local pond or stream. On the way there, he would do some quick digging and uncover enough worms to make the casting a fruitful exercise. Through the process of trial and error he found that the closer he dug to an old abandoned shed, the larger and more plentiful the worms became until it came to pass he was digging right alongside the rotting lumber that made up its walls. In fact, by this time, he was wondering just how large the worms would be should he venture inside the dilapidated structure and do some digging so he did just that.

The shed's interior was surprisingly large and dimly lit, the only light coming in through grimy windows and small cracks between the rotting planks that made up its walls. If you are picturing some endearing scene where a young boy is wide-eyed with a naïve mix of fear and curiosity, you are way off. Nap strolled in like he owned the place and went right to work digging.

It didn't take long until he was looking down at worms of such size that if he were to lower them into the pond on a hook, most of the fish would take one look, shriek a fishy shriek of terror, and throw themselves on shore. Snakes would give these worms a wide berth.

Nap was soon looking down on a squirming black mass of worms the likes of which usually appear in bad horror movies. Sitting in the middle of these hellish *Lumbricus terrestris* was a black mummified face. Half buried, he could make out its unnecessarily creepy non-arthropod invertebrate making its way out through the mouth.

Even at the tender age of twelve, Nap would have typically heard the sinister man sneaking up behind him but you'll forgive him if he was momentarily distracted by the site of the mummified face opening its eyes and staring right at the young man.

You wanted supernatural? You've got it in spades! This shed reeked of supernaturalness.

And the mummy is only the start of it. Unknowingly, Nap had stumbled into a shed containing the long-lost Amulet of Osiris, a piece of jewelry that legend suggested would give its bearer not only power over life and death but limitless wealth and influence. A fact that the man sneaking up behind Nap was keenly aware of.

Now anyone but Nap Lapkin would have been rendered unconscious by a swift blow to the back of the head and thus would have begun an epic story of Nap searching the globe to avenge this violent affront to his skull and recover the artifact. But nope... no such luck for this storyteller. I can't seem to catch a break.

While it's true that he was momentarily distracted by the mummy eyes popping open, he quickly recovered and realized there was someone approaching from his rear with ill-intent.

He quickly scooped up a rusted garden implement and drove it up through the man's jaw and into his brain. He then kicked some dirt over the mummy's face and departed the shed to go fishing.

Later, authorities found the body and decided it might be best if Nap moved on to another group home. Nap never said a word to anyone about what had happened and the shed, the mummy and the long-lost Amulet of Osiris were later bulldozed over to make way for a strip mall. A strip mall that ironically housed an Egyptian restaurant whose food was so good that some people said it was to die for.

* * *

If I'm giving Nap a back story, I'd better pony up for Madonna... so here goes. There are almost eight hundred female Saints in the Catholic faith but the little gold medallion hanging around Madonna's neck doesn't signify one of those. The serene face emblazoned on it is a touch more obscure. If you have any understanding of the religion at all it's easy to see why.

Sister Charity and her miraculous vagina.

Back in seventh century Italy, she was well-known for the healing gifts bestowed upon her and her woman parts. For reasons that nobody was ever able to figure out, anyone inside her at the moment of her orgasm would immediately be cured of any ailment. She was the original "pity fuck."

After word spread of her amazing power, men traveled from every corner of the globe to be with her. Cripples and lepers waited outside her home waiting for a shot at her wondrous nether regions.

Obviously this put the church in an awkward position as the magisterium clearly states that sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes. Nowhere did the good book state it was ok to bang the blindness out of a guy or hump the hump off a hunchback.

Sister Charity grappled with this conflict all of her days, wondering why her God would give her a healing gift that seemed to damn her to hell. She appeared to literally be taking one for the team... and by one I mean no less than one hundred and sixty documented miracles. And by team I mean the roughest group of suitors you could ever imagine. And to make each miracle happen, Sister Charity had to climax.

Nobody ever asked her what she was thinking about when some obese fevered retard was plowing away that allowed her to cum, but if it wasn't the hand of God working between her sweaty thighs, I'd be hard pressed to come up with another explanation.

