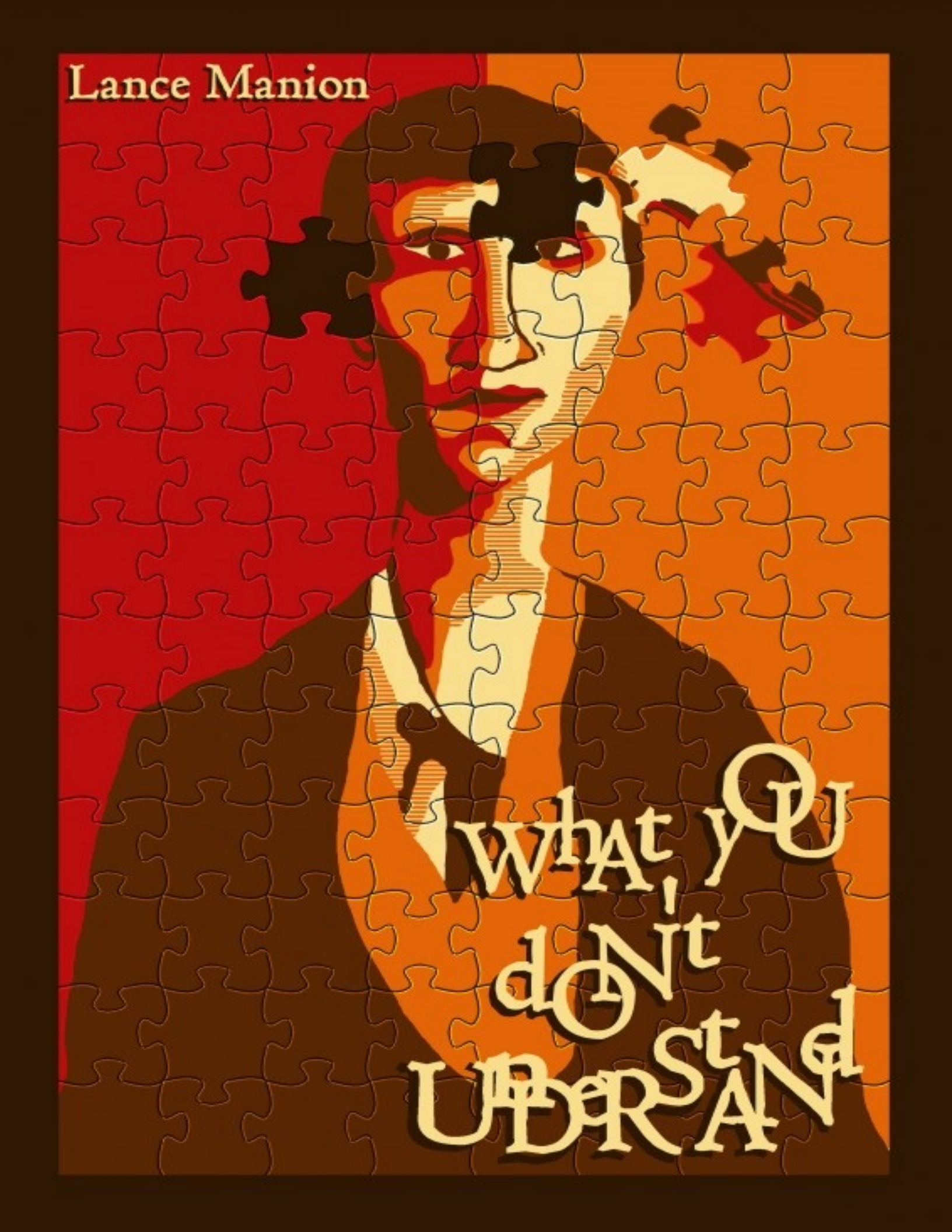


Lance Manion



what, you  
don't  
UNDERSTAND

# What You Don't Understand

**Lance Manion**

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## **ALSO BY LANCE MANION**

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 sluggy scent. What you might ask is a sluggy 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 heads 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 and 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*.

## Boobies (Not The Good Ones)

There is a seabird in the Galápagos Islands called the Nazca booby.

Let me tell you about this fucking bird. You could scour all the islands of the Pacific and not come up with a bigger dick than the Nazca booby. Let me explain exactly what these feathered bastards are up to while nobody is watching them out in the middle of nowhere.

They lay two eggs every breeding season but they lay one five days earlier than the second so that one hatches earlier and that chick gets a head start. Why is this important? Because that older bird kicks the younger one out of the nest and leaves it to die. Eggheads call it siblicide but I call it being a total jag-off.

How did I come to know this?

Because yesterday, I was sitting on my couch flipping through the channels and I came upon what seems to be a seemingly-harmless nature show. One minute I was sipping an ice-cold glass of milk and enjoying a black & white cookie- I'm always looking for any opportunity to bring the races closer together- when this little drama was sprung on me. Not in passing, not as a quick aside, but as the feature attraction of the whole damn show. It might as well have been called "Nazca Boobies: Assholes of the Galápagos!" They show the whole production, from the time the second bird hatches until the time it's lying dead a few feet away from the mom bird and his/her terrible sibling. In between those two events, to the tune of about ten minutes, I was treated to every peck, push and poke of the larger bully booby. It was gut-wrenching. And the whole time momma booby was sitting there watching it without a care in the world.

I was literally yelling at the television like a lunatic. The fucking younger chick literally starves to death within feet of his/her mom. "You fucking dick! You're a horrible bird!"

You know why the mom doesn't give a shit? Because she did the same thing to her younger brother/sister. Every living Nazca booby is a murderer. The whole species is made up of dicks! Every damn one of them.

For some reason, whenever I eat a black and white cookie, I eat the white part first and then eat the black. Obviously I like chocolate better than vanilla and this act clearly demonstrates I have amazing self-discipline but as I brought up race in my previous mention of the cookie, I now have to consider that since the first half of my life I've banged nothing but white women, soon I will be doing nothing but black chicks.

Why did I have to say chicks? It's brought me back to that horrible nature special after I was doing my best to change the subject.

Remember when I said this act of siblicide wasn't briefly mentioned in passing but giving the starring role in the nature show? You want to know what *was* mentioned in passing about the Nazca booby? I don't think you do but I'm going to go ahead and tell you. Its right up there with siblicide and it was just quickly offered up with no follow-up or explanation. The narrator showed no shock or disgust, he just came right out and blurted it like he was giving the time and temperature.

If it seems I'm beating around the bush, it's because I am. I don't want to think about it because it really bothers me that these birds exist and live on none other than the Galápagos Islands, where Darwin got his *Origin of the Species* on. How can such a shitty bird continue to share the planet with other nicer animals?

Ok, ok. Here it is. The male birds that can't get it up or find a mate during breeding season walk around and rape the chicks of other birds. Now you might think that because they kill their siblings that these baby birds have a good raping coming to them, but it's still a fucked up thing to be going on. I wonder if Darwin saw any of this shit happening and just kept it to himself. Maybe he thought "The less particulars they know, the better." The Nazca booby could have sunk the theory.

Can you imagine if God turns out to be a Nazca booby and we find out later that Jesus had a little brother that he killed? While Mary sat by the manger minding her own business. Maybe that would help explain priests.

It's funny how all this talk of mortality suddenly makes me realize that given my black & white cookie theory, I can determine approximately when I'll die. The first time I sleep with a black girl (I don't say chick to avoid thinking of boobies and boobies immediately make me think of chicks, I can't win) will mark the halfway point of my life. Double my age at time of penetration and start making the arrangements.

Somewhere there is a black girl who will read this and it will act as a mating dance of sorts, in the sense that it will make her want to sleep with me, and I will bang her and it will mark the next phase of my sex life and then she'll get pregnant with twins and one will be born five days earlier than the other and I will be forced to immediately scoop up the second right after he/she pops out and flee the hospital and take him/her to live on some island in the Pacific where his/her older brother/sister can't ever find him/her and we'll live on a diet of nothing but boobies.

And with every booby I kill, I will think of her.

If there is such a thing as literary Darwinism, this story is definitely the second chick.

# The Joys Of Obliviousness

(first appeared at [www.section8magazine.com/](http://www.section8magazine.com/))

One day while driving, I noticed that I hadn't hit a red light the entire trip. Miles and miles of road and dozens of traffic lights and not one red. As soon as I noticed it, the next light was red. It was then I realized the power of obliviousness.

I wanted to develop my ability to be unaware of things but was unsure how to begin. Just by beginning, wasn't I acknowledging it and thereby defeating the whole purpose? Like a pitcher who is in the seventh inning and suddenly realizes nobody has gotten on base yet. From that point on, the pressure mounts. Ideally he would have preferred to hear from a reporter in the dressing room "Did you know you threw a no-hitter?"

I imagine floating through a world of difficulties by being completely oblivious to them. The kind of casual ignorance that allows a child to skip unharmed through a minefield or a writer to believe there is such a thing as non-fiction.

What was I thinking as I drove through all the greens? Does it matter? Would perfect obliviousness have us laying on our deathbeds, having never been delayed at a traffic light but completely unaware of anything we ever thought or didn't think? Would we breathe our last breath without knowing it?

There were once sick individuals that would torture animals because they believed all the yelps and anguished cries were just the outward manifestations of a clockwork piece pretending to feel pain. How could they be so oblivious?

Because it suited their purpose. They were blowing through green lights all the way.

Let's say that for a period of time you buy into the fact that there is someone for everyone. A special person that completes you. It's a great thing to think that there is someone that you just can't live without until there comes a time where you have to live without them. Circumstance can be a bitch like that.

You can choose to have to stop at every red light or you can speed up and catch a few yellows until such a time that you're back on the road again. If at some point you sat down and started an autobiography, there is no way in the world you could call it anything but fiction. Try as you might, obliviousness will be sitting next to you and filling in all the gaps you put in the story in the first place.

What's so great about green lights anyway? I think everyone has had moments during long drives where they suddenly snap back into reality and realize that they don't remember the last hour of a trip. An hour closer to their destination but an hour of the journey gone forever. Is life about the destination or the journey?

Does it matter if you are the driver or the passenger if you're not looking at anything but the road in front of you? Just imagine all the stuff you're missing along the way.

Does it matter...?

Maybe we are just clockwork. Playing a role and registering the appropriate emotions but longing for the obliviousness of sleep or death. Waiting to crawl into bed or the grave and away from the red lights and green lights and minefields and strikeouts and lost loves and bitchy circumstances that make up our days.

That make up our fictional lives.

True story: one day while driving, I noticed that I hadn't hit a red light the entire trip. Miles and miles of road and dozens of traffic lights and not one red. It was then I realized for that space in time I might as well have been dead.

Luckily I am oblivious to the fact that this makes very little sense to anyone but you.



Wow, that felt awesome! I know you assume that I just copied and pasted that over and over, but I actually typed out each and every one of those sentences like Jack "All Work And No Play Makes Jack A Dull Boy" Nicholson in *The Shining*.

Very therapeutic.

Shit, make it full blown marathon and give the whole family cancer. I'll finish or die trying.

Which would be sort of ironic.



## Birthdays And Other Melancholy Days

April felt more like October. She was only forty-nine but she felt the cold coming. She never liked cake and she hated people singing to her so she knew the next few hours were going to suck ass. What were birthdays but a yearly reminder that you're a year closer to death? For all she knew, she was going to get run over tomorrow and the number forty-nine would sum up her entire existence.

She especially dreaded fifty.

Half a hundred.

Good Lord.

She had her doubts about Him too.

If she sat and thought about it, which she was doing, the days that were making their way past her at an alarming rate weren't that valuable anyway. Not like when she was eighteen. Now *those* days were gold. When she was eighteen, guys wanted to fuck her. She would trade two of her days now for one of those days then. She would probably let more guys fuck her.

Try explaining that to an eighteen year old.

"You'll want to fuck more."

(Then the police come and drag away the creepy old lady...)

She saw it all play out in her head as she sat behind the large planter at the mall. She was hiding from her party and the people that made up her life and her life in general. She saw a couple of teenage girls but refrained from imparting any advice.

By the time she was seventy, her days would be almost worthless. Or so she thought. She knew plenty of older people and they all seemed happy enough and she wondered how they did it. Maybe when you get older everything is fuzzier, like when you're given valium or whatever it is they give you before an operation to take the edge off. Maybe life is good like that.

She found that she had wandered into one of those stores at the mall that sells rude t-shirts, posters of punk bands made up of men who seem a bit old to be acting the rebel, and sex toys. She stood in front of the cheap vibrators and laughed as girls and boys walked by and giggled to themselves at the thought of actually buying one. She knew they were poorly constructed and she'd probably snap one in half the first time she pulled it from its box and inserted it into hers. They were just for show. Pity the girl who bought one with the intention of making a lifetime friend.

She felt a familiar burning in her hand. That's what comes with age. Random aches and pains with no medical cause. She stared at the hands of a middle-aged woman and felt the usual revulsion at the loosening skin and brown spots that were starting to arrive. She moved them like they belonged to someone else. Her hands couldn't be this old. They must be novelty hands.

She realized she'd been standing in front of the vibrators for too long and sheepishly moved on. Somewhere there was a restaurant filling up with her friends and some acquaintances. Probably just as eager to have the festivities behind them as she was. She slowly moved to the exit of the mall, but couldn't get herself to leave.

The girl at the kiosk offered to pierce her tongue and she stood and debated it. She remembered her brother's advice about tongue piercing: "Guys assume that if your tongue is pierced, you suck dick," but even that wasn't enough to convince her.

She wondered how people born on New Year's Day make it through the day. The last thing needed was a giant flashing ball dropping into a crowd to remind her. She quickly ran through all the negative words she associated with crowds and the people who make them up. Then she imagined them celebrating and kissing.

The pain in her hand she could take. The long ache in her heart she could not. She tried to focus on the burning in her old-woman hand but he wouldn't be ignored. The only man she'd ever loved and

lusted after. She'd had plenty of both but never at the same time so he barged into her thoughts uninvited as he was apt to do from time to time. She wondered if he ever thought about her.

She walked back to the kiosk to get her tongue pierced but chickened out.

A teenage boy was looking her up and down and she met his gaze with a smile. He blushed and she realized his dick would fare no better than the cheap vibrator in her box. The thought made her laugh.

“Careful son, I will break that shit off.”

She finally made her way out to her car. Tonight would still be worth a dozen nights when she was eighty.

## More Climbers Killed... yawn

I'm getting just a bit sick of hearing about climbers getting killed on Everest. Why the fuck are they there to begin with?

Ok, that's not fair. Let me back up and think about this a second. I'm not mad that they are there. If they want to climb up a giant, freezing-cold mountain in the middle of nowhere, they are certainly free to do so. I'm mad about all the publicity they get every time there is an avalanche. I couldn't care less about a bunch of rich people that are so painfully bored with their lives they have to jet off to another country just to climb a mountain.

I can almost hear you now... "What have YOU done that's so impressive, Lance Manion?!"

Nothing. But I'm not going to get killed by an avalanche watching TV on my couch in my underwear. And if I do, I won't be clogging up the news reports with details of my "tragedy." In fact, if someone is killed by an avalanche while sitting in their home, that would actually qualify as a tragedy. An avalanche killing people on the side of a mountain in the middle of nowhere isn't eligible to use that term. Those people had to spend a lot of time and money to put themselves into the path of that snow.

That's what mountains do. They have avalanches. Humans are the only species on Earth that actually intentionally puts itself into the path of danger. There are no "extreme" zebras.

