

neXt

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

neXt

Lance Manion

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Introduction

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Lance Manion is not my real name. It is a nom de plume, which is French for “Too embarrassed to use a real name.” I have a real life that has nothing to do with writing. A life that would be negatively impacted if anyone I actually knew read what I write as Lance Manion.

The book was originally going to be called *Short Pointless (?) Stories for Your Long Pointless (?) Trip*. The question marks being there to show that everything is a matter of context, whether it be why I write these dumb things or why you get out of bed in the morning. I changed it because I thought I would wait until you’ve read a few of them before realizing your terrible mistake.

Who is my ideal reader? If I had to put a finger on it, I’d say an ex-FBI agent who was kicked out of the bureau because they kept sending things into the crime lab for analysis that had nothing to do with any active cases. Things they found under their seat at the theater, for example.

Smart, but not as smart as they think they are. Normal on the outside but tremendously odd inside. If life is indeed a box of chocolates, then they definitely have a nut lurking within. But back to me (perhaps my favorite sentence of all time). I used to classify my writing as humor but only about half of these stories even attempt to be funny. The other half aim to show just how funny life isn’t. It was only after reviewing things that I realized how many revolved around bad ideas and people ill-equipped for success.

Like me.

Don’t worry; I don’t want to be famous. I don’t even want to be known. I write to get all the dumb ideas out of my brain. Like an exorcism of sorts. I don’t care what anyone thinks about them. Having said that, I sincerely hope you find some of them interesting.

holocene



I hit a deer.

I wasn't speeding but the roads were icy and it jumped out of the woods. I had no chance to even apply the brakes. I mean to say, I did, but only for a fraction of a second. Just enough for it to think to itself, "Those are the breaks."

It leapt out of the way and I clipped it with a dull thump. It spun right into the path of an oncoming car in the other lane. It happened so fast, I couldn't confirm that the car hit the deer (again) but it seemed unlikely that it could have dodged the hurtling vehicle. I craned my neck to look back but all I saw were the red tail lights of the other car as it slowed down and then kept driving. Late for work perhaps or just the driver thinking to himself "My work here is done."

"It was just a deer." Not my dear.

I turned around awkwardly, as it was a narrow winding street- it took a few back-and-forths- and drove back to the scene of the crime where I pulled over and got out.

I needed to know it was dead and wasn't suffering.

The air was cold. Crisp but cold and I wasn't dressed for such activities. The snow crunched accusationally beneath my feet. It was the quiet that got to me.

Nothing moved except my eyes over the snow. There was no twitching carcass. No big dead eyes to look up at me. Not even a few red drops on the white ground. No hoof prints to follow to their grim end.

It was like it never happened. I was emotional and the damn thing didn't have the courtesy to let me grieve.

I could feel hundreds of forest eyes on me. All of them waiting for me to leave so they could exhale. There was no wind, but the clouds

raced across the sky; the moon was there one minute, gone the next. Everything cast a shadow.

I got back in my car and made the drive home. I turned off the radio. I turned off the heater because I thought the very least I could do was shudder a little. In fifteen minutes, I was walking through my door.

I lay in my bed, alone in the dark, and realized the shadows had followed me home.

Life is like that. And death, apparently.

I hadn't known the deer existed a few seconds before I hit it and as I lay there, I had no idea what had happened to it. A few seconds. A few decisions. If I had left five minutes earlier or five minutes later. Actions taken and things not done and things that can't be undone.

It was the quiet that got to me. I couldn't see the moon from my bed, but I knew it was out there. I knew that it had seen the whole thing despite being 238,550 miles away, give or take a few miles. Hanging there in space with nothing better to do and without the good manners to abandon its usual synchronous rotation and look away for a few minutes.

The next morning, I went out to my car to see if the deer had done any damage and saw hoof prints on my lawn.

And little red drops sprinkled around.

It was, of course, impossible that the same deer had followed me home. Things like that don't follow you home.

I had hit the deer a good five or ten miles away. It was either fine and had made a narrow escape or it was broken and had crawled off to die alone in the dark. It couldn't have tracked me down. I wasn't guilty of anything. I wasn't accountable.

All the best villains believe that, I think.

The sun was warm and shone as usual but I got the feeling the moon had told it everything at daybreak. "Anything happen last night?" Satellites are like that. Can't keep their mouths shut.

If I sported a handlebar mustache, it was at that moment I would have twirled the ends.

Instead, I went back into the house.

There were red dots on the white tiles in the hall.

Odd. These things don't follow you home.

her safe place

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“Why are you dressed like that?” she inquired through the intercom.

He laughed a little. “Fair question,” he conceded.

He was a burglar. He was dressed in a black and white striped shirt, black pants, and a Lone Ranger mask.