The church never saw it that way. Although her name made its way all the way up to the pope, she was never granted sainthood. Madonna always thought that Catholic view of sexuality was both cruel and arbitrary.

Just the way she liked her lovers.

* * *

Ron Snyder had read about the strings of mascot homicides with growing concern but he was in no position to call in sick. He knew that if he wasn't inside that Mad Ant costume someone else would be happy to take his place. The NBA Development league games were never televised and Fort Wayne, Indiana might not be as glamorous as New York City but at least it was a job and it helped pay the rent. His ailing grandmother lived with him and her medication ran at least five hundred dollars a month and besides, he had promised some of the boys down at the orphanage where he volunteered he would get them a few autographs from some of the up-and-coming basketball players, so even though

he knew he was exactly the kind of person who usually gets eaten in situations like this, he threw his ant outfit in a duffel bag and headed out to the game.

Later that same night...

In addition to the usual crowd of forensic nerds, there were a few nerds that Nap couldn't put his finger on. Then he realized that the discovery of a six-foot-long ant corpse is not the kind of thing that happens a lot in the entomological world. You couldn't throw a notepad without hitting a tweed jacket. Six notepads later, Nap finally asked who he'd been pelting with notepads. "I'm an entomologist... and that's going to leave a mark." (It's important to note as you build a mental image of Nap Lapkin that he typically doesn't carry six notepads. This was a special case.)

I throw in a bit of levity because I know that there are some of you who must have fallen under the spell of hard-working-yet-lovable Ron Snyder (damn my ability to create living, breathing characters, damn it to hell) and probably need a minute to collect yourself after putting the pieces together.

Take your time.

* * *

Fort Wayne is as good as any place for Madonna to join Nap in the hunt for the killer. If you introduce Madonna into a story, you know it's going to end up with Nap sleeping with her so let's cut straight to that chase. If you're expecting me to go all *50 Shades* on you, you're going to be sorely disappointed. I'll be leaping straight to the post-coital scene where Madonna is lying next to Nap and waiting for him to say something romantic. He continues to stare at the ceiling with a far-away look on his face. She assumes he is replaying their intimate encounter in his head. Finally he speaks... "What kind of sick mind thinks of making a dessert out of carrots?"

Her eyes almost bulge out her head. "Really Nap? Carrot cake again?!"

Some of you still might be salty about the fact I skipped over an outstanding opportunity to introduce a little smut into what might be the least supernatural story you've ever read. Typically I ignore such second-guessing, but even I have to admit that I've pretty much abandoned the original premise so it certainly couldn't hurt if I threw in a little of the stuff that seems to sell books these days.

So here goes... Madonna slowly walked into the room and closed the door behind her. Moments later, it began. Birds in the area took flight and small woodland creatures hurried to find shelter. Waves lapped at the edges of a nearby pond that had never seen waves before. There was a two-minute guttural groan that escaped her trembling lips and brought dust down from every ceiling in the county. Asphalt surrounding the motel shimmered as though it were August in Death Valley. Seismologists scrambled to confirm their readings.

Happy?

* * *

On the topic of sex, Nap once gave a little speech he gave at the Academy on that very subject. It was completely unrelated to the topic he was supposed to be talking about but he felt it was good advice just the same and needed to be imparted. That advice? A man needs to approach sex as if it's his goal to break the vagina with his penis. He was so sincere in his delivery that many of the men in the room actually wrote it down. The quick sketch he did to accompany the lecture turned one of the women in the audience into a lesbian.

Nap also had this advice for the cadets: "There are going to be moments that are over before they begin. It could be prom night or your first exchange of gunfire, you'll be there but you won't. As if the moment exists only to pass into your memory. Recognize them for what they are. In those situations, I find it's best to just act how you'd like to have acted looking back on it and not how you want to act. Take yourself out of the decision-making because you'll just fuck it up. For those fleeting minutes, be the person you want to be and not how you are. Do that enough and you end up being that person."

He then paused for a few seconds before adding “Whatever becomes of the person you are is anyone’s guess,” in a hushed, almost nostalgic tone.