Maybe I just don't get it. If the view from the top of Everest is so good, why not put in a fucking escalator? You could even put in one of those cameras at the top like they have when you ride a rollercoaster and you don't know when the picture is being taken. Instead of a look of terror ruining the picture, it would be the snot frozen to your nose. If you're worried about an escalator taking all the challenge out of getting to the top, I don't think you're taking into account the long line that would no doubt form. And where there are escalators there are inevitably fat people trying to get their fatmobiles up them.

I could see it being a very trying experience.

Of course, for some people, the idea that you would remove the possibility of them being turned into a climbercicle ruins the whole thing.

Who cares? These bored rich people can find some other hobby to fill their empty hours. They can bungee jump into a wood chipper, for all I care. There are people with real challenges to face scattered all over the globe. I'm not losing any sleep if we make Everest a Disney Park with a Mr. Moose character walking back and forth at the summit trying to peddle foam antler hats.

I'm not sure why I had to invent a new character named Mr. Moose when there are so many beloved Disney characters to choose from, but I'm unclear about the subtleties of trademark infringement and such so I was scared to mention Mickey or Pluto.

Inevitably one of the "victims" of the most recent avalanche will read this and be offended by its tone. I might even get an email yelling at me and telling me what a great husband and father one of the climbercicles was.

Yeah, he was such a great father, he had to leave his family for a month or more to walk up the side of a mountain. Maybe if his wife wasn't such a naggy bitch, he wouldn't have felt the need to sleep in a tent, freezing his ass off. Just saying, before you attack Lance Manion, make sure you have your own house in order. I know there are many ways I could die this afternoon, but I'm not actively engaged in making that list longer. Your frozen ex-cicle should have taken up bird watching.

Every now and then, you run into one of these Everest characters. Sitting at a cocktail party waiting to be asked about his adventure at the top of the world. He thinks everyone knows because we're all talking about him and I just want to go up to him and tell him the reason that everyone knows he's a climber is because half his face is black with frostbite and could he pull his wool cap all the way down and stop scaring the children. When he dishes out a condescending chortle at my expense, I just want to

whip out a picture of me and Mr. Moose at the summit eating corn dogs and waiting to get our sack so we can start our three-hour slide down to the bottom.

Here's my point... avalanches are not only super dangerous but also about the most preventable form of death out there. If you stay away from the sides of mountains loaded with snow, you won't get killed by an avalanche. There is no reason to be in the way of an avalanche in the first place. If you get avalanched, it's on you. I don't want to hear about it except maybe as a joke on a late-night talk show.

Fuck Everest and quadruple fuck the people who climb it.

# Shadows And Dust And Cats And Accordion Necks

(first appeared at <https://thewritinggarden.wordpress.com/2015/07/07/the-writing-garden-issue-four/>)

I'm looking out my third-story window and there is a tree that I've seen a thousand times before but for some reason today, it is beautiful. Actually, the tree itself isn't beautiful but the shadow it casts on the snow is beautiful. The tree has no leaves and is actually quite ordinary. The shadow - purple and all stretched out against a perfectly white background- is wonderful and I wonder why I've suddenly stumbled upon this scene and appreciated it when it's no doubt been there most of the winter.

I could say that it has to do with the angle the sun is hitting the tree or the cloudless sky but the truth is, I just never invested any energy into seeing beauty in it.

I'd like to illustrate my point with a visual.

Imagine for a minute that people had accordions where their necks are. Now imagine how annoying it must be to be in a crowded car traveling along a bumpy road if everyone has accordions for necks. Don't stop at reading this; picture it in your head. Imagine the noise of five heads bobbing up and down slightly as you travel over each bump in the road. The noise it makes.

People just don't work hard enough to find whimsy in their lives.

You will bust your ass to catch a plane or pay a bill but you won't take ten seconds to picture something that might make you laugh.

Now take another ten seconds and imagine how well weighted hats would sell in a universe where people had accordions for necks.

I know, I know, the new job's a hassle and the kids have the flu but don't you owe it to yourself to take a little mental vacation?

Would people just get used to the sound of heads going up and down as they walk and run and dance or would it drive everybody mad? Would the world be filled with insane people jumping up and down for the sole purpose of making their accordion necks make noise?

The deaf would be envied.

Is that what you're saying to yourself every time you miss the chance to feel whimsy? That the days aren't really passing and you can get them back and you'll always have time later on to appreciate a witty observation. That there won't come a day when party time and potty time will elicit the same enthusiasm.

Bullshit.

Happiness takes effort. I'm not talking about making money or repairing a relationship. I mean taking a breath and selfishly allowing yourself to keep your mental faculties sharp. Are you even capable of appreciating beauty anymore? Not nodding your head in time with the rest of the sheep at some painting but grabbing a poignant moment in your own life and drinking it and swishing it around your mouth and swallowing. Lying in a tub of it. When is the last time you laughed until you snorted or made some other obnoxious sound?

Go to any comedy club and you will literally see people trying not to laugh. They paid money to watch a comedian and yet there they sit trying not to laugh. Are they afraid that if they laugh they will set off their accordion necks and everyone will turn to see what the ruckus is about? Do they worry that laughing will leave lines around their mouths like embarrassing stains on their shirts?

So for the love of all that is holy, take a full minute to imagine being in a car with people who have accordions for necks. Follow that train of thought to all the silly places it leads. Fight for the brief flicker of joy it will elicit when you think of something that only you could have come up with. You owe it to yourself.

Really.

I'm just the tree. Your imagination is the shadow... and it's been sure nice talking to you.

## Sucker Punched

The problem with writing flash fiction is that people who read one story base their entire opinion about your writing on that one small sample. If they like it, you want them to remember your name but never read another word you've written because eventually they'll stumble upon something they hate and if they hate it, you're desperate for them to try another one in the hopes that they'll hate it slightly less.

First impressions and such.

The only way around a problem like this is to write a story that completely captures what you're all about, which of course is completely impossible given people change almost on the hour, so here goes.

I was attached to this girl once, attached being an intentionally vague word, and she owned two chinchillas. She named them Baby Doll and Sweet Pea after characters in her favorite movie. The truth was that she only purchased them because she was unable to buy any pets originating from Australia. For some reason, she felt a connection with Australia and I only discovered this after stopping her from hurling Baby Doll off of a second floor staircase wearing a crude set of wings she'd constructed for her pet in the hopes of having her mimic one of the more endearing features of the sugar glider.

Sometimes on really long drives, you suddenly arrive at home with no memory of the miles you've traveled. I had a lot of days like that with her. Emotionally speaking.

Baby Doll and Sweet Pea did not get along. I don't know enough about chinchillas to say if this was unique or typical behavior, but they would try to bite each other right through the cages they lived in. She had hoped they would play together so she didn't feel she had to amuse them all the time, but from the start it was clear they were solitary creatures who resented the presence of another chinchilla in their territory.

One time, she withheld their daily treat of a raisin for a week because they refused to keep wearing the duck bills she'd made for them to wear in order to look more like platypuses. Raisins were apparently ok for them to eat but the list of non-approved fruits and grains was pretty hefty, all of them a risk to cause the chinchilla diarrhea. It was explained to me that a chinchilla with diarrhea was something to avoid at all costs for reasons that were never explained to me.

One day, after pleading with Rapunzel to finally let down her hair, I climbed the tower to find a note explaining why she had to fly to Australia for awhile and asking if I would take care of her chinchillas.

I was grieved to find out that chinchillas live for a very long time. Any hopes of walking in after a week or two to find them dead was quickly extinguished after a quick visit to a pet store for advice and supplies.

They are not affectionate creatures. They will hop around when you let them out of the cages and poop little pellets every few seconds but they won't tolerate being petted or stroked. They live life completely on their own terms.

I finally decided to put their two cages right next to each other thinking that it would force them to get along. The next day I heard a shriek and found Sweet Pea had one of her little fingers bitten off. Undeterred, I separated the cages an inch and left them to sort things out. Maybe all they needed was time.

Then they peed on each other. Endlessly. They would sit back on their hind legs and let fly. Face to face they would screech and pee and chew their cages until I wanted to make them into a pair of slippers.

I would sit there and let them run around the room pooping their little pellets and jump up on top of me and I would wonder where she was and what she was doing and if she was ever coming back.

I was out of town for a week and when I came back I was alarmed to see that Sweet Pea's water bottle had fallen off the cage and I was convinced I'd find a shriveled up chinchilla waiting for me but instead I got a very strange surprise. Baby Doll's water bottle had been pushed in such a way that both chinchillas could access it. It was the single most uplifting gesture I could have imagined.

The next day, she called to say she wouldn't be coming home.

Needing a lift, I went upstairs and asked Baby Doll why, if she hated Sweet Pea so much, she would share her water and allow her to live.

She explained that she still hated Sweet Pea but that she enjoyed getting peed on.



## Oral Fixations

Sometimes an awkward moment can be the only thing that turns an ordinary conversation into honesty. Maybe we all have some clandestine respect for fate and in the end, that's what makes us decide, consciously or otherwise, to let people into our worlds.

It wasn't as if we hadn't been getting along. Lunch had been pleasant and each of us seemed comfortable in the presence of the other.

But that mushroom...

What else could make a couple of people who were feeling attracted to each other burst through the usual walls and go straight to a weird level of commitment?

After lunch, the walk through the woods had been intended as an opportunity to take a few deep breaths and see where things were headed. Instead, we ended up staring at an enormous mushroom that could not be described in any other way than as a penis. The long shaft, the large head- it was as if nature had done its best to create an ode to the male genitalia. I think it's fair to say that neither of us would have been shocked to see a pair of hairy balls perched beneath it.

We stood ogling. Jaws slack. We didn't know whether to laugh or keep walking but it seemed the whole forest existed as a way to showcase this giant glistening mushroom dick.

So she started to talk.

What else could have possibly led to her telling me everything?

That she'd been let go as a dental assistant, a job that meant the world to her. She was let go due to her own poor performance and she had no one to blame but herself. Or so she said.

Ever since the day she was fired she hadn't brushed her teeth. Nor would she ever again.

I stared at the mushroom and tried to process what I was hearing. I attempted to prod her into sharing a little more about why she would withhold oral hygiene in response to her termination but she seemed a little defensive and, truth be told, I couldn't concentrate because of the mushroom penis sitting right in front of me.

As the weeks passed it started to become an issue. At first her breath was a little off and I could deal with it, but eventually it started to smell like I always imagined a rhinoceros turd would smell. And her teeth started to get a film over them.

But she was smart and funny and the sex was great so I let it slide. After one particularly outstanding love-making session she drew me close and whispered "I'll be yours until the end... just never ask me to brush my teeth."

So I didn't.

Even after they started to fall out. She almost never smiled and I almost never wanted her to. Every time she would flash even the smallest grin, I would get a glimpse of the nasty stuff going on in her mouth. If there was something funny on TV, I would quickly change the channel. Her gums were getting inflamed and there were grey and green shadows between all the remaining teeth. There always seemed to be flies buzzing around her mouth. Looking back, it might have been my imagination. I began to have nightmares where I would French-kiss her and then feel maggots crawling all over my tongue.

I would like to think that she was unaware of the dangers of not brushing but given her old profession, it's unlikely. One day she was with me and the next, an infection from an abscessed tooth reached her brain and she was gone.

It was a closed casket.

So here I sit in front of where the mushroom used to be. Someone had ripped it out, perhaps offended by the sheer penisness of it or maybe it was given as a gift for a person who had everything. Whatever the case, all that remained was a shallow smelly rotting hole where it used to call home.

A hole that makes me miss her.  
Life is funny in how unfunny it can be.

# Casper

I'm not exactly sure what makes an albino an albino- I always thought it was pink eyes, but I think I got that from an old action movie that had an albino bad guy- but whatever it is, I'm pretty sure we had one on our hands in college.

It was sophomore year and I lived on a dorm floor that was laid out like a quad. Three of the rooms facing out off of a main common area and one smaller room that had no windows and lurked off at the end of a hallway. That's where he lived.

Casper.

A cruel nickname to be sure, but as this story unfolds, I'm sure you'll understand why a bunch of dumb college guys would bestow such a moniker.

He never left his room. Even when he left it, he didn't leave it... he emerged. You wouldn't say a baby left his mother's womb, there is far too much else involved in the procedure to simply say left. Same with Casper.

Nobody ever saw him during the light of day. The only time he would emerge was in the middle of the night. To use his ham radio. Apparently the reception in the bowels of the building wasn't great so he would set up shop in the middle of the lounge.

I'm not sure how many albinos there are in the world, but it wouldn't surprise me if the amount coincides with the exact number of ham radio enthusiasts. He would sit out there yacking away to people on the other side of the globe at all hours and wake us up.

And not with the yacking.

He chirped.

Like a tree frog.

The fucker sat out in the lounge at four in the morning chirping. I'm not even sure how he produced the sound. I was afraid to look. I imagined his neck swelling to enormous proportions prior to the chirp. Maybe all albinos chirp; like I said, I'm not an expert on them. Maybe the chirping was the real communication and all the talk was just cover as the albinos sat up at night planning their eventual takeover.

I digress.

So you had three rooms full to bursting with the kind of enthusiasm for life you only find on a university campus and one room with a creepy pale guy who nobody ever saw except when they stumbled in late at night. Before you leap to the conclusion he was shunned from the start, just know that we did try to reach out. We would knock and knock and know without a doubt that he was inhabiting the dark confines behind the door but he would never answer.

I'm not sure that he ever showered. It was tough to tell because the hallway to his room smelled like a rotting corpse from day one, so subtle shifts in the odor were difficult to detect.

It was important to us, at least at first, that he felt like one of the guys and that we weren't excluding him when we headed out to various social functions, but he would have none of it. Apparently the lure of liquor and women did not tug on his heartstrings with the same fervor as his ham radio.

Maybe operating a ham radio is actually wildly entertaining and I've been missing out all these years.

I don't think his eyes were pink though. I would have remembered that. Mostly because if I walked into the lounge at four in the morning, half in the bag, and was greeted with a chirping cave thing with pink eyes, I would have probably leapt right through the window and plunged to my death.

You'd remember a thing like that.

So the year zipped by and nobody ever saw him again or heard anything about him but every time I hear a tree frog, I give a little smile and think about ol' Casper and wonder if he still haunts the ham radio airwaves.

Fuck that, I'm not going to feel nostalgic for an albino.

## The Struggle Ever Renew'd

There is nothing quite like the exhilaration of heading out on a crisp October night to do some trick-or-treating with your kids. Their palpable anticipation is like a live wire running directly from their eyes to my heart, making it flutter as we put the finishing touches on our costumes and head out to visit friends and neighbors. Me, dressed as the Grim Reaper, my older son as Walt Whitman and my youngest as a clumsy research assistant from the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology.

Why a clumsy research assistant from the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, you ask? Give me one second to slip in the first Walt Whitman quote and I'll explain.

*There was a child went forth every day;  
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became;  
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of  
the day, or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.*

The Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology was where Walt Whitman's brain was taken to be researched after his passing. That is until one day a careless researcher dropped it. It broke into numerous pieces and was summarily scooped up and thrown in the trash. No fanfare. Just tossed in the garbage.

My oldest son, "Walt," calling me My Captain since donning his disguise (he thought of that himself) and his little brother, clutching their plastic pumpkins, strode through our front door and into the beckoning night. You'll excuse me if I wax a bit poetic; seeing him dressed as Walt gets my literary juices flowing.

At the first door, the clumsy research assistant from the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology rang the bell and when the door opened, Mr. Whitman said " O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring!" instead of "Trick or treat," just as we'd practiced. Delighted neighbors squealed their approval and produced handfuls of candy to reward them for their cleverness. Death, in the form of me, gave a nodding approval from the shadows and shepherded the pair to the next house.

*Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walks of dreams,  
I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet and  
hands;*

This production was repeated dozens of times until their pumpkins overflowed with all things sticky and sugary. We all sensed that the end of the evening was nigh as we decided to visit one last abode before returning to our own, there to spill our bounty on the floor and divide the candy into various piles to be consumed or traded or discarded. Such was our revelry that I put aside the fact that this last house contained an individual whom I loathe. A man whom I've had quarrels with in the past.

A doorbell was pressed. An " O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring!" cheerfully offered up. The man looked down at my sons then put down his bowl of candy and departed, to return momentarily holding a package of sandwich meat. He carefully placed a slice of bologna into each of the plastic pumpkins and then closed the door a little too forcefully in the faces of my offspring.

Not allowing this to spoil our fun, I removed the slimy offenders and made light of it as we departed. I cheerfully walked Walt and my clumsy research assistant home. I was going to say clumsy research assistant from the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology but I feared that you might be a little sick of reading all that so I went with the shorter version out of courtesy. Of course, having explained it, you've now read more than originally required to begin with, so any good will I might have garnered due to my thoughtfulness has now evaporated.

After the requisite amount of giggling and tomfoolery, I put my two happy children to bed. Despite the enormous amount of sugar no doubt coursing through their system, after a prolonged evening of physical activity, they dropped off to sleep quickly and I was free to once again don my costume.

I returned to my bologna-dispensing neighbor's house. Except this time, I hopped over the back fence and entered through the rear door. When he saw a dark figure clutching a scythe standing in his kitchen, he knew instantly and with no uncertainty that he was about to die.

*I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men, at anguish with  
themselves, remorseful after deeds done;*

There is no need to tell you how I dispatched him, only that I did. After some minutes rummaging through his garage to find a saw, and his cabinets to find an ice cream scooper, I had his skull off and scraped out his brain like the innards of a pumpkin... careful to throw it out with the same indifference shown by the staff at the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology.

*That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly  
wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world:*

What a sight awaited the next visitors to his house! Him, seated at his door within arms-reach of his tub of candy, a single candle flickering inside his empty head, the light making its way out of the two empty sockets where his eyes used to be. How long would it be until they recovered from their initial fright and realize that it's not an elaborate prop but the remains of a fellow human being?

I returned home to shower and remove any evidence of my visit. Upon checking on my sons again, I saw that, despite its apparent itchiness, my eldest once again slipped on his big grey Walt Whitman beard. I smiled broadly and kissed them both on their foreheads.

You have to love All Hallows' Eve.

## Things I'm Thankful For

I've always admired the way Dave Barry can make me laugh out loud without using profanity or mentioning his penis. He is also able to write about topical subjects instead of just random things that happen to pass through his head. In that spirit, I'm going to sit down and write a Thanksgiving list of things I'm thankful for without mentioning Dave Barry's fucking penis.

First and foremost, I'm happy that the pilgrims had better weapon technology than the Indians. I'm pretty sure that when the pilgrims arrived, the Indians had bows and arrows but had yet to invent the arrowhead and instead still used suction cups (do you have any idea how many suction cup arrows it took to bring down a bison? You have to respect their pertinacity) while I'm ninety percent certain that pilgrims had machine guns. Had it been the other way around, I'd be eating a Thanksfornothing's Day meal in some squalid Settler's colony somewhere in South Dakota.

I'm thankful for stuffing. That's what I call sex.

I'm thankful for the fact that we eat turkey on Thanksgiving. I love the idea that an entire nation would select a day to consume one particular bird. When turkeys eventually evolve to the point that they can fully comprehend the meaning of this, you have to think it will cause them real internal angst. While they will resent these yearly holocausts, they will also have to take a good look in the mirror and realize just how delicious they are.

I'm thankful for little traditions. Like for instance how I come out to my parents during the Thanksgiving meal every year. Sure, for the first few years it upset them, but once they realized that I'm not gay and I just like to shake things up at the table, it has become a treasured part of the meal.

I'm thankful for bursts of insight that other people don't have. When I realized the wisdom at the intersection of the expressions "Getting there is half the fun" and "Showing up is half the battle," it made me feel even more brilliant than I usually do. Which is pretty brilliant.

I'm thankful for nice reviews on Amazon.

I'm also thankful for the bad ones.

I'm thankful for never having watched a single minute of *The View*.

I'm especially thankful for not wanting to change genders. Sometimes it's the little things that you need to appreciate. I look down at my penis- remember, I said I wouldn't mention Dave Barry's penis but I said nothing of my own - and I get filled with a warm feeling of appreciation. And not just because it's so big. I just like knowing it's there.

Perhaps because of the aforementioned, I'm thankful for girls with big tits. I realize that my list has lost some of the naive charm typically associated with Thanksgiving, but once I explain why I'm thankful for girls with big tits, I'm sure you'll understand why I mention it. It's not because I prefer them over small tits, it's just that whenever a girl with big tits bends over, I hear porno music in my head.

I'm thankful that you still have no idea why hearing porno music in my head would somehow make being thankful for big tits more acceptable but you're still reading this list anyway. Readers like yourself don't come along every day, so I just want to tell you how much I appreciate you.

And your shocking lack of standards/expectations when it comes to reading lists of reasons a writer might be thankful on Thanksgiving.

I'm thankful for living on a planet with a single sun as opposed to a binary system.

I hope you have a nice Thanksgiving. If you don't live in America, I won't hold it against you.

As long as you sign on to whatever second-rate version of Amazon you have in your god-forsaken country and give one of my books a review, I'll be thankful enough for both of us.

## Hardness In Grey Places

People on the outside have a lot of misconceptions of what it is like on the inside. They've watched *Shawshank Redemption* a few times and think they have a handle on it but they don't. Mostly because they don't know much about human nature.

At least the way it is on the inside.

Prison is all about being hard. That's what gets a man respect. It's what separates him from his peers. In some cases, it's what protects him.

Hardness isn't about what you have; it's all about what you're willing to lose.

Sean for example.

It took a while for everyone to see how hard he was. He had a quiet way about him, a walk and a talk that just wasn't normal around here. He strolled, like a man in a park without a care or a worry in the world, like he had on an invisible coat that would shield him from this place. Then one day at lunch, he suddenly started talking. He told us a story about how he and an associate at the firm he worked for would make a game of messing with the sales reps that stopped in occasionally to pitch their products. He and this friend would take turns interrupting the meeting by raising their hand and then talking as long as they could without actually asking a question. They would talk until it got too uncomfortable or they were cut off by their embarrassed superiors. It was a little game they played.

He was hard.

After that, he ran the place. Nobody messed with Sean. It wasn't long after the salesman story that he told us another. This one about one of his old girlfriends, how she sometimes had panic attacks when they were having sex and he would pretend that he didn't notice and how much better the sex was for him.

Sean was hard. Jack Henry Abbot hard.

Eventually, I worked up the nerve to ask him what he was in for. Turns out that this friend he had on the outside, the one who he would play the "interrupt the salesman" game with, was wrapped up in this tale as well. Apparently they were both very competitive and they came up with a game where they would count how long they could hold onto the hand of a salesman during the introductory shake before it was pulled away from them. They would do this all month and then tally up their scores. Turns out one month Sean was way behind so at 4:30pm on the 31<sup>st</sup>, he grabbed onto the hand of a Vice President and didn't let go until the police were called.

Do you understand now? Do you appreciate just how hard Sean was?

Then one day, he was paroled and Sean was gone. Some birds aren't meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright. And when they fly away, the part of you that knows it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice. But still, the place you live in is that much more drab and empty they're gone.

I guess I just miss my friend.

His parting words to me were something about the only difference between gilded cages and prison cells was your definition of crime.

And as for me? One day, when I have a long gray beard and two or three marbles rollin' around upstairs, they'll let me out. On that day, Jack Henry's observation about prison, "Every day takes me further from my life," will come back to me and remind me again that I am not hard.



# The Truth About Ugly

Well, another National Have Sex With An Ugly Person Day has come and gone, so all that's left to do is change the sheets and take down the crepe paper. Actually, you might want to consider burning the sheets.

And maybe the bed.

That's if you really got into the spirit and bedded a true king/queen of the hogs.

April 3<sup>rd</sup> is a day to reflect on how ugly the word "ugly" is. There is no denying that ugly exists and is in full swing in some people, but the terrible truth is that everyone is ugly to some degree, on the outside or on the inside and heaven help anyone who tries to figure out which is worse. If you were to look into the face of a truly ugly person, which I admit can be rough sledding, you would see nothing more than a reflection of yourself.

Every crooked tooth and insecurity. Every single hair connecting the unibrow and every hair that isn't there in the middle of the shiny bald spot and every ounce of superficial bullshit that allows you to bury your own humanity and join the rest of the flock in bleating and pointing out the flaws in others. It's not like seeing things in clouds or wallpaper. This is so real that it stops it from ever being whimsical. If you look long enough, you start to feel an ache in your chest.

I hate to break it to you, but we all end up ugly. The prettier you to start off, the harder it is to see it all fade and sag and what's worse is the joy that everyone feels watching the beautiful become average and then worse. We all have ugly to look forward to. Some of us will just be better prepared after a lifetime of preparation.

Ugly boot camp. "If you think I'm ugly now, you should have seen me at thirty."

Now before you go running off doing the hypothetical math, 25% of people are beautiful on the outside and inside, 25% are beautiful on the outside and ugly on the inside, 25% are ugly on the outside but beautiful on the inside, and 25% are ugly on the outside and on the inside, you might want to put down your calculator and face some hard truths. Those numbers are way off.

If I knew how to use my Excel program to create a graph, it would look like this;

1% of people are beautiful on the outside and inside.

9% are beautiful on the outside and ugly on the inside.

20% are ugly on the outside but beautiful on the inside.

70% are ugly on the outside and ugly on the inside.

Now mind you, these numbers aren't exactly scientific, but if you're reading this for some greater understanding of the human condition, supported by the full weight of research and logic, boy did you back the wrong horse! If the fact that this article is talking about National Have Sex With An Ugly Person Day didn't tip you off, I can't say whether you're ugly or not, but I can conclude with little uncertainty that you're an idiot.

Does calling you an idiot make me ugly?

Count on it.

But I think you already suspected as much. I came up with the stupid holiday after all. Luckily it will never catch on because the last thing people need to be reminded of is ugliness. It's all around them. Except maybe in Hollywood and Beverly Hills. There you have to close your eyes and listen to figure it out. 0.0% of the 1% on the chart-that-isn't-a-chart lives there. That 1% doesn't want to end up ugly until they absolutely have to be.

If I could make a graph, I think I would go bar over pie.

I can never fight the urge to make a pie chart a smiley face, regardless of the bad news it's imparting, and most people find a defaced graph ugly.

# Mother's Day

Everyone expects when you write a story about your mother, you'd publish it on Mother's Day, but I prefer to wait a few days, just like she would often do when celebrating my birthdays. She should just be happy I'm writing one at all.

That's what she'd say when she'd march through the door with a melting ice cream cake upwards of a week after my big day. She would always adorn it with those candles that you can't blow out and would get angry when I wouldn't even try. I would just let them burn down to the frosting in a traditional battle of wills. It would leave burn marks on the cake, but I didn't really care as I always hated ice cream cakes.

She always calls my dad her "Baby Daddy" despite the fact that she's been married to him for over forty years. She says she loves me like I was adopted.

I'm an only child and I've read that these kind of uncommon things are common. My sister certainly had many of the same experiences and will vouch for me being an orphan.

My favorite childhood memory was the time that my mother got stung by a wasp. She discovered a huge nest of them under the wooden swing set in our backyard. I'd never been attacked by them because I'd never gone near the swing set. As a child, I suffered from vertigo anytime my feet left the ground.

Instead of getting a can of wasp killer, she marched into the garage and returned with a whiffle ball bat. She then proceeded to wade into combat with the nest. The rest of the family sat and watched her do battle from the safety of the kitchen. We could still hear her yelp every time she was stung and I can't remember ever laughing so hard.

You might think with that temper, I'd been on the receiving end of that whiffle ball bat a few times, but she never once hit me with it. When I was bad or wouldn't listen, she'd spray me with wasp killer.

Eventually, both she and the wasps ran out of gas and she entered the kitchen seeking ice for the numerous red welts that seemed to crisscross her body. As she slumped against the sink, I took a black marker and connected all the stings to make the outline of a giant wasp with a giant stinger. By the time I raced back with some colored pens to fill it in, she'd departed to her bedroom to lie down.

I don't think a wasp has dared venture into our backyard ever since. Adult wasps probably tell stories about my mother to small wasps to keep them in line.

My mother doesn't smoke except when around people who don't like smoke. If she is in a place that prohibits smoking, she will fart.

I like to tell myself that the reason she told me the story how female mice, when they and their babies feel trapped by a predator, will kill and eat their offspring in the hopes of someday having more, was a lesson in practicality and not a warning not to go camping with her in an area frequented by bears. I also like to tell myself that if I ever realized my mother was about to eat me, I would have the wherewithal to adorn myself with candles that can't be blown out.

My mother doesn't have a limp except for when participating in events where a limp would make things awkward. The degree in which she limps is directly proportional to how uncomfortable someone limping would be. Once when she was in someone's wedding, she careened down the aisle so badly that she actually touched the pews on both sides as she made her way down. I think if she ever met the Queen of England, she would simply crawl towards her on her hands and knees.

When I was very young, I once wrote a song for my mom for Mother's Day and she liked it so much, her eyes welled up. She said that none of the words rhymed... just like her. After that, I stopped giving her gifts because I had nowhere else to go but down.

## The PC Birds Have Come Home To Roost

I'm not one to just start talking out of my ass about something that I have very little knowledge about (actually I am but I will pretend for the sake of this introduction that I'm not), but I think that most people get offended and lash out at the people that offend them with complete confidence that they will never actually silence the offensive party. That somehow the people that offend are always going to be there and there's fuck all they can do about it.

They could be wrong.

Political Correctness is not only on the uptick but its list of allies is getting formidable. Politicians have been silent for decades on any topic that is controversial and the media has always played the blame game in order to make themselves look more-bleeding-heart-than-thou (think Jon Stewart), but now this oversensitivity has set in with the very people who are supposed to be fighting the good fight against the norm... young people.

The fact that it's getting institutionalized is creepy.

Before I continue, let me return to the idea of misrepresenting oneself in an opening paragraph. I'm completely one to start talking out of my ass on any topic so why did I feel I had to start my discussion of political correctness by somehow feigning credibility? In fact, talking out of one's ass might be the only way to fix this political correctness issue.

Maybe young people see how much influence people can acquire when they are offended. These days power seems to derive from the accumulation of grievances more than contributing to any vague "greater good." If you look at the wide array of paper moral tigers that are inflicting themselves into the national dialogue, you might start to get an appreciation of how fucked up things have gotten. It has opened the door to a world where tyrants, race-hustlers, terrorists, and financial criminals are all given a forum to spew their ignorance to the masses.

Masses that seem to believe that every opinion should be accepted at face value.

I think of all the stupid and hurtful things I've said and written in my life. Thoughts that have passed through my head that I am ashamed of and times where my callousness towards my fellow man has me wondering what is wrong with me. So I think some more. I absorb new data and come to different conclusions and continually update my world view. In my life, I have said every horrible slur known to man out loud. Not in a lighthearted way, but in sincere bursts of anger or spite. Every race, religion and sexual preference has been on the receiving end of this slander and at the end of the day, I wouldn't take back one offensive thing.

I'm just a dumbass human trying to figure things out.

We all are. And when we try and pretend otherwise, when we try and bury these feelings beneath a protective blanket of bullshit, they simmer and grow into something truly scary.