She was dressed in her pajamas. I’ll let you decide what her pajamas looked like. It may change as the story proceeds.

“You have to admit... it’s a little weird to actually dress as a cliché. I mean, I would understand a black ski mask to hide who you are, but why the Lone Ranger mask?”

“It’s interesting that you call it a Lone Ranger mask as opposed to just a mask,” he said. Now I’m interested too as I did the exact same thing.

He continued. “Being a burglar is a lonely profession, so the term Lone Ranger has a couple of different connotations.”

“Why are you still here?” she asked. “Shouldn’t you leave now that you have all of my valuables? Are you waiting to kill me?”

“Oh, no. Quite the contrary, in fact.” He paused and then walked to the front of the locked panic room she had fled into.

“I had the opportunity to review your CD collection and your video collection and take in all the posters and artwork on your walls,” he said as he sat and looked into the small camera over the giant iron door. “I think I’d like to ask you out on a date.”

Silence.

He wished there was a camera on her side so he could see her reaction. Trust me though; he would not have been encouraged.

“You’re very pretty,” he added. “I’ve been admiring some of your pictures. You seem nice.”

Now be honest, the fact that you now know she is attractive has totally changed your opinion of her pajamas. I bet she's probably wearing a skimpy nightie now, isn't she?

She is in my story, I'll tell you that much.

"So... what do you think?" he asked, looking hopefully up at the camera.

"I think you're a lunatic who wants me to open the door so he can murder me because he wore a fucking Lone Ranger mask instead of a real one and he knows I can probably identify him in a court of law."

Not the answer he was hoping for. He tried to look more sincere and gave it another try.

"What if I tie up my hands? Would you come out then?"

More silence. More wishing he could see her reaction. More of him being happy he couldn't.

She had a gun in her safe room. She was loading it.

"I mean," he continued, "love is a strange thing. You never know when you're going to meet 'the One,' right?"

"I've called the police, burglar guy. You and your bad Lone Ranger mask should go. Try and find a costume party," she said coldly. Love was definitely not in the air.

"I don't want to be the Lone Ranger anymore," he offered up.

"Tonto then?" she said tentatively, not sure that Tonto wore a mask. She wasn't sure if one was necessary in the role of Kemo Sabe. Then she was worried that the Lone Ranger was the Kemo Sabe and if that was the case, what did that make Tonto? Relationships and roles therein can be tricky.

"I'll be your Tonto if you agree to be my kemo sabe," he replied.

"Well, that answers that," she thought to herself, although she could tell by the way he said it that he didn't capitalize kemo sabe.

He felt like it was time to try and close her.

“I went through your purse and I know your name is Sandy. I don’t want to be too familiar though. Is it ok if I call you Sandy?”

“I’m going to come out and shoot you now,” was her reply.

“I’m Brad,” he countered.

“Ok. I’m going to come out and shoot you now, Brad.”

He smiled. She called him Brad.

He heard a rustling behind the door. She was opening it.

“I know it takes a lot of trust for a relationship to work, Sandy. I love your musical tastes and your taste in art. I see all the pictures of you with other men. Boyfriends, I assume. I appreciate you might have trust issues. You might not want to feel vulnerable. You’re in your safe place now. I get it. I think if you get to know me, we could be wonderful together. Will you give me a shot?”

It was a tremendously poor choice of words.

The door opened and Sandy shot him right through his Lone Ranger mask.

Women... am I right?

the spoon diatribe

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Now, the easy thing for me to do would be to pretend this didn't happen. That it was some crazy diatribe delivered by a fictional character in one of my dumb stories.

But it wasn't. This was actually something I said, almost word for word. I believe the bond between writer and reader is sacred and demands honesty... even when it makes me look like a moron. Before I offer up the aforementioned diatribe, let me try to put it into some sort of context. I think most people agree we can't lash out every time we're angry or disappointed. Instead, we tuck it away somewhere inside our heads, and it's fair to say psychologists make a pretty penny sorting through the accumulated rage inside patients' conscious and subconscious. If people can't afford a shrink or don't believe in the science they trade in, this is the shit that happens.

Date: This morning. Time: 8:07 a.m.

Subject (me): pours a bowl of cereal and opens a drawer to retrieve a spoon. There are no spoons.

“What the fuck?! How can we be out of spoons? There are fifty fucking forks and a hundred fucking knives but not one motherfucking spoon? Are you shitting me? Do the people in this house eat nothing but soup? What's for dinner? Roast beef? Nope! We're having soup again! Soup for dinner and soup for breakfast and soup for lunch and if you want a snack, it better fucking be some sort of bisque, bouillon, or fucking consommé because god forbid we dirty a fucking fork in case the Queen herself stops by to inspect our forks! If you want roast beef, you better throw it in a blender and puree that shit because we only use spoons in *this* household!”