* * *

Here's something else to consider about Madonna Axiom. When she was in her high school health class, there was a rather odd discussion amongst the other girls- when the teacher was absent from the room of course- about the way their private parts smelled when aroused. It caused a lot of giggling and blushing but also exposed some rather telling information about the way the girls thought about boys. It wasn't long before they debated amongst themselves what they wished their vaginas smelled like. At first things like flowers and apple pie were offered up as preferred bouquets but eventually they started moving towards what they believed boys would find attractive. Soon they were wishing their vaginas smelled like beer or pizza. Finally all eyes fell on Madonna, given the fact that she seemingly had an opinion about everything, and her one word answer ended the discussion cold.

"Pussy."

* * *

It's at this point that you can be forgiven if you're clenching and unclenching your fists and asking aloud if I ever plan on getting back to the mascot-eating dragon that started off this whole mess of a story. I mean to say, this really got away from me. But, ever the thoughtful writer, I will do my best to try to stay focused and return to the realm of the supernatural.

Let's see what Nap is up to, shall we?

Nap arrived too late to save the UC Santa Cruz mascot. The half-eaten banana slug lay draped across a bench in the locker room and gave off a pungent and sluggish scent. What you might ask is a sluggish scent? I have no idea. At some point, I have to be honest and say I have no idea what a giant five-foot-eight banana slug would smell like. I think everyone’s banana slug corpse will smell a little different. I gave you pungent; you’re on your own for the rest.

Nap reached into his pocket and produced a red phone that acted as a direct link to the President. It was red because Nap refused to address the President as anything but Commissioner Gordon. A fact that irritated the President but nowhere near as much as the endless string of late-night calls from inebriated cocktail waitresses asking him if he really was the President. “Yes. Yes I am. Yes... THE President. No, I’m not a Sagittarius. Put Nap on the phone please. Ok, well, when he’s done vomiting please tell him that if he calls me again I’ll have him shot. Yes, really.”

It wasn't really necessary but Nap pressed in the required digits and heard the call go through. After a few rings he heard a familiar voice.

"What is it Nap? This better not be some drunken slut asking me if I'm really..."

Nap cut him off.

"It's not. I just wanted to tell you I know where the mascot killer is going to strike next."

* * *

This might be a good time to come right out and tell you that I’m not going to explain the how or why of mascots turning into the actual creatures they are pretending to be. Face it, whatever explanation I offered up would fall flat compared to the one you already came up with. Nor do I have a good back story about why an out-of-work mascot would suddenly turn into a dragon and what’s more if I were to sit and come up with one, you’d only roll your eyes and think to yourself “Lame!” While you might have been a bit thrown by the first paragraph of the story, I’m sure by now your imagination is really cooking and there is a part of you that hopes that I will not screw things up by trying to explain too much.

* * *

What I will tell you is how Nap knew the dreaded dragon would end up back at Miller Park in Milwaukee. Because he was about to offer him a treat that no self-respecting demonic entity could pass up: a sixth competitor running during the seventh inning stretch. The wolf in meat's clothing. (#6) Pepperoni. (#6) Nap Lapkin... dressed to kill. A salami out for justice. Out to avenge Sammy the Slug, Speedy the Geoduck, and Arkansas-Monticello's noble boll weevil.

While waiting for the seventh inning fireworks it might be interesting to mention that there was something about listening to *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* that always got to Nap. Not so much a wave of melancholy as a deep resentment that Cracker Jack is no longer available at ballparks.

"It's in the fucking song" he would rage to himself. He couldn't shake the thought that somewhere there was a really crappy Cracker Jack salesman who slacked off and allowed other snack foods to waltz in and take the baseball market.

The casual baseball fan did not escape Nap's wrath either. "How can anyone sing Cracker Jack and then not want Cracker Jack? Why isn't there a stadium full of people with their head's swiveling around wildly looking for the Cracker Jack vendor?"

It baffled him that peanuts make the cut but Cracker Jack did not. He was about to scoop up his red phone and discuss the matter with the President but then realized that there were more pressing matters at hand. Plus, his giant Pepperoni hands would not allow him to dial.