I've never really worried about it before because I've always thought that young people would always reject the crap that came before them and improve on things, but when I hear that Chris Rock won't play colleges because they've become too politically correct, I feel the first drop of perspiration forming on my brow.

I lay (or is it lie?) a lot of the blame at the feet of lawyers. Bullies in suits and ties that are no longer content with shaking down every facet of life for cash and now want to bring the free exchange of irresponsible ideas to a halt. Don't kid yourself, North Korea didn't stop Sony from releasing *The Interview* on Christmas, lawyers did. Lawyers are the reason more of us don't openly laugh at Scientology. The American Dream is now to raise a thug or marry a scumbag and hope they get shot by police so you can become a celebrity millionaire. Young people, who seem to have become sheep, will lay down in front of police stations by the dozens bleating "Hands up, don't shoot!" even though they know that at no time did Michael Brown have his hands up and never uttered the words "Don't shoot."

Apparently, it doesn't matter. It's easier for cowards to demonize the easy targets- cops- than it is to deal with the issues behind crime and violence. In this politically correct charade, facts just don't matter.

It doesn't matter that after 9/11, the entire country wanted terrorists stopped by any means necessary. Now we'll worry that these terrorists might not enjoy getting water-boarded or being sleep deprived like interns at most brokerage firms... even as they heartlessly murder over a hundred children in Pakistan. Young people are actually worried that we're losing the moral high ground to these mindless animals?

I realize that this has turned into more of a rant than a clear-headed evaluation of political correctness, but I don't give a fuck. I don't care that in a week I might change my viewpoint one of these topics. I just want to let it out. Sort through it all. I just want to think about it without feeling like a crazy man. I want the luxury of hearing other people who disagree with me tell me why I'm an asshole!

I want to process what's going on in a world that seems to be getting more fucked up on a daily basis. I want to scream that Obama is an incompetent asshole and not be accused of saying it because he's black but because he truly is an incompetent asshole.

So where was I?

Oh yeah. Young people.

I want to be able to say these things on a college campus. I want kids to want to hear different opinions. And not just those of incarcerated cop-killers that should have been put down years ago. *That* they'll listen to but they'll ban Bill Maher because he made some comments about Muslims? How fucked up is that?

Millennials need to wake the fuck up and realize that old people, as they've always been, are wrong about everything and they need to figure things out for themselves. Political correctness posing as humor on Comedy Central is nothing more than our generation's way of trying to manipulate you. Removing options and pushing you down the same shitty streets that we've been living on for too long. MSNBC and Fox are *not* Coke and Pepsi. Fuck them both. Fuck politicians, they no longer care about us. Fuck lawyers. Fuck people who've never had a flat tire. Fuck the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Fuck institutions. Fuck Germans that play the banjo. Fuck comedians that pander to their audiences and say what is expected of them. And fuck wearing pink fucking ribbons to support an organization made up of people who profit off of cancer.

And if you don't agree with any of the things I've said then please, PLEASE feel free to tell me to fuck off too. Say it loud, the more profane the better.

That might be our only hope.

## Basketball vs. Hockey: A Tribute (of sorts)

(It's a shame that I even have to point this out, but I know somewhere there is somebody who will read this and say "Hey! This is just a rip-off of the George Carlin routine about the differences between baseball and football!" Relax, fuckface. We in the writing profession don't call it "ripping off;" we refer to it as a "tribute." Mostly because we are intellectually dishonest.)

\* \* \*

I'd like to talk a little about Basketball and Hockey. These sports differ in a lot of little ways. For instance, while they are both played in the fall, basketball is played on a court made of wood while hockey is played on a rink of ice. Points are scored by getting the object of everyone's attention, be it ball or puck, to go into a net. In basketball, it comes out the other end and play continues. In hockey, the game stops to give everyone the opportunity to reflect on what a shitty goalie they have.

Basketball is played by black people. Hockey is played by Canadians. Black Canadians, all ten of them, spend their lives conflicted. Hockey has a lot of fights, which is odd given what pussies Canadians are. One day, they will realize that they can use the sticks they carry around as weapons and murders will become commonplace in hockey.

Speaking of murdering people, you'd assume that there would be a lot of murders involved in a sport played by black people but surprisingly there aren't. Occasionally one of the players will attack someone in the stands, but other than that, violence is limited to a little pushing and shoving. Experiments conducted by Nike and Reebok involving inner city kids wearing basketball uniforms in order to reduce assaults have to date proved unsuccessful.

At the professional level, basketball has four quarters. At the college ranks and below, the game is divided into two halves. Hockey on the other hand is the only sport that is divided into three periods. Nobody knows why. At first I assumed that it was because of the metric system but when I did some research, I found out that our quarters could be converted to centiquarters and our halves into millihalves with very little difficulty. Turns out that Canadians just like to make everything difficult for everyone.

Like you, if I had to guess, I would have guessed that if a game ended all tied up, the black sport would be the one decided by a shootout but what do you know... it's hockey. Go figure.

Basketball can carry on about the home team's "sixth man" all they want, but I've yet to see a basketball court littered with dead and dying octopi. Perhaps it's because when a basketball player commits a foul, their opponent is given the opportunity to shoot foul shots but in hockey they send the offender to a special glass box where he is forced to sit in front of everyone and think about what he has done. The cameras catching every second of his delicious metaphysical squirming (I saw HDMS open for *Counting Crows* back in 2003). If there could be one thing that I'd like to see transferred from hockey to basketball, it would be the penalty box. Except maybe make it a penalty cage with thick iron bars. Like the kind you see in backyard wrestling videos.

And to balance things out, hockey could change the rules and make their goalies wear only short shorts and a headband. Maybe wristbands... but only if they match the headband.

It's at this juncture that a wit like George Carlin would come up with some pithy observations about dribbling and checking but I can't seem to fight the urge to point out that female hockey fans rarely have a full set of teeth. It's completely clouding the pithy part of my brain. I'd like to be pithy, believe me, but I'm so worried that I will somehow forget to point out that females who enjoy hockey are a rough bunch, that I can't concentrate. If you're a female hockey fan and you're offended by this, at

least take a moment to admit that your first thought was that you wanted to pull my shirt over my head and smash my face into a pulp.

See? See why I'm distracted?

It's really a shame because I had some hilarious stuff about how the only reason that hockey players can't dunk is because they are wearing heavy skates, their net sits on the ground so there is no reason for it and, most importantly, they are white. Canadian white at that. Canadian white is like 25% whiter than American white. For the last couple of hundred years, white Americans have been banging all sorts of other races while Canadians have been stuck banging each other and the occasional moose.

Am I the only one who misses afros in basketball? I understand doing away with the red, white, and blue ball, but isn't there a way to force the NBA players to wear afros? It somehow makes the players less terrifying when you see them out and about in the real world and they are all seven and half feet tall.

And if hockey wants to call the area between the blue lines the "neutral zone," then the least they could do is incorporate a few Kobayashi Maru scenario references. If basketball players are willing to don afros then the least hockey players can do is have the away teams dress like Klingons.

The one thing that both sports have in common is that the players are there to score.

With white women.

Clearly George Carlin knew a lot more about baseball and football than I do about basketball and hockey.

And humor.

# Sna

When a snake suddenly decides to bolt under the mower as you're cutting the grass, the least it could do is have the common courtesy to be chopped into a thousand tiny pieces. Not so yesterday. This particular snake comes out the other side with about 60% of himself still intact, forcing me to bring the proceedings to a quick conclusion and instead launch into a snake rescue mission.

As I grabbed the little fella, he immediately started to whip what was left of his tail around and spray blood all over my light-colored shirt. I almost threw him back under the mower, to be honest. Instead, I brought him into the house to patch him up.

Proof that I am a decent human being.

I call him a "him" instead of an it because I was getting quite attached to him and all snakes look male to me given their phallic shape. I don't think any member of the animal kingdom looks like a vagina but if there was one, I would extend the same consideration. Offhand I know of at least a few flowering plants that could lay claim to that title so I will make a note to henceforth call them her.

I called him Sna on account that my mower lopped off his ke.

I was going to make a comparison between my relationship with Sna and families of people who are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol but I wanted to think it through a bit before blurting out something insensitive. Now that you have lunatics trying to call such addictions "diseases," you never know who you're going to insult.

Then I thought about my writing career, or lack thereof, and thought that perhaps a little controversy might be just what the doctor ordered. Just look at how much press Jenny McCarthy got for coming out against vaccinations.

I was trying to figure out if all press is good press when Sna kept breaking my train of thought by wiggling around and showing his displeasure with his new surroundings. Obviously if I was waiting around for some appreciation from him, it was going to be a long afternoon. I couldn't help feel that although I was the owner of the mower, it wasn't my fault he chose to go snaking under it. He can claim it's a disease all he wants but the truth is he chose his path and if that path led under my friggin' mower it's on him.

A disease my ass.

After I threw some leaves into the hastily-constructed bucket triage so Sna could wiggle out of view, I returned to my dilemma about insulting people who claim that their addictions aren't really their fault.

Look at what happened to Rob Schneider, another anti-vaccine guy. One minute he's on a State Farm commercial reprising his old Saturday Night Live role from forty years ago and the next he's back out on the street when his vaccine views became known. The question is, before this event made headlines, when was the last time I'd heard the name Rob Schneider?

About forty years ago.

And is it fair that State Farm gave him the boot yet still allows Hans and Franz to pimp their insurance even though it's obvious from their accents that they're both Nazis?

Perhaps it's best if I continue the story by saying things without coming right out and saying them. When you're an unknown writer, you have to tread pretty lightly. I don't want to endanger any State Farm commercials that might be in my future.

Perhaps Jake harbors some soon-to-be-disclosed anti-vaccine sentiments and I'm just one pair of khakis away from being Lance from State Farm.

So eventually the bleeding stopped and Sna seemed to be out of immediate danger. As much as I wanted to continue to nurse him back to health, he seemed eager to rejoin his fellow wild animals in my

back yard so I was forced to give the bucket a good tip and deposit him back on my lawn, where he slid away to the best of his ability.

In some ways, I felt like a family member waving goodbye to a recovered son or brother. Happy that he was feeling better but worried about his next misadventure. Worried that it might inconvenience me again. It's a cruel world out there but the truth was I still had a lawn to mow.

Was there a part of me that wished that he'd just been sliced into a thousand pieces so the lawn would have already been finished and I could have flopped onto the couch with a cold one?

I guess you'd have to ask the family of a “diseased” crackhead for that answer.



# The Chirping Of Birds

The chirping of birds is only relaxing if you don't speak bird. If you did, all you'd hear is an endless series of sexual advances. "Hey baby! Hey Baby! Hey baby! Hey Baby! Hey baby! Hey Baby!" How long do you think it would be until you got out of your lawn chair and started screaming for them to shut the fuck up if you spoke bird? Not long, believe me. That's what I hear when I hear birds chirping. An endless series of come-ons.

That's what passes for romance in the bird world. And whether you want to admit it or not, birds are just the tip of a very weird sexual iceberg. Nature offers us a staggering variety of ways that males and females get together. Sometimes it's based on a physical feature possessed by the male. Sometimes it's as simple as the largest one gets the girl. For every example of a hard-working male who provides shelter for his intended, I can offer you a dozen where copulation comes as a result of rape or a free-for-all gangbang.

So don't tell me that romance is the norm in the animal world and don't try and tell me that we're not animals. When I stop and think about it, I hope you don't try to tell me anything that doesn't support my contention that romance is unnatural. An aberration created by females to avoid packs of men descending on them with procreation on their minds every time they slip down to the bar for a drink.

Just like in the woods, whom a girl ends up with can be determined by any number of factors. What's different is that in the woods, each species usually has one attribute that all females go for. Every female of that particular classification is looking for the same thing. The winning male will be the most aggressive, most persistent, have the brightest plumage, have the biggest dick, whatever.

Not so for human females. Each woman has a completely different set of standards, which makes courtship a pain for the male. Is she looking for the most aggressive, most persistent, the brightest plumage, or the biggest dick? And if it is the biggest dick, how do you let her know you're packing? If you're a bird, you just lean back and whip that puppy out, all red and engorged, and start calling attention to it with all vigor. I tried that once at a bar and let me tell you, Applebee's did not appreciate it.

Which brings me to the concept of love. Talk about an emotion that muddies the sexual waters. Are we looking to spread our genetic seed to every willing female or are we to buy into some bastardized version of the nest-building instinct? The shark would simply laugh and explain why it's better to just bite a fin and plow away every chance you get. There are no sharks marching down the undersea aisle with friendly fish throwing the aquatic equivalent of rice and wishing them well. Bite. Insert. Repeat.

Is it because female sharks have never seen a Nicholas Sparks movie?

No textbook on animal physiology or nature special on the National Geographic channel is going to explain to why a male feels the way he does about a specific girl instead of all of them. Not the urge to mount them but the desire to make them smile. The feeling that he is somehow diminished if she is not in view. Passion that transcends the need to have his DNA muddle on.

It's at this point that you might be asking yourself why getting thrown out of an Applebee's for exposing myself would bring me to the concept of love. Well, if you must know, because somewhere there is a girl who would fall in love with a man like that. She would find it endearing when no other girl would. Reason and logic would wilt in the face of the primordial attraction that would blossom in her breast. I'm not sure that is the definitive definition of love, but I've heard much worse.

Especially on Hallmark cards.

Maybe National Geographic would appreciate that observation.

I knew a guy who, once he fell in love, never stopped. He loved four girls in his life and from the moment he fell for each one, he was in love to stay. It made no difference that circumstances and harsh

realities intervened in each, he remained in love with them all. He didn't have a finite amount of love to distribute amongst them, loving one did in no way reduce the amount of love he felt for the others. In fact, he could never understand the concept of falling out of love with someone. He did not view it as a conscious choice. It just was. He would have made a terrible husband but, on the other hand, he would have made a tremendous bird. Flitting from one to the other, his plumage fully on display. An image so convoluted that it should help you to understand a little better why getting thrown out of an Applebee's for exposing myself would bring me to thinking about of love.

# The Resignation Of Mabel Maghee

(first appeared at [www.headstuff.org](http://www.headstuff.org) 8/26/14)

To whom it may concern

RE: The disappearance of Abigail Petty

\* \* \*

To all concerned parties, this is my account of the events leading up to the disappearance of Abigail Petty, known henceforth as Abby. From this point forward, I will stop attempting to sound formal and just tell you what happened. This letter will also serve as my letter of resignation from the Colorado Springs Police Department.

I was made aware of Abby's existence some weeks before her disappearance. She had called the 911 dispatcher on numerous occasions to report what she believed to be an intruder in the vacant house across the street from her home. Each time, an officer was sent to the location without finding any indications that there was anybody within the residence.

Eventually, the dispatcher stopped sending a unit over and instead transferred the calls to me. I was instructed to make sure there were no immediate threats to her and to see if there was another reason for her calls.

I put her age at approximately ten years old. I was disturbed to find out that she lived in a single-parent household and her father worked nights. I worked under the assumption that she was lonely and this was some sort of attempt to get attention. When I asked if it was ok to speak to her father about her calls, she seemed fine with it. She had told him about the intruder as well and apparently he would not be upset that she called the police.

She officially disappeared on Saturday, August 24<sup>th</sup>. The Wednesday before she called in to once again report seeing someone moving inside the residence across the street. When I asked her to describe what she saw, she could only say that it appeared to be a large shadow moving back and forth in front of the windows. Other than a rough idea of the height of an individual, she could not give me any additional details about hair length or color, skin color, or clothing. She told me it looked like a big shape moving around.