It's at this point I decided to pull the silverware drawer all the way out and hurl the assorted utensils across the kitchen floor. With the same focus, I decided to return the drawer back into the confines beneath the countertop in one swift motion, missed by a good margin, and watched it disintegrate into a twisted pile of cheap particle board at my feet. I was left holding only the drawer front.

Which I held onto throughout the rest of the tirade.

"I distinctly remembering going out and buying extra spoons to avoid just this scenario. I bought them in bulk. I needed someone from the store to help me get the giant box full of spoons to my car!"

At this point, I shook my fist in the general direction of the box of cereal and, forgetting I was still clutching a - until recent events - drawer front which, due to very recent events, was transformed into just a piece of wood with a handle on it, knocked it over, spilling out what seemed to be an avalanche of Froot Loops.

"What the fuck are you looking at, toucan?! At least come out and admit you're gay. Look at yourself! Look at yourself! Take a look in the mirror, Sam, and just come out of the fucking closet! Are you going to clean up this mess? No? I didn't think so! Who spells fruit f-r-o-o-t?!"

I surveyed the damage and for a moment, it appeared I'd be able to collect myself.

"If only female mosquitoes bite people and only male crickets chirp, why can't we make them mate so that at least we'll hear those fucking moscricketoes coming at us? What the fuck is science for if it can't get that done? You're not helping anyone, science!"

Nope.

"Does every fucker in this house approach their plate the same way a baseball player does? Do they bring three spoons to the table, swing them all around for a few seconds and then hurl two of them into the sink? Batter up! Does it occur to anyone to wash a spoon every year or two? Noooooooo, we just use spoons for everything and then throw them out so I can't have a bowl of fucking cereal to start my day! God forbid I enjoy a bowl of cocksucking cereal with a fucking gay parrot

on the box- fuck you toucan; you're a parrot now. Neanderthals had spoons. Fucking Neanderthals had spoons and I don't. They probably had fucking Froot Loops too, but I can't find a spoon to save my life! Neanderthals! They didn't have dick but even they could dig up a fucking spoon. Cars? Nope! Televisions? Nope. Spoon? Check! I bet they'd look at me and assume I'm a caveman because even they had spoons and now I'm going to have to pour milk all over the floor and get down on all fours and eat my Fruity Fucking Loops off the dirty tile! I bet the first cave painting ever found was some fuckwad eating something with a spoon and smiling ear to ear with a 'I might get eaten later today and I'll probably die before I'm thirty but at least I have this spoon' look on his face!"

It dawned on me where all the spoons were. Across the kitchen in the dishwasher. I advanced upon it as if opening it and finding it devoid of spoons would be the "All work and no spoons makes Lance a dull boy" moment that sends me upstairs to murder everyone in the house. Crunch, crunch, crunch. I made my way over, little red and yellow and green crunched rings marking my progress.

I opened the dishwasher and spoons poured out. Thousands of them. Instantly, I was waist-deep in spoons. The windows of the kitchen exploded outwards with the pressure of so many spoons coming forth. Millions of them. The very roof was lifted off by the sheer number of spoons that filled the house.

Ok, that last part didn't happen, but the rest is totally true. Give yourself bonus points if you asked yourself why I didn't at least mention possibly becoming a "cereal" killer.

The terrible truth is that had I known that Mary Tyler Moore was going to die later in the day, I would have no doubt crumbled to the ground and remained there sobbing until the proper authorities could be summoned.

in the red

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The End.

Worst first sentence you can have for a story... but the truth is I never expected it to end in the first place. I thought it would go on forever. Call me a romantic, but it started so optimistically that the idea of starting another story from scratch was the furthest thing from my mind.

We use words to try and capture memories then spend the rest of our lives trying to erase some of them. Chew them out and spit them up. Then eventually, they're all erased for us and the big "The End" comes.

Seems like a good premise for a new start but maybe that's just the romantic in me surfacing again. Is there any story worth telling that doesn't involve romance?

Here's one. A story about a man who invented a wood chipper that had an opening that looked like a mouth where you fed the wood and then the backside, where the chips were shot out, looked like a human anus.

It really wasn't anything other than a wood chipper, no better or worse than the other models on the market, but the slick advertising made it seem like a brilliant metaphor for what happens when humans eat. Just a lot faster.

The thing is, what makes it a story about romance is the fact that, along with copious amounts of wood, the second most fed-into-a-wood-chipper item is human remains. Murder victims and folks that have gotten on the wrong side of the mafia.

You're trying to tell me that most of those stories don't involve some sort of romance?

I won't believe it.

I can't. Not now anyway.

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