But before the pressing matters could commence he had a race to win. Although he was told prior to the gate swinging open that it was Chorizo's turn to win, Nap was damned if he was going to lose a footrace to a pork product. Sensing what was afoot, Madonna, situated in an ill-fitting Polish Sausage costume, tackled him about twenty feet from the finish line. The sight of two Racing Sausages getting to their feet and engaging in an impromptu martial arts battle was an unexpected treat for the thousands of baseball fans in attendance.

Once back behind the confines of the hallway, both Nap and Madonna heard a familiar growl.

It's here I have to warn you that if you're expecting some epic showdown between good and evil, you might be a bit disappointed. The thing is, even if you're a dragon, you're still susceptible to the kind of weaponry Nap and Madonna were packing inside their mascot attire. Before Madonna could even raise her plasma-spewing vibrator, Nap had unloaded a clip of hollow point bullets into the demon's head.

It fell over without even a last snarl.

The problem is that countless fantasy authors have filled your imaginations with completely unrealistic expectations regarding the durability of dragon scales and dragon teeth and all the other things that make up a dragon. The truth is that they are basically just as sausagey inside as any other animal.

Obviously I'm not any happier about it than you... I ended the damn story with the word sausagey for fucks sake.

Totally not epic.

99 Problems But Morality Ain't One

While everyone enjoys a good hug, we all have to be envious of the way warm toast embraces butter. It's just the nature of both parties involved. To understand our feelings of envy, I think it's important to come up with a completely fabricated set of circumstances that will in no way shed any light onto the original premise.

Let's say for instance that the toast is actually an angel. Pick whatever religion you'd like to attach to the angel but it has to be understood that this toast is beyond reproach. If your religion de jour doesn't have angels, then just pretend that it does. This will in no way change the look of the toast; nobody wants to be wrestling a set of wings into the toaster.

Now let's say the butter is possessed by a demon. A tub of "It's Very Easy To Believe This Isn't Butter" because the tub is levitating and hurling profanity at everyone who enters the kitchen. Just as I did not go into detail about the toast as to whether it was wheat or white, there is no reason to wonder if other spreadables would work just as well. The first line of the story said butter so there's no reason to start speculating about various jams, jellies or marmalades. Sure, their sweetness and/or stickiness might offer any number of interesting metaphors but as it is, there is no point to this so adding more interestingness would just further the pointlessness of it.

Originally I was going to profess the innocence of the person applying said butter to said toast but as I've already mentioned the butter hurling profane language at anyone unfortunate enough to remove it from the refrigerator, that particular ship has sailed.

As a quick aside, recently the manufacturers of Pop Tarts (toasted pastries for those of you unfamiliar with what a Pop Tart is-how you are unaware of what Pop Tarts are is a mystery to me, as I consume at least my own body weight in Pop Tarts annually and have to believe that even in the depths of some faraway jungle there are still Pop Tarts to be had) began an advertising campaign that anthropomorphizes them and has them duped into being toasted and consumed by a variety of hungry people and animals. Apparently the fact that they are delicious is all the justification that's needed by the nefarious consumers, despite the fact that the Pop Tarts are presented as intelligent and seemingly good natured creatures. Kellogg's runs these ads to invite you to join the party. Ironic that this is a bit difficult to digest.

Perhaps I mention this in case you were having trouble imagining yourself willingly forcing an angel into the 310 degrees Fahrenheit heat of a toaster. If that crossed your mind, I have to say that you're taking this a lot more seriously than I appear to be.

So you can see that there are a lot of moving pieces in this little tale. While it may give you a moment of satisfaction to plunge a knife into the foul-mouthed tub of butter, you might still be reeling a bit from pulling the charred remains of the angel from the toaster, the starch within the angel having caramelized. I can almost hear your brain associating the word "starch" with character and I'll have to once again caution you that you're looking way too deeply into this. If you keep it up, there's no way you'll avoid being disappointed with my summation.

As another aside, there is a thought experiment where a piece of buttered toast (which always lands butter-side down) is attached to the back of a cat (which always lands on its feet) and dropped, thereby creating a perpetual motion machine and a possible endless source of energy. The effects of having the toast be an angel and the butter possessed by a demon on the efficiency of this device would make for some interesting conjecture.