When I was done asking pertinent questions, we started to just talk. Gal talk. One story she told stuck with me. She was telling me her father had taken her on vacation to the Caribbean the previous summer and one night she sat out on a dock and watched a school of tiny fish swimming at the top of the water. Every now and then a larger fish would sneak up and eat some of them and then less frequently a larger fish would come gobble up the fish that was trying to eat the tiny fish. I realize that coming out of a ten-year-old's mouth, it might not seem profound, but the way she said it made me remember it. She said "Only people are silly enough to think that there's a point to life. Those fish know the score."

The next night, at just about midnight, she called again. Same problem... the shadow was moving around inside the house again. She was actually watching it as we talked. This time she told me about a boy that had gone to her school last year. He had moved from England and had a rather hard time of it. The other kids teased him relentlessly and when I asked why she told me the oddest story, I had to actually Google the word faggot to make sure she wasn't making the whole thing up. When I did, I saw that faggot is indeed a British dish. Apparently the boy had mentioned in class one day that his mother had made him faggots for breakfast.

For the remainder of the school year, his life was unpleasant.

As you might guess, I was getting quite attached to Abby and when the phone call came the next night, I was actually happy to take it. The nightshift can get a bit dull and our conversations passed the time nicely.

Her voice was different though. She sounded nervous. She told me that the shadow was just sitting there at the window. Watching her. She said she could feel it somehow. I tried to calm her down, get her talking like she usually did, but this time she seemed agitated.

She told me that she thought that it was mad at her. I questioned her about calling the shadow an "it" as opposed to a he or she, but she simply said that it wasn't a person. That's why, she explained, the police could never catch it.

There was something in her voice that gave me goosebumps. I started to talk about the little boy from England and whether or not she'd ever made friends with him. She said that she didn't; she was too nervous to introduce herself.

Looking back now, I realize that I'd made a mistake in changing the topic because she started to associate the shadow in the house with the little boy. She said that perhaps the thing in the house was just lonely and didn't have any friends. She said that maybe this time she should have the courage she lacked with the faggot-eater.

I about fell off my chair when she called him that. Kids say the funniest things without knowing it.

She told me that she waved at the shadow but it just sat there. She took a long breath and told me she was going to introduce herself.

"Maybe I'll make a new friend. Or maybe I'll end up like those little fish next to the dock."

Then she hung up. To this day, I don't know why I didn't scream at her not to go. Or at least send a squad car around to make sure she was alright. I tell myself that the whole thing was just something in the imagination of a young girl but even then I knew it wasn't. I felt something was wrong about the whole thing.

I even went to the house a few times. Once late at night. Looking for shadows, I guess. I never saw anything.

So when I stated that this was my letter of resignation, I really should have phrased it that I am resigned to quitting. I have handled all the inner demons of the people that come through these doors day in and day out, but I'm not sure I could handle it if there are other types of demons.

Actually, I'm quite sure I can't. I stare at the picture of Abby and I hear her voice. In my mind's eye, I see her walk across the dark road that separates the houses and I hear her little hand knocking on the door. And almost every night since she disappeared, I wake up out of a nightmare picturing what opened the door.

# The City: Where We Keep Our Stupid People

When you listen to the ongoing debates about what to do with our crumbling inner-cities, it's scary that these discussions have become so politically correct that nobody can even mention the number one issue: people in the city are dumb.

There it is. The painful truth. The inner-city is filled with painfully stupid people.

We allow them to vote and drive and call in to local talk radio programs and collect food stamps like other people, but it's somehow off limits to mention that their IQs hover right around those that we deem mentally handicapped.

And they are procreating at a breakneck pace.

Roll out the usual city problems- crime, poverty, unwed mothers, whatever, and I will show you what's really behind them: ignorance.

How can we expect to send kids to school when their parents are dumb as bricks? How are they ever going to see the necessity of education? Right now you have these moron parents trying to keep their kids from taking standardized tests because they don't want the world to see what little morons they are raising.

Yeah, THAT will help the problem. Ignore it and hope it goes away.

The whole thing is a joke.

Kids in the city are actually going backwards in the evolutionary process. Some of them will be sporting tails again in a few generations. They will have to hold classes in trees.

And if you attend a "city council" meeting, all you're going to get is a collection of the most eloquent of these dipshits sitting around a table and yelling for the suburbs to give them more money. Occasionally they will interrupt their mock-outrage to bestow honors upon each other, but then they will return to the task of begging for funding from outside their borders because the tax base within those borders is dick. Should anyone have the nerve to raise a real concern about being accountable for their own finances, the "council members" begin to posture and screech and throw feces at the offending party.

So that's the city.

It's where we keep our stupid people.

The real problem is that the rest of the country doesn't want to deal with them. We can't blame stupid people for being stupid. They are too stupid to understand why their surroundings always look like a post-apocalyptic movie set. The idea of being responsible for their own environment is simply beyond them. I might have mentioned it before but let me say it again... they are dumb as dirt.

But the rest of us aren't.

At least I hope not.

So why do we dance around the issue? Why don't we come right out and deal with the problem?

Because it's uncomfortable. It's awkward.

Nobody wants to start a discussion by telling everyone with a below-average IQ to sit down and shut the fuck up and let the adults talk.

But we're going to have to at some point. The cities are becoming war zones. Gangs of heavily-armed cretins running around killing each other and gangs of heavily-in-debt mothers hoping the police will kill one of their offspring so they can sue the city and get rich. Crime lotto. The kids in the city play Cops & Robbers & Lawyers, where everyone wants to be a robber in the off chance they can get shot.

The saddest part of stupidity? We live in a democracy so their vote cancels out yours. We see it already; entitlements decide elections so we can never have any hope of actually fixing any of the

problems. Eventually dumb people will outnumber smart ones two to one and the country will turn into a third-world country.

So I guess the question is really “Who are the dumb ones?”

I think you know the answer.

## Doing My Jury Duty (or 12 Angry Men... and Then Some)

Every now and then you are called upon to do your civic responsibility and yesterday was my turn. I had jury duty... but that isn't the responsibility I'm talking about.

Let me explain.

I walked into the waiting area at 8:30am sharp and saw roughly ninety people sitting watching a video giving us juror instructions, i.e. quick review of the legal system and our upcoming role in it. Things were a bit dour. This crowd made the people waiting at the Department of Motor Vehicles look like a rave.

Then came the part where we waited to see if we'd be asked to serve on a jury. We were looking at a solid seven hours sitting in uncomfortable plastic chairs hoping our number didn't come up. Thirty people were immediately whisked out of the room to go through screening for a civil trial and the rest of us exhaled and produced our various reading materials.

Mine was "Driving Mr. Albert," by Michael Paterniti, a story about his drive across America with Einstein's brain and the man who had taken it with him after he performed the autopsy almost sixty years ago. I'd heard good things and was looking forward to the opportunity to read it in its entirety.

I should at this juncture clarify my statement about everyone producing their reading materials. By everyone I meant everyone but one woman.

She had no book.

Or inhibitions about striking up a conversation with a total stranger. Or volume control on her voice. Or a filter about what came out of her pie hole.

Let me set the scene. Sixty people sitting quietly in a small room, reading. One woman began to talk to the poor bastard next to her in a voice that gave the casual observer the impression she thought she was speaking in a wind tunnel as opposed to a room where you could hear a pin not only drop but roll around on a carpeted floor.

My book was starting off well and I was getting more engrossed by the minute. I was even able to block out the wheezing of the man next to me. Every breath seemed to be a great feat for him. Part wheeze and part death rattle. The irony was I was reading about the brain of Einstein while actively trying not to imagine what was sloshing around in this idiot's cranium. He just sort of gave off a shimmer of stupidity. My ability to ignore him was a true testament to how much I was enjoying the book.

But I was not faring as well with the loud woman in back. She seemed an endless reservoir of banality. She just kept talking and talking and talking. What's worse was the guy next to her had the kind of voice that was so low you couldn't actually make out what he was saying. You just knew he was responding because you'd get a little rumble in your stomach and then she would return to her efforts of making sure everyone in the courtrooms upstairs didn't miss a bit of her conversation.

One hour.

Two hours.

Three fucking hours and this monster kept assaulting my eardrums with her opinions on every topic known and unknown to mankind. Everyone else in the room took turns craning their necks back to glare at her but she was immune to such subtleties.

Lunchtime arrived and if I hadn't been surrounded by gun-wielding police officers, I would have walked directly to the back of the room and murdered her. I know there wouldn't have been a member of the present jury pool that would have convicted me.

What I needed was a plan.

One hoagie and lemonade later, I knew what had to be done.

I came into the room and plopped down right next to her. My book could wait. It was time to make a point.

Apparently she didn't notice, or didn't care, that I wasn't the man with the low voice because as soon as the nice woman from the county was done giving us an update on our remaining possibilities of serving on a jury, the woman started right back in.

I cut her off and I started my own story.

Loudly.

"Last week I was at one of those giant super-saver buying club places and I'm standing in line with about twenty other people and all of a sudden the woman in front of me farts!"

She neither laughed nor took offense. I got the impression she was waiting for me to pause so she could return to speaking so I took an enormous breath and continued at about forty decibels.

"Well wouldn't you know it but then a lot of other people start to fart! Even I farted and I never fart in public. I just let loose. The weird thing is I didn't feel it coming. Then it occurs to everyone that our colons were talking to each other. Short staccato bursts followed by long windy soliloquies. We all just stood there as our asses were chatting away. Lord knows what they were saying but the funny thing is the farts didn't smell."

I looked at her. I was waiting to see if it would sink in that I was trying to make a point. Clearly I had everyone else's attention in the room but I was unsure if the she-demon perched next to me was aware of my intentions.

She wasn't.

She started to tell me about a neighbor who had recently died unexpectedly. I was going to further explore why a fart farted by a rectum engaged in conversation wouldn't smell but she had jumped in and changed the subject.

I felt at once cheated and challenged. It was time to bring out the big guns. The true story that I'd never shared with anyone...

"I know exactly what you mean about life being cruel. For instance, the other day I was at Starbucks and was grooving to James Brown's "I Got Ants In My Pants (And I Need To Dance)" background music when all of a sudden I saw this girl's head swinging around wildly behind the counter. It was so cool to see a girl so uninhibited so I immediately started to watch as her she made her way towards me. I'll be honest, I sort of felt that she could be the One and I started thinking of all these opening lines I could to introduce myself. Then when she turned the corner, I saw that she had cerebral palsy."

Audible groans erupted from all around us. For the first time all day, the woman shut her mouth and sat back.

"You see how that's cruel on so many levels right?"

I picked up my book and continued reading. I won't give away the ending but because it's a true story, it sort of fizzles. There's no big ending, it sort of just trails off.

I hate when stories do that.

So anyway... I guess that's my story about jury duty.



## Parade Of One

I'm looking out a window and sitting in a small field, situated between a major road and clusters of warehouses, is a metal outline of a wolf. Not so much a statue as a black shadow of a creature that hasn't been seen in these parts in a hundred years. I fight the urge to call the wolf fake or a fraud because its lack of animation is through no fault of its own.

I'm not sure what the original purpose of the wolf was, but now it just acts as a reminder that I'm looking out a window situated between a major road and clusters of warehouses. And that makes me sad.

I realize that if you're a rabbit, you've never spent any time mourning the fact that large carnivores are no longer with us but I have to think that even rabbits, whether they're aware of it or not, must feel like something's missing. If you've ever seen a rabbit get killed by a wolf, you'll never get too romantic about the relationship between the two animals but teeth and blood and rabbit screaming aside, I still imagine that a rabbit that has never heard the howling of a wolf must somehow feel incomplete.

Maybe the owners of the corporate park thought the wolf cutout would act as a scarecrow of sorts, keeping away the hoards of bunnies that would otherwise make quick work of the elaborate gardens that they meant to plant but never did. So the wolf sits in a field of pale green with splotches of yellow and brown distributed rather unimaginatively and surrounded by grey leaf-less trees and grey roads and grey buildings filled with grey people driving brightly colored automobiles that never miss an opportunity to run over every rabbit they can get their wheels on.

The wolf itself is well done. If it were a bit darker outside, I could mistake it for a real one. In fact, I keep looking at it out the corner of my eye as if inducing it to move.

But it doesn't.

Which is a bummer.

Then it happens. I am away and bounding through the fields. Low to the ground I feel the wind on my face and smell farms miles away. Past the storage units for rent and the plumbing supply place, the blood rushing through my wolf-man limbs. I let out a long howl and rabbits in the tri-county area shit themselves for reasons they don't fully comprehend. I glance back and see a black cutout of a nerd sitting in a task chair in a window, so lifelike that if I look at him out of the corner of my eye I could swear I see movement.

And then I'm back in the chair... but I don't see movement. Only stale air moving back and forth out of my mouth grudgingly. Like it's being wasted. But I feel an ache in my chest so I know it's not. The teeth and blood and spirit screaming aside, there might still be some hope.

Hope that one day I can climb on the back of that wolf and have him carry me somewhere that feels like home.

To the both of us.

# The Birthday Shower

It was a bad morning to find a tick clinging in his armpit. Truth was, most mornings were bad regardless if a tick was present, but this was a particularly bad morning. He found it while soaping up the aforementioned area and decided to just rip off the little offender without even looking at it.

Ticks made him a bit squeamish, as did anything to do with blood. He had actually passed out cold at a picnic after swatting a mosquito and seeing a big red smear where the corpse stuck to his leg. Things had gotten a bit dodgy when he thought about the blood being his own, but the lights flicked all the way out when it occurred to him that perhaps it was the blood of a fellow picnic-goer.

This was his birthday. That's why it was a particularly bad morning. He hated birthdays and could never understand why people made such a fuss about them.

"One year older and closer to death. Now blow out your candles."

He lived alone. Although not technically, as his building had plenty of other people residing there, but he lived alone in spirit. Not of his choosing but completely of his own doing. Although he didn't consider himself living alone because he had a dog. A dog that was not going to take the news of this tick very well. One of the high points of the dog's day was when he took him for a walk (you can have the he and him mean the dog or the man in either order, whatever floats your boat) along a new wooded path they'd discovered recently. A path that had resulted in the man getting a severe outbreak of poison ivy and now a tick.

It was back to the paved bike path for the both of them.

The man pinched the tick in between his fingers and gave it a good tug but it clung on fiercely. Clearly the tick was not done with its meal. This enraged the man and he gave it a more violent yank.

Nothing.

The trouble was that he'd failed to remove all the soap before starting the pulling endeavor and apparently there was a friction issue. His armpit hair wasn't helping either. As he rinsed away all the suds he was tempted to take a quick peek at the offender in the mirror but he was afraid he'd lose his nerve. Gathering all his strength he gave it a final mighty pull and the tick relented.

Now the fun was about to begin. He hated ticks with a passion, they reminded him of other parasites like leeches and people who lived on welfare, so he made it a point upon discovering one to pull off all their arms and legs (he assumed half were arms and half were legs despite them all looking and acting very much like legs) before setting them on fire. He glanced down to his pinched fingers to see the soon-to-be-victim of his birthday wrath... but it wasn't a tick at all.

It was a pinkish lumpy thing. A mole. He'd ripped off a mole. A mole that hadn't been there yesterday. A birthday mole.

His eyes wandered to points further south and he saw blood swirling around his feet. On the white tile, it looked like a demented candy cane was being sucked down the drain.

Things began to swim in his head. He tried to drop the birthday mole but his fingers wouldn't let go. He was shaking his hand vigorously but his fingers would not play ball.

He looked at his armpit. Blood oozed out of the birthday-mole-sized hole.

He also considered people in prison serving life sentences without the possibility of parole to be parasites and he silently admonished himself for not including them in the first batch of bloodsuckers. What kind of society would find an act so bad that they would lock someone away for life and feed, clothe, and entertain them but not pull off their arms and legs and set fire to them?

It made no sense.

He slumped against the shower wall and slowly slid to the floor, all the while the water cascaded without a care in the world. His mole-sized hole gave no indication that it would be closing up any time

soon but he wasn't about to start calling out for assistance because he was sure nobody would come anyway. The only worse scenario would be if someone did come and see him in his present state.

If he would have just taken the time to look at the tick/mole before reacting so hastily, this whole thing could have been avoided. One more lesson he should have learned a long time ago... but who in the world would have figured that a mole could have sprung up overnight? That made another lesson he could take away. When you're old, moles can just start popping up unannounced. Moles and age spots. They're like super organisms that can't be reasoned with.

Getting older sucks.

He realized he was going to pass out. The edges of his vision got blurry and he remembered that there is supposedly a room in New York City where all the teachers who have been convicted of pedophilia and other horrible things report to every day because the teacher's union won't let them be fired. They get paid for doing nothing.

"They're definitely parasites," he thought to himself before things slipped into blackness.

## Shocked

About twice a week I engage in perhaps my most favorite activity; taking my dog for a long walk. When I get out the leash she jumps up and down in a way that makes me believe she is only moments away from exploding with joy. This in and of itself brings me a great deal of satisfaction.

Walking today I noticed why I enjoy the walk but my dog is consumed with it. I was watching her sniff around and realized I was only getting about 33% of the walk. While I had sight, sounds and hearing going my dog had smell on top of it. I was missing out on a third of the walk experience.

And that reminded me of a girl I once had a relationship with. A relationship that in retrospect I think I enjoyed about 33% more than she did. I actually remember times where I was only moments away from exploding with joy. It was only later I realized that she had no sense of smell so we had gone on completely different walks.

Perhaps I was trying to keep myself distracted because there was another element in play on today's walk. It was the first day it was really chilly so when I walked by the pond my heart ached a little.

Complicated story I realize, lots of moving parts, but hang in there it will all come together.

Maybe.

The reason the pond caused me angst was because of a decision I'd made in the spring. Due to reasons I won't go into here I had a tank full of guppies and while they aren't a particularly ugly fish they are also not particularly exciting to look at so I wanted to get rid of them but I didn't have the heart to just flush them.

So I made a decision that at the time seemed like a great deal for everyone involved. I would release them into this pond so they could have a few months of being 'free'. When I tipped them in I remember feeling the same happiness I feel when I take my dog for a walk. Figured that for a fish living five months in a pond beat living out a few years in a boring tank. Which for those five months seemed a good decision.

I was starting month six and I knew that soon the water would get too cold for them and they would die. It was time for them to pay the consequences of my decision. The reality that I could have flushed them and have been done with it long ago provided no comfort. The weirdest part was that I knew the guppies were completely unaware of any of this turmoil. They were swimming around obliviously.

So I walked and watched my dog chase squirrels and wondered what to do with this weird guilt. Obviously when my dog stopped to smell a giant pile of deer poop I realized that not all smells are positive but I still envied his nose nonetheless. All things end so why should I feel bad for the guppies? All things end so why should I feel bad for that girl?

Or myself.

Ok, so maybe all these moving pieces didn't come together so easily. Moving pieces are funny like that. They seem determined to not come together. Maybe I'm wondering why I'm willing to put on old shoes and worn jeans and go back to the pond with a bucket and walk around in the muck and mire in the hopes of catching at least a few of my guppies and returning them to the safety of the tank when that girl wasn't willing to do the same for me? To stand in a pond like an idiot with my little net trying to catch fish that have no idea why they are being scooped up yet again. Maybe by going where most people wouldn't go I can develop my sense of smell and in the end enjoy my walks a little more?

So I arrive at the pond, close my eyes and take a deep breath in through my nose.

## Right Under Her Nose

Brenda is an ugly girl. It plays no part in the story but I felt it was important to point it out nevertheless. Perhaps it makes me feel better about myself... but that's neither here nor there. She struggles with a good many things that somehow involve either her body or her mind. Most of these struggles come down to deciding which of them is the dog and which is the tail.

Brenda is the greatest type of rebel, the kind of rebel that doesn't know how rebellious they are. They keep all their fights internally so the rest of the world misses out on just how wonderful these fights are.

When she was just a child, she had an experience with a microscope that forever changed how she saw boogers. When she peered through the little lens, she saw a lump of green covered with long black objects squirming and lashing all over it. She practically leapt back from the apparatus. She was so rattled by what she saw that she had to take another look just to confirm the nightmarish scenario she had just witnessed. She applied her eye to the hole and was once again greeted with dozens of twitching snakes that suddenly confirmed to her all of the advice she had been given up to that point about not eating anything that came out of your nose. There were little devils in there.

Flustered and wiser, she went back to putting insects under the microscope as she was supposed to have been doing all along.

From that point on, she went about the task of blowing her nose with all the same protocols that are usually reserved for handling plutonium.

It wasn't until college that she had another opportunity to work with a microscope again and it allowed her to have another revelation regarding not only boogers but advice, knowledge, and childhood in general. She was tasked to examine some leaves and lo and behold, what did she discover? That these leaves were covered with the very same long black objects squirming away on them.

She then realized they were her eyelashes.

The blood ran out of her face and those surrounding her thought she was about to pass out due to some strange fear of leaves.

She had been terrified of boogers for the better part of ten years because of her eyelashes. The trappings of science had aided and abetted this fear. She marveled how a brief childhood moment could have such long-lasting implications. Like how the way she processed uncertainty was unalterably altered when her beloved uncle, a big hunter, one day invited her to accompany him on a crapshoot. I don't consider "unalterably altered" redundant so much as emphasizing to you just how altered it was.

She retreated to her dorm room to do some serious thinking. The floodgates were opening and she needed a floatation device. It started to make sense to her. How could boogers be harmful?

They couldn't.

Why do kids eat them without provocation? Are they delicious?

Brenda started to chew her nails. They weren't delicious, but she enjoyed the sensation anyway.

If she would have put a scab under the microscope as a child, would it have prevented her from picking them off and eating them as she'd been in the habit of doing?

She never ate what was under her nails because there could be anything. The nail and scabs seemed somehow more organic because her body produced them. She would sometimes chew the calluses off her feet. They weren't delicious but they had a pleasant rubbery texture. She never had the desire to taste the white innards of a zit but on occasion there would be a hard little nodule that would pop out and she got all bon appetit on it.

Was it time to add boogers to the menu?

Or were they the same as what lurked under her nails, a nasty by-product of whatever environment she was in? Like a lint trap in a dryer or the air filter in her car.

The unjustified fear she still felt about boogers and the image of the dark tendrils swarming over them clouded her judgment... if you believe that trying to talk yourself into eating boogers can be defined as judgment.

She wrestled with memories and advice and inhibitions and science and fear and impulses for the better part of three hours, until her stomach growled and it was time to go down to the cafeteria and eat dinner.

Brenda is a rebel so she saved some room for dessert.

## Chat Your Way To An Uglier You

To commemorate National Have Sex With An Ugly Person Day, I thought I'd give those of you who aren't particularly ugly a glimpse into a world you may be unfamiliar with. A wonderful and terrifying place on the internet known well by the truly ugly amongst us... the adult chat room.

It is a world populated/polluted by the worst of humanity pretending to be attractive. Or at least doable. It's with this in mind that I thought allowing you to become comfortable with the verbiage would make you that much more likely to take a chance and visit one of these human cesspools and, perhaps in the spirit of the holiday, sleep with one of these people.

When you sign in, you are given the chance to pick a name that best suits you or your intentions. Don't spend too much time on this part because whatever you pick is stupid. You are in a chat room, for the love of god; abandon all wit ye who enter here.

Naming yourself Rurpleforeskin will not get you laid.

Understanding who it is you are typing to is important so let me give you a few examples of what words in an internet chat room actually mean. For example, if a girl says she is "curvy," it means she is fat. You might think it refers only to her ample bosom but you'd be wrong. Very wrong. At least fifty pounds of wrong. The same is true for "buxom." "Buxom" means enormous. Same goes for "little." Or "thin."

"Fit" is how they say fat in England. Never has one innocent letter difference led people further down the wrong road.

"Chubby" means that they are unable to leave their house without the assistance of a crane.

Let's just come right out and say it... all girls in a chat room are fat.

It's the same for men.

Moving on.

When a girl gives you her age, it gets a little trickier. If she says she is 16, she is 13. If she says she is 17, she is 13. If she says she is 18, she is 35. 19 is probably 19 but anything over 20 you should add 8 years to arrive at her real age.

Men are whatever they say they are. They don't think it matters to girls because it doesn't. What they will lie about is their marital status. If they are single, they will think girls are attracted to married men and if they are married, they will claim their wives were recently run over by a cement mixer in order to garner sympathy. This is only half true; their wife's face usually only looks like it's been run over by a cement mixer.

If a girl says she is "bi," it means she is a dude.

If a girl says she is a lesbian, she is a dude.

If a girl says she is a girl, she is most likely a dude.

The words "no cam" after a girl's name mean she is a dude.

The "cam" after a girl's name means you are, at some point in the conversation, going to see her penis.

Sometimes a site will allow you to post a pic next to your name as you chat. Don't be deceived. The person you are talking to never even remotely looks like that person. If it is a picture of an attractive person, then they are ugly. If it is a picture of an ugly person, it is just setting the table. Dinner is horrifying. If it is too small to clearly see what the picture is, do not under any circumstances click on it to make it bigger. It is a penis. It is always a penis. Every time you try to enlarge it to a better look, you risk getting an eyeful of dong.

Along the same lines, if a girl has an adorable dog or horse in their picture, you can be sure the first picture she sends you will be her having sex with that adorable dog or horse. As warped as you might feel you are, you still have no idea what's lurking are out there.

If a girl gives you her phone number so you can call and engage in phone sex, she is a dude. (Are you starting to see a trend? Chat rooms are the quintessential sausagefests.)

If a man gives a girl his phone number in order to engage in phone sex, he plans on tracking her down at some point in the relationship and murdering her. Methods will vary based on the preferences of the man but all will involve duct tape. Duct tape should be one of the big sponsors of chat rooms.

Any girl with the words “slut” or “whore” in their name are virgins. A girl who says she is a “virgin” usually has a vagina the size of a walk-in closet. Regardless of what they have in front of their names, all men in a chat room are virgins.

Or serial killers.

Particularly men who act nice.

On the flipside, girls with the word “lonely” in their name will hunt you down if you talk to them too long. Occasionally a man will talk a girl with “lonely” in her moniker into phone sex and although there are a lot of ways it might play out, the only thing for certain is that somebody is going to die.

Avoid British girls if you can. They use the word “naughty.” Nothing kills a boner faster than the word “naughty.”

“Kinky” means repressed and if you see a girl advertising herself as “shy,” you can be sure she either owns a breathtaking amount of porn or has appeared in a breathtaking amount of porn.

Don’t bother talking to a girl named Karen. Even in the ugly world of internet chat rooms, nobody wants to fuck a girl named Karen. Or Brenda.

Avoid any Eastern European girl because they are looking to get married. If you give them so much as the first two digits of your zip code, they will arrive the next day at your front doorstep already impregnated with your child. While that might be nice at first, assuming you’re ok with fat foreign girls, no women in the world (save perhaps the leathery-skinned women of Brazil who look forty by the time they are twenty) age quicker and more poorly than an Eastern European woman. Plus the accent will make you want to hang yourself after twenty minutes of listening to them mangle the language.

If a girl has the word “sub” in her name it refers to her favorite sandwich... because all girls in a chat room are fat.

If you’ve gotten this far, you might have come to the conclusion that chat rooms are not a good place to find love or perhaps even a quick fling. That is only true if you are evenly remotely attractive. If you are ugly, then they are Studio 54 and Area 51 wrapped into one. The perfect place for mutants to meet and breed.

Imagine a hippo in a bathing suit getting into a hot tub. It doesn’t add any clarity to this article but it’s a funny image and it will allow the pseudo-intellectuals out there to somehow make these observations seem like biting commentary on something broader.

They’re not. They are as retarded as they seem. Refreshing in a world where every writer wants to appear smarter than they are.

I can’t think of a better way to celebrate National Have Sex With An Ugly Person Day than to spend a few hours trying to hook up in an online chat room. Just because you’re not ugly doesn’t mean you can’t spend a few hours being ugly.

You might like it.

I can’t get enough of it.



# Planet of the Koalas

You can't say that science fiction writers didn't try and warn us.

From space travel to submarines, sci-fi writers have been on point bringing us both the upside and downside of everything from technological advances to medical experimentation. In fact, of all the various topics that they have been rather down on, messing around with nature has always been high on their "No can do" list.

Am I the only one that was moved to tears by Jeff Goldblum's "What you call discovery, I call the rape of the natural world" speech in *Jurassic Park*?

Which makes this story that much harder to relate because we all should have seen it coming. I mean to say, *Jurassic Park* did over \$400 million at the box office. Throw in the other three sequels and the total had to be close to \$420 million.

The irony being that if koalas had teeth like a T-Rex, none of the trouble would likely have started in the first place.

But start it did, in the form of one Darryl Generico, a researcher at a prestigious Australian university. Which one I'd rather not say as it would require me to Google prestigious Australian universities and I'm afraid there might not be one so I'd rather just let that sleeping dog lie. Or is it lying dog sleep given that there might not be a prestigious university in Australia for all I know? All I really know about Australia is that it has a nice opera house and that if you get stung or bitten by any of the insects there, you will probably die a painful death.

Whichever dog it might be, Darryl got it into his head that the koala was nature's greatest underachiever. Sleeping between 18 and 22 hours a day, Darryl wondered what the koala was capable of if it just had a little more get-up-and-go.

So he undertook an experiment, despite being an avid fan of science fiction, and switched the diet of a test group of koalas from eucalyptus to coca leaves. Soon after, neither Darryl nor his furry band of *Phascolarctos cinereus* research participants got much sleep and, despite having one of the smallest brains of any mammal (the koalas, not Darryl), the koalas quickly made up for a lot of lost time. After only a few weeks of their new diet, they managed to escape from the lab, learn how to ride horses and shoot guns on their journey to Victoria, and then began to systematically wage war on the dingo population living there.

The world watched in horror as the adorable creatures captured and slaughtered every dingo and dog in the entire state. If you're thinking that Victoria is in fact a province of Australia and not a state, let me point out that I thought the same thing. Turns out we're both wrong. It's a state... with a governor and everything. Although to be honest, their governor is appointed by Queen Elizabeth II so it's not quite as governory as you'd think.

When the Australian authorities finally captured the koala leader, Mr. Tickle, he was just too damn cute to prosecute (what with the fluffy ears and black spoon-shaped nose and all). In fact, Mr. Tickle, looking especially cuddly, was able to convince the Australian Parliament to allow all koalas to eat coca leaves and soon the whole country was overrun by horse-riding, pistol-packing varmints.

When dragged in front of the United Nations General Assembly to account for his brethren's poor behavior, Mr. Tickle just sat there all snuggly and lovable and got off with a sternly-worded warning. The problem with the aforementioned warning was that neither Mr. Tickle nor any other koala understood the English language. Or any human language. This communications barrier reared its ugly head again soon after when a copy of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* was discreetly slipped to Mr. Tickle in the hopes of him taking a subtle hint after it was found out that koalas in Queensland had been up to their old tricks again, this time large pythons being on the receiving end of their brutality, had instead been torn up and used as bedding.