Probably far more interesting than where this appears to be headed.

In the end, I think it's fair to say that the demonic butter would still melt into the angelic toast and the angelic toast would accept the demonic butter into its nooks and crannies (Be honest, when you read nooks and crannies you imagined an English Muffin didn't you? Trying to keep your mind from wandering is like herding cats with pieces of toast attached to their backs). Why? Because it's the nature of butter and toast. It's what they do.

And therefore I have invalidated the concepts of good and evil. Didn't see that coming, did you? You thought this was some lightweight reading and suddenly you're confronted with a profound insight into the human condition.

Recognize.

If you need a minute to go back a re-read this a few times, by all means do so.

I don't know what you take me as... or understand the intelligence that Manion has.

So go be butter or honey or rye bread or a bagel. Do fifty-five in a fifty-four if you want to. It's just your nature.

And that's why we're so envious of how toast embraces butter.

Get Stoned, Inc.

WARNING: This story is pretty profound. And I'm not saying profound relative to my other stories. I mean this is the kind of story that will have you mulling things over. You'll be at a cocktail party later tonight and someone will approach you and ask why you have a faraway look in your eyes and you'll have to explain that you're mulling.

You've been warned.

* * *

Gary was a psychology major in college, so the dream left him more than a little perplexed as to its meaning. He dreamt that he was on a bus travelling through Texas, trying to convince himself that moving there wasn't going to be all bad. As the bus moved through the beauty of the mountains all around him, he thought about what a nice place it would be to hike through. It would get him in better shape.

The problem was soon the mountains gave way to an ancient burial ground that was equally picturesque but completely out of place. Then the bus started to drive through what appeared to be Incan or Aztec ruins. Scenic as all hell but as far as he remembered from his history courses neither the Incans nor Aztecs had ever been in Texas.

He awoke with the feeling that some great change was coming.

Gary owned a kitchen countertop company. People would come into his store and select a nice granite or marble top with a sink and then his installers would go out and transform their kitchens. The problem was, at least until recently, that it was a very competitive industry and it had been difficult to make enough money to keep everything humming along.

That was when Gary put his psychology degree to use. He realized that a large percentage of the population was uncomfortable with both confrontation and offending people. Given that premise, he realized that he could make more money if he did the work three times for every client. To accomplish that, he hired a crew of installers that were all midgets.

Who better to install stone than dwarves? Just look at their work in *Lord of the Rings*.

Not only did it make the process of installing more whimsical for the client (when the dwarves march in with their little tool belts) but when the work was finished they were usually, 72% of the time, too embarrassed to voice any displeasure that the midgets had installed their counter tops at a height of 26". They would walk in and there would be the midgets leaning against the countertops beaming with pride- they practiced in front of mirrors- and the home owner would try and keep their smile plastered on their face as their mind ran through various scenarios wherein they would try to make a sandwich without throwing out their back.

Hours later, Gary would get a sheepish "Isn't there anything you can do?" phone call. He would offer them a small discount off a new kitchen countertop and dispatch a new group of installers.

Installers that were all 6' 8" or above.

38% of the time these same clients would make another phone call after the project was completed to say the work was outstanding but the 44" high countertops are a little tall and is there any way that Gary could have a normal-sized crew come out and perhaps install countertops at a standard height?

And could he not mention their dissatisfaction to the group of enormous men still milling about their home?

If the customer wasn't interested in getting a stool to stand on for all future kitchen endeavors, Gary was quick to offer a crew specializing in standard-height countertops.

The math is a little tricky, but given Gary's mark-up on a new kitchen sat comfortably at 50%, this little business scheme paid off handsomely.

Before you start mulling, I'd like you to take a minute and think about how funny a crew of midgets installing 26" high countertops is. You were so busy looking for something profound, I fear you might have skipped over just how amusing this scene is.

Now picture the frustrated consumer's face when they walk in to see 44" high countertops.

Ok, now you're free to start mulling.

Just like Gary was doing when he woke from his dream. Texas and buses and mountains and graveyards and ruins. What did it all mean?

And no, I don't really think you're going to a cocktail party any time soon. Your mulling will probably be interrupted by a teenager wearing a paper hat and standing in front of a register.

Sorry. Continue your mulling.

Mirror Moved

Ed was a large man and even he had to admit that nature seldom creates a more dangerous animal than a large man with a short name. Maybe, just maybe, an ox. Which explains why he can't listen to more than one *Psychedelic Furs* song at a time.

Actually it doesn't explain it to you, the reader, but in fairness, if it did, there would be no reason for this story to continue and you'd be out the next few minutes of bliss.

Perhaps bliss is too strong a word. I guess I'll just have to plow ahead and let you be the judge.

Anyway. Ed was a large man with a large heart, in both physical size and emotional depth. He had a hair trigger when it came to anger and a hair trigger when it came to grief and pretty much every other reaction he had to inter-personal stimuli vibrated between these two like a drunken hula dancer with an inner-ear problem. He had wept during fights and could never bring himself to attend a school reunion for fear he'd strangle someone.

Ed had been divorced twice and both women still dearly loved him but leapt at the chance to depart the rollercoaster the first chance they felt it slow down and the bar sitting across their chest relax enough for them to wiggle out. The fact that this might give you a visual similar to a drunken hula dancer is just a happy coincidence.

I didn't get that visual but I can see how it could happen.

Ed is often misunderstood.

So the question remains, what to do with a character like Ed? The story is half done and yet I've come no closer to explaining why he can't listen to more than one *Psychedelic Furs* song at a time. Like in life, Ed is filled with such promise that fate, if you want to call the author of a story deciding what to do with a character fate, could lead him down so many paths as to be mundane. Cliché.

Of course, if you're a *Psychedelic Furs* fan, you are already taking Ed by the hand and throwing him in the most unbelievable of circumstances. Places where his strength and frailties can be on full display without making him the tragic hero. Or a hero at all.

Maybe every now and then I should write something where it's assumed the reader loves *Psychedelic Furs* music and leave it at that. People who are either unfamiliar with or not impressed by the musical stylings of Richard Butler may be left feeling a bit put out but it wouldn't be the first time I've left readers feeling that way. At least this time I can feel like I have an excuse.

The problem is that I am nothing if not a professional and if I go around insinuating that a reader is going to feel bliss while reading a story, then I can't help but feel an obligation to provide the aforementioned whether they own every *Psychedelic Furs* album or not.

So what to do with Ed for the non- *Psychedelic Furs* fan...

I've got it. I will examine, as truthfully as I feel comfortable doing, whether or not I am writing from the perspective of Ed. Obviously I didn't go into this story intending to express some secret sentiment under the guise of Ed, but if you've taken any psychology classes, which I've really intended to do on many occasions, it's common knowledge that many writers explore their subconscious desires through third persons of their own creation. A classic example would be my story "Philip Wishes He Had A Bigger Penis" from my as-yet unpublished book "Why Can't I... I mean Andrew... Have Multiple Orgasms?"

In this case, I don't think I'm Ed. I am not large in stature and I am for the most part emotionally disconnected. I mean I am taller than most but I am a weakling and occasionally I will cry at the end of movies, but I'm also the guy who stepped over a man having a heart attack on the Atlantic City boardwalk without breaking stride or feeling any desire to look back.

I couldn't be less Ed-like if I tried.

Am I trying? Is that what you want to know? Is that why I avoid lifting weights or making friends?

Careful, you non- *Psychedelic Furs*-liking reader. Keep up this line of inquiry and I will turn it back on you so fast it will make your head spin.

You're still thinking about that guy on the boardwalk, aren't you? Or are you wondering why you look like a hula dancer with an inner-ear infection when you try to dance or why the only time you try and dance is when you're drunk?

You really want to know why Ed can't listen to more than one *Psychedelic Furs* song at a time? You want bliss? Do you think it's a coincidence that you're reading this right now? Do you think it's a fluke that you want to go back and reread this?

Ed, Ed, Ed... it's time you listened to *Mirror Moves*.

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