Eventually these new and improved koalas calmed down and found their way into almost every zoo in every country in the world. Doing tricks and endearing themselves to humans everywhere. Which was their plan from the start.

(Cue foreboding music)

Acting all cute and counting the days until they could put Mr. Tickles' terrible scheme into effect. At precisely the same time everywhere around the globe, they launched into action and began their war on humanity... and were massacred in only a few hours. They were still koalas after all. Sure, a koala on horseback carrying a rifle is pretty scary if you're a dingo but...

We have tanks and shit. Mr. Tickles totally overplayed his hand.

Present Day. A trendy Hollywood health club sauna. Jeff Goldblum, clad in only in a towel, wonders aloud "What if we gave a sloth a cappuccino?"

# Crying Uncle

It has always been a source of great disappointment to me that my memory is so bad. Often times when I am hanging out with old friends, they will mention a litany of incidents that would be featured front and center in a normal person's Greatest Hits reel but have disappeared into the abyss of my mind never to be seen again.

Not so with this one.

It's the moment I transformed from a boy into a man. And the moment had a soundtrack and a sunrise going for it so it's no wonder it's seared into my memory like a brand. Maybe everyone has a "coming of age" memory... here is mine.

My uncle died in a plane crash.

He was a hero to me. Bigger than life and he died exactly how someone like him is supposed to die, screwing around doing crazy stunts in a small plane with a friend at his side. The problem was that he had a wife and two small children and a sister and a mother and two nephews and the news of his death was like a scream inside our hearts. I'm sorry I can't put it better than that, but that's how it felt.

My parents, grandmother, my brother and I flew overseas immediately to be with his widow but because the funeral wasn't going to be for a week, my parents and brother had to fly back to the States to take care of work-related things until the service.

Which left me alone to take care of my grandmother, aunt, and my uncle's two beautiful kids.

And I did.

I found a selflessness I never knew I had. I held them when they cried and I did the shopping and I mowed the lawn and I visited with the countless people that stopped by to grieve. A bright light had gone out and there was nothing left for his friends to do but to gather and mourn.

I guess I should tell you that my uncle lived on the grounds of the airport he owned and on those grounds sat a pub that he also owned. And frequented nightly. The sense of community I felt during that week was something I'd never experienced before and haven't since. My uncle had built something special and everyone knew that it had come to an end. They sat on their stools and could clearly see that in a few years, the airport would be a strip mall and the friends that they saw on a daily basis would become ghosts.

So they toasted my uncle and cried.

As did I.

My uncle was just as cool as I'd always imagined him to be. And then I left the pub and went back to the grieving widow and the children who'd had their dad stolen from them.

My uncle had been the one to take me parachuting when I was an exchange student in his country. I would have never done it with anyone else but him. I was terrified as I sat with one leg hanging out of the plane, waiting for the tap on the shoulder that told me it was time to leap. I looked back at him and he was smiling and I knew I could do it. Again, I wish I was a better writer and could tell you why but I keep having to delete the words because they seem too hollow to explain it. If he was smiling, then it was going to be fine.

So I took the plunge into the unknown.

Now I was sitting in the living room that he would never again walk into, taking care of the people most important to him. There wasn't a fucking thing in the world I wouldn't have done to make those people hurt a little less. It was the first time in my dumb self-absorbed life that I felt something bigger than myself. For that week, I was the man. They had simply to ask and it was done.

I felt honored to be doing it.

The last night before my parents returned to help out, I sat alone in my uncle's bar and put some money in the jukebox and watched the sun set. The entire horizon exploded into red and Bono sang

“Where the Streets Have No Name” and I cried. My tears had never felt hot but they burned down my face like lava creeping down a mountainside because it was sinking in. It was all sinking in like the sun was setting. All of it. The joys and heartbreaks, bricks and mortar, triumphs and tragedies, not just clichés but the real stuff life is made of. I couldn’t even imagine the pain my grandmother was feeling at that very moment having lost her son. It felt like an ocean of grief. I was dreading the funeral and finality of it all. The hurt that was going to be on display.

I’d like to say that I was sitting there with one leg hanging out of some metaphorical plane looking back to find my uncle at the bar smiling, but that’s not what happened.

What happened was the funeral was brutal and my uncle’s airport was eventually turned into rows of take-out restaurants and hair salons.

And I went back home a man.

I guess I hope that you don’t understand and that your “coming of age” story was very different.

## Cloud Nine Inch

The first thought many of you had upon hearing that because of a breach of security in “the cloud,” numerous celebrities had very private pictures released for public consumption was “I wonder if there will be any Lance Manion penis pics to be had?”

I'm sorry to disappoint you. Truly.

There is nothing more I'd like to provide the penis-hungry public than a few tastefully-done pictures of my rig. No doubt I could utilize some trick photography and make it look enormous.

Well, *more* enormous. Enormouser.

The sad truth is that there has never been much demand for Manion-penis pics. Try as I might generate interest, the penis-buying public is always looking for a more recognizable dick.

What I do have are some pretty embarrassing pictures of a younger Lance Manion trying to see if a hat made him look cool or not.

Let me explain.

Even in my youth, it was rare I would fall prey to the clammy clutches of vanity but it was also very rare that I would buy a hat.

Let me explain my explanation.

I never wore hats, nor do I now wear hats. Hats are for cowboys, farmers and douchebag hipsters. Let me just get that out there. Which is why it was odd that I fell under the spell of a big green and yellow hat perched in the front window of a trendy store at the mall. It was one of those big floppy numbers that looked like a deflated chef's hat. The kind that would seem somehow more at home on a giant afro. I always imagine the wearer of said hat to be constantly chewing on a toothpick for some reason.

But I digress.

I bought it and smuggled it home as if I was carrying a pound of cocaine through customs (I actually considered shoving it up my ass rather than risk meeting a friend as I left the store but it was too big), eager to be alone and in front of a mirror. When I arrived, I felt a bit of a letdown. It sat on the top of my bony head like an animal that had expired there. Limp. Lifeless.

(Let me just be clear that when I say “it” was too big, I meant the hat. Not my ass.)

It became obvious that this was not a hat I could wear to just any social function. What it needed was a little action.

I distinctly remember the faraway look I got in my eyes as it dawned on me that the school dance was just days away. I looked into the mirror and added some movement to the bony head in hopes of resurrecting the hat and allowing it to become the hat I had first fell in love with. But let's face it, all you can really do in front of mirror is a little shimmy here and there. You can't bust out your best dance moves. I needed to see the hat in all its glory as I whirled and twirled.

What I needed was my camera.

I believe the song was *Battleflag* by Lo Fidelity Allstars.

I let it all out.

Does that explain it sufficiently for you?

Do you now see why I'd much rather have a few candid snapshots of my dong leak out rather than these hideous tributes to both bad fashion decisions and bad dancing? When I stumbled on them a few years back, what I should have done is burn them right there on the spot. Perhaps a priest could have said a few words to make sure they wouldn't come back to haunt me, but their destruction should have been my top priority.

But you know how writers are. We're vain, even about our bony heads and hideous hats. I thought that at some time down the road I might want to produce these photos as a way to make fun of myself.

In my head I thought it would be funny and people would have a quick laugh and then forget all about them, so I scanned them and put them on my computer and unwittingly in “the cloud.”

I put the apostrophes around “the cloud” because much like 99% of the people on the planet, I have no idea what “the cloud” is. I assume it's the brains behind the coming robot takeover but I'm not sure.

What I'm hoping for now is for the robots to hurry up and exterminate everyone before they get a look at a young Lance Manion mid-twirl wearing a giant green and yellow hat. It might even be the picture that pushes the robots into action. They might be sitting on the fence about the destruction of the human race and when that picture crosses in front of their electronic eyes they will sit back and think to themselves "Well that does it. What else is there to say? I mean really. Look at that dumb bastard. It's extermination time."

Now I bet you wish you'd had more of an appetite for my junk, don't you?

# Celebrity Redistribution

Just as income inequality continues to be a growing concern in the United States, I wanted to discuss a problem that parallels it in many ways.

Celebrity inequality.

In the 1920s, when there were only 106 million Americans (and only about a dozen people here illegally), there were an estimated 500 famous people. Right now there are over 316 million people in the US (500 million if you count those here illegally) and about 500 of them are famous. If you are reading this in 2020 it is estimated that the number of people in the US, both legally and illegally, will be well over a billion and there will still only be about 500 famous people.

You see the problem?

Celebrity is not being distributed fairly.

And don't try to tell me that the recent influx of reality television stars count as celebrities. They are nothing more than the death throes of a crumbling culture. I'm talking about real celebrity. The kind of notoriety that has the news of your latest fling sitting between headlines concerning the Ukraine and the latest killer hurricane.

(Speaking of the death throes of our culture, how long do you suppose it will be until hurricane names will be sponsored? "Hurricane Pepsi kills a hundred. While rescue workers scramble to reach those in need I bet there's nothing that would taste better to those trapped in rubble than a cold refreshing Pepsi!")

And while there appears to be only 500 seats at that particular table, more and more of those seats are being sat in by the talentless sons and daughters of other seat-sitters. Not only is this not healthy but it's not fair.

Now before you think this observation is coming from a selfish place, let me be the first to say that I don't believe I should be a celebrity. I don't say this with mock-humility. I say it because I would become the world's biggest asshole if I got even a whiff of celebrity.

How do I know this?

Because whenever a band is nice enough to learn the German words to *99 Red Balloons*, I can't help but imagine Adolf Hitler as soon as they start singing them. I know that imagining Hitler standing on a balcony in front of a huge grainy black and white throng of people rocking out to *99 Luftballons* is wrong but I can't help it. Every time it's the same reaction.

So I know I'm not worthy of celebrity. The last thing the world needs is someone sitting on a couch in front of the latest vanilla talk show host and coming out with that.

But there are artists, actors, singers and writers all over the place that deserve a little taste of fame. Not a giant helping but enough to keep them going. We can't continue to have it be where if you're a creative type you're either dogshit or a god. Nobody is either. Everyone is pretty close to the middle and perpetuating the myth that the famous are somehow that much better than the rest of us is just ridiculous.

I bet when I said earlier that it wasn't healthy, you nodded your head in complete agreement but then rolled your eyes when I said it wasn't fair. There is something about fairness that is an argument killer. Fairness is a turn-off. A buzzkill.

Why?

Because it's so obvious that in this life nothing is fair. To try and go to the fairness well to prop up an argument is a sure sign that you are on the losing end of logic. But I say loud and proud, "Fuck that!" Even if life isn't fair there is no reason to revel in it. Why can't every single little town have a slightly-famous artist? A sort-of well-known band? Nobody has to fawn all over them but a little respect would be nice.

Get off your ass and buy a painting. Go to a show. See an obscure film. And what's more, let the creator know you liked it. That you appreciated it. That it meant something to you that they went to the trouble of producing it.

Get in the game, you lazy fuck.

Everyone has that one friend you treasure because they're always coming up with some cool new song or book... be that person.

Don't meekly accept the 500 lame celebrities that we've been allocated. Go out and make some new ones and share them with those close to you.

It's only fair.



## Greatly Lowered Expectations

Now that I'm fully aware of what a horrible person I am it's becoming harder and harder to be honest. Horribleness. It's the one thing that our culture seems to have raised the bar on. Everywhere else our standards are plummeting but somehow the expectation that people stop thinking horrible things remains.

Take for example police officers. The other day I get pulled over and as I'm fumbling in my glove compartment I hear the obligatory "License and registration please" from the window. I turn, license and freshly-acquired registration in hand, and see only the top of a policeman's hat out my window. I lean over and look down on a little person in blue.

Please note I did not say midget like I've been known to do in the past. I recently got an angry e-mail from a little person after one of my less politically correct stories and made a vow to be more sensitive. How did I know it was from a little person?

None of the letters were capitalized.

So anyway, I'm looking down on a little policeman and I'm suddenly filled with the urge to open the door and make a run for it just to watch him give pursuit. Being chased by a little person has always been on my bucket list. Who wouldn't want to run from a midget policeman?

Shit. I said midget didn't I?

You could see a little policeperson coming years ago as the standards for cops kept being lowered further and further.

Same in the military. The Navy Seals just issued different standards for female candidates. How long will it be until we have blind people, gun in one hand and cane in the other, tap tap tapping their way to the front lines? Probably getting indignant if the enemy refuses to make any noise to help them know where to shoot. So everyone is fine with us having an entire platoon of special needs paratroopers jump behind enemy lines and spend the entire war trying to get themselves out of trees but I'm not allowed to think horrible things?

Things like special needs paratroopers flailing around suspended in trees?

People are ok with them actually hanging there helplessly kicking and yelling but I can't think it.

Now before you leap to the conclusion that I think I'm not a horrible person and just prone to flights of fancy let me assure you I am. Just last night I was out to dinner and I hadn't even ordered my drink when another group was seated next to me. Among this group was a man whose age I put in the ballpark of a hundred and thirty.

When it was time for them to order his son leaned over and said "Hey Pops, they have brisket."

His father gazed ahead.

So his son repeated the sentence a little louder. Then again. A little louder. Now keep in my mind I'm sitting within earshot the whole time.

"Hey Pops, they have brisket." Repeated a tenth time in a voice that could have been heard on the tarmac underneath a landing 747.

Finally his dad responded in a puzzled manner ... "I'm a brisket?"

"Yes!" I bellowed in my head "You are a fucking brisket. That's what your son has desperately trying to communicate to you, that you are a brisket! He felt it was important enough to continually interrupt everyone in the restaurant's meal."

Then I thought it.

"Now hurry up and just get in the fucking box already so your family can move on and I can enjoy my meal!"

The jury would not need to deliberate any further; Lance Manion is a horrible person.

It's exhausting pretending otherwise.

I just hope when they come for me, and make no mistake they most certainly will, they send a squad of little SWAT members to take me in. You can be sure it will be a merry chase.

## The Worst Campfire Story Ever Told (or is it?)

For years, I agreed with everyone who was in attendance at the campfire in question that we had been privy to the worst campfire story ever told. The storyteller was an awkward boy who rarely said anything and was considered a social pariah because nobody was sure if he was retarded or a genius. Even to the guidance counselors at the school he attended. It wasn't until years later that I thought about the story a little more and realized that it might actually be a brilliant and profound existential tale of horror. Or the kid really was a retard. I will relate it here as best as I remember it and let you be the judge. It helps if you imagine a dark forest surrounding you while various woodland creatures scamper around unseen in the depths and a large fire crackles in front of you. Now off you go.

"Mitt's neighbors thought he was a scientist and the scientists he worked with thought of him as a janitor. Mostly because he was a janitor. But the men he thought of as scientists were actually businessmen. Sure, they had science degrees but they were businessmen.

I should start off by telling you this story takes place a couple of hundred years in the future. And about a hundred years after the craze of people cryogenically freezing their heads in the hopes they could one day be thawed out when people had discovered the key to eternal life was over. That left a lot of frozen heads that were being kept frozen for no reason and eventually, after all the next of kin of these heads had passed away, it was decided that the heads needed to be disposed of.

Mitt worked at that place. He was tasked with getting rid of the heads. The businessmen posing as scientists gave him some very detailed instructions on how he needed to dispose of the heads but instead he threw them in the back of his car and took them home. In the basement of his home he built some shelving and kept row upon row of his new guests there.

I should have started off by telling you that Mitt was crazy. Obviously, now that you know he has a basement full of human heads, you might suspect as much but to make sure we're clear about it, let me confirm as much. Mitt was nuts.

He gave personalities to all his heads. He had taken all the files relating to each so he knew their names and a bit about them so filling in any missing information was easy. He would walk through the rows of heads and greet each one and give them a quick rundown of the news and sports and such that he felt each head would have wanted to know.

The head at the end of the row was a gentleman named Alex. Alex wanted very badly to live forever. He had also attempted to download his brain into a computer prior to his departure from the world of the living and that had been equally unsuccessful.

Or had it?

Mitt would stand for several minutes each day talking to Alex. For some unknown reason, Mitt had a real affinity for Alex. He felt he could hear Alex talking back to him. Of all the heads in the basement, Mitt really believed that Alex was his pal.

The problem was that it was all in Mitt's head. As much as Alex might have wanted it to be real it wasn't because Alex was completely unaware of it. Alex was dead so there was no possible way that the head inside the glass jar could be in any way aware of its surroundings or the fact that to some degree Alex still existed because a conscious being was interacting with it.

You want to know the scary part? The really scary part? Although you could argue that in some way Alex got what he wanted it makes no difference. Not to Alex or Mitt or to you or me. It just doesn't matter.

Nothing matters."

With that, the creepy little kid walked off into the woods and missed all the rest of the stories about ghosts and werewolves as well as the hot dogs and marshmallows that were later offered up on sticks as burnt offerings to youth. Looking back now, I guess it doesn't matter.

# America Is In Decline

America is in decline (and if I'm repeating the title as the first line of the article, I must mean business). There's no getting around that fact. We see it every day in a thousand ways... but nowhere so glaring as our "on demand" TV programs.

The idea of watching what we want, when we want is as American as baseball and apple pie. You think it's a coincidence that so much baseball and baking shows are on TV? Our Founding Fathers practically put the idea of "on demand" in the Constitution. Freedom is the backbone of this great country. The problem is that America now has two backbones.

Capitalism is the second one. And the two of them are starting to come into conflict on a daily basis, like some hideous multi-spined troll all hunched over and shuffling around like a poorly-worded metaphor.

What does this demented allegory have to do with "on demand" TV? I'll tell you. When you watch some TV shows "on demand," the fast forward feature is disabled! You can't zip past the commercials!

When did I wake up in a fascist police state?

I am literally squirming as I desperately hit the fast forward and writhe as the little note pops up on the screen gently reminding me that my basic human right to fast forward has been disabled. What would George Washington make of this? Even back in his day they had the option of fast forwarding past the ads. What would Paul Revere have to say if he wasn't able to gallop past the commercials?

I'll tell you. They would pound their desks and hue and cry and all the others things they did back then to show displeasure. You could argue that if "Honest Abe" Lincoln knew how many shitty shows and movies Tyler Perry was going to make, he might not have freed the slaves but you can't say he wouldn't have been pissed if the rudimentary liberties of white men and black men alike were stripped away so callously as they have been with this "on demand" nonsense.

And what the fuck is with these bland women being shoved in our faces as pitchmen? Blame Progressive Insurance and that filthy whore, Flo. Now you have Toyota (Laurel Coppock) and AT&T (Milana Vayntrub) trying to throw these new empty vanilla visions of American womanhood at us as if their "adorable" visages will make us drop our guard and go running out to buy their wares. They aren't adorable; I want to murder them after about the third time I've seen their commercials. This is America goddamn it! I want blonde and big breasts! We didn't struggle to become the most powerful nation the Earth has ever seen so we can have plain everywomen with overgrown nether regions that have never seen a razor selling us products.

And I want, above all else, the ability to fast forward past their vapid pitches.

America used to have fire in its belly. We built railroads and dropped bombs on people and now the offspring of those very workers and soldiers have to sit glued to their seats as their favorite show is constantly interrupted by women they wouldn't fuck even if they could. That's something you expect out of an Eastern European country, not the U S of A. We're supposed to be better than that.

Wasn't that what the Declaration of Independence was all about?

Actually, I'm not exactly sure as I've never read it, but I'm pretty sure one of the Articles or Amendments or whatnot had to do with telling the town crier to get on his bike and cry somewhere else out of earshot. And take the Laurel and Milana-types and their no doubt scruffy pubic areas with you.

It comes down to simple American virtues. No one should have to wait through four score and seven years of commercials when they are watching TV. Why did we bother throwing tea in the Boston harbor if we were going to turn around a few hundred years later and lose our will to fight? You think for a moment that Betsy Ross didn't have hardwood floors downstairs? Don't let the flag fool you, under that simple frock was a bod that would put Flo to shame.

It's in the Constitution, damn it! I just need Dan Brown to do a *Da Vinci Code* thing on it and I'm sure the words "TV," "fast forward," "disabled," and "shaved" are all in there. We have to face the fact that Lady Liberty has gone from a star-spangled babe to an awkward librarian with the vagina of a lowland gorilla.

# TERF Wars

With all the conflicts going on in the world, it's hard to pick a really fun one to watch. I'd like to suggest the ongoing dust-up between radical feminists and transgenders. The truly angry versus the truly fucked up. I can't tell you how much I'm enjoying this one.

While I bear no ill-will towards the transgender community, the simple fact is that if a man cuts off his balls and sews on breasts, that doesn't make him a woman. It makes him a man who cut off his balls and sewed on some titties. Just like cutting off my legs doesn't make me a dwarf. It might be semantics to some people, but I hate the way that some people insist that gender is a choice. It's a reality. You are a man or a woman and you can dress however you like and you can interact with whomever you like but at the end of the day, cutting things off or sewing things on doesn't change what you are and I'm sick of having to pretend otherwise. Don't make your psychological issues my problem.

Somebody needs to have the balls to say this. Balls that they were either born with or had attached. Doesn't matter. Sex is like race. It's a given. You can listen to Michael Jackson songs all you want, but it won't make you a self-loathing black pedophile... just someone with horrible musical tastes.

To this day, nobody has ever been able to explain to me how homosexuals allowed transsexuals into their tent in the first place. After hundreds of years of trying to convince others that being gay isn't a decision and is rooted in biology, they turn around and join forces with people who are clearly making a decision.

Honestly though, I could care less if a man wants to wear heels or a woman wants to belch and scratch herself. To each their own. Live and let live. Just don't put on a wig and try to blow me. My life is complicated enough.

Unfortunately for trannies everywhere, not everyone is as open-minded as I am. In particular, radical feminists (or as they are called TERFs, which stands for "trans-exclusionary radical feminists"). The weird thing isn't that they are upset by the idea of someone wanting to use the same bathrooms because of the long lines or some practical concern; they are mad because whichever way the sex change has taken place, it reeks of male privilege. Men can't just decide to become a woman and women can't switch teams. In such an androcentric society, these chicks have no alternative than to view everything through the prism of male entitlement and female submission. However tormented they might be, people can never pay enough dues to change sexes.

So in the end these babes just won't accept transsexuals in their bathroom.

If you know anything about activists, both of these groups are real hornet's nests. Put them together and the nasty tweets have really been flying. Honestly, I didn't think there was enough of either group to cause such a ruckus but apparently the transgender movement is one of the current darlings of the empty-headed, politically correct crowd and radical feminists have managed to hang around like ticks on the side of a beloved pet. Do a little research and you'll find things have been getting pretty nasty.

That's the part I love.

I can't enough of it. Two communities that are so full of themselves, so self-important that neither can concede an inch to the other. It's like a cat fight on steroids. Literally... on so many levels.

The more you dig into the conflict, the more crazy participants you find getting into the fray. Everyone starts an organization with cool acronyms, sets up fundraisers to create awareness of themselves, posts flyers, and starts social media sites to trumpet their unique spin on the topic. Before long, they are hashtagging the living shit out of their new-found sworn enemies. For every fourteen-year-old boy who feels the need to express his inner woman and starts a Kickstarter campaign to fund his surgery, there is a woman who had a penis attached ten years ago and now deeply regrets it and feels that she was manipulated by the movie *The Birdcage*.

Things are getting ugly. Battles that were once waged on obscure college campuses between a couple of people holding signs are now featured on YouTube as each side tries to get the others' speakers banned from presenting their side of the argument. Both sides are so filled with self-righteousness, the idea of common ground is as unrealistic as both sides realizing they are turning themselves and their causes into a freak show.

And I do love me a good freak show.

What's truly fun is when other civil rights groups try to keep their heads down without looking like they aren't being supportive of their "brothers" and "sisters." The last thing they need is to get caught up in a transsexual shitstorm when they have their own wars to fight. One wrong word and you either have a hundred drag queens picketing outside your local office or a hundred bra-burning lunatics.

Put them all in a giant arena and let them fight it out, I say. Survival of the fittest... amongst the least emotionally fit to survive. Include all the people that feel oppressed and down-trodden, give them weapons, and put the whole thing on pay-per-view. Let all the victims fight it out to see who is most hard-done-by.

If I sound callous it's just because I just don't give a shit about who wins. Just as long as there is a lot of name-calling.

# Keeping It Real

Today I'd like to discuss reality.

That got your attention. Pretty heady stuff I know, but I've never let my complete ignorance of a topic stop me from discussing it. To compensate for my breathtaking lack of knowledge about the field of metaphysics, I will try and wrestle the topic in the direction of something I'm more comfortable with... language.

Words.

To try and define reality without using words seems an awful lot like the cartoons where the rabbit/pig/duck/etc, continues to walk along a path only to find that the animator has stopped drawing and they are standing in front of a blank backdrop. i.e. if there is no way to verbalize what you're thinking as you watch a tree fall in the forest, does it matter that it's falling?

Once you allow yourself to buy this premise, go ahead... this won't take long, you begin to understand why our reality is so messed up. We're using words and words are inherently complex and yet nobody wants a complex reality. While it is true that words can offer us some helpful red flags, starting with the word *reality* (What kind of a word has only seven letters yet has four syllables? Is it just me or does that immediately tell you that something is up?), it can also make everything we think subject to multiple interpretations.

When cement is finished drying, it is hard. When something is difficult, it is hard. My penis gets hard.

See what I mean?

I can't even get a boner without having to deal with issues involving context? It doesn't get any more primal than an erection, but even that seems fraught with double-entendres and although I might not be consciously aware of it as I go crashing around with one, behind the scenes you know my subconscious is hard at work muddying any waters it can get its hands on.

You know there is nothing more it would like to do than whisper "relationships are also hard" just seconds before I relinquish my seed.

I don't want to argue that perception is the problem, I just want to stick with the fact that the words that we use to process information make it hard to stick with whatever reality we've invented in our heads for more than a short time.

Learn a new word or a definition for an old one and you forever change your reality.

Along that same line of thought is my fascination with men who, when referring to masturbation, use the phrase "I beat it like it stole something from me." What exactly could it steal? Their innocence perhaps?

Even *beat* could mean assaulted or triumphed over.

Words, word, words.

I remember playing a prank on a friend who was staying at my house. What I did was cover a bar of soap with tons of my pubic hairs. It looked like a hamster with mange. Don't ask me why, or the discomfort involved with getting the pubes, because it's irrelevant. The point is that listening to him shower, I couldn't wait to hear a scream or groan or something that indicated that he'd stumbled upon my soap and my plan to nauseate and amuse him had reached a satisfactory conclusion.

The problem was neither a scream nor a groan came. Twenty minutes later, he emerged without a care in the world. When I later snuck into the shower, I saw the object of my tomfoolery had not only been used but half the hairs were gone and the other half had been pressed into the soap. Pressed in as if forcefully pushed against a face... including a set of apparently-harder-than-you'd-think-to-clean lips.

I reeled. What kind of a moron doesn't look at a foreign bar of soap? Did he think it was some sort of Somalian Monkey soap? It was only years later that he admitted that he'd recognized what I'd done



and decided to play along to gross me out.

The point being, for years my reality was different than his reality. And why? Because of the words I'd used in absorbing the information around me during the event?

No. Not at all. I couldn't have given a worse example if I'd have tried. A really, really horrible example.

Not only that but now I've discussed it, I can't duplicate said prank on my next houseguest.

Although I did get to invent the visual of a bar of Somalian Monkey soap.

Without the words *Somalian Monkey soap*, you'd have never gotten the image in the first place so I have successfully rescued my original assertion. I was going to actually take a picture of a bar of soap coated with pubic hair for this story but then it occurred to me that I don't need to. It now exists in your head without it. Somalian Monkey soap now exists because of the words you read. Obviously now you realize that I was being realistic when I said that language is the basis of your reality.

Really.

## 15 Minutes Of Wasted Sun On My Face

Every now and again, I feel the urge to write about writing. Don't worry, this isn't one of the articles where a writer you've never heard of gives tips on how to be a well-known writer. If anything, this is an article giving tips on how to stay unknown and why this is a sound policy.

You'll note I did not call myself an author. I'm not an author. An author is someone who earns money by telling rather engrossing stories in great detail. Writers earn nothing because they tell stories in the same way a painter paints a house. When the house is done he can't consider himself a painter... just a man who put paint on a house.

This might sound a bit vague, but as Justice Byron White so famously observed about pornography, "I can't define it but I like to rub my dick when I see it."

This dovetails quite nicely into mentioning that numerous critics have less-famously observed that my writing usually seems like I'm just jerking off.

I guess I am. And I'm doing it proudly. A pride that grows with every magazine or website I see with a smiling author simply bursting with enthusiasm at the thought that someone might read their works. They sit there stewing in their mock-humility, every second before someone asks them to tell them a little bit about their book seeming a million lifetimes. Their face frozen in a smile that they have no doubt spent hours practicing in front of a mirror at home, a smile that says "This is the story I was born to tell," as if that will make the book any less unbearable.

I've never written anything that felt like I was born to write it. In fact, there are usually quite a few things suggesting I don't write it all... good taste and common decency being just a couple of them.

I can't help feeling that at least a few of you are still hung up the fact I said that a painter isn't a painter. You might even be someone who puts paint on houses, seething with resentment at the fact that I've never even asked to see some of the reclining nudes, pastoral landscapes and bowls of fruit that litter your basement studio.

You paint houses and I write dumb stories. End of story.

Well, not quite. In fact, putting the phrase "end of story" smack dab in the middle of the story is a sure way to identify me as pornographic.

I read somewhere, in a magazine filled with articles that make this book look like Dostoyevsky, that you're supposed to get at least fifteen minutes of sun on your face every day so I thought I'd take a walk and see if I could get a good idea for a story. I present Exhibit A that the walk was unsuccessful. Along the way there is a bench that faces a major highway so I sat and watched countless people roaring by on their way from one place to another. An author would have returned to his desk with a great novel about the highway as a metaphor or some epic travel adventure but before I could come up with any such heady stuff, I was distracted by a beetle flying by and trying to land on a leaf.

It hovered and made a few passes as if he meant to make them but it was clear by the way his little legs lurching out every time he got close that the terrible truth was that he was a crappy flier and an even worse lander. Finally, he managed to plop down at his destination and before I could examine him any further and make some poignant observation about how his destination wasn't really where he meant to be, along came another beetle doing the same bad job of flying. Just like his winged predecessor, he crashed around while before managing to grab enough leaf to haul himself to a complete stop. "Beetles are such a joke," I said contemptibly.

Then I lifted my eyes and for a split second all the drivers in all the cars and trucks whizzing by were beetles.

Before you rush to my defense and point out that the last two paragraphs might be considered poignant by a fourteen-year-old girl or a middle-aged folk singer, I should point out that after re-reading such a mundane thought, I can't help but feel I should be downgraded from a writer to a beetle.

End of story again.

# Hump Daze

Before you start reading this, it is important that you understand that I know nothing about the evolution of horses or camels. I mean I literally know zilch about which came first or if they are even part of the same family. In my head, I imagine one of those charts that looks like a giant tree and the horse and camel come together at some point in the distant past, albeit they have flippers or fins or whatnot. The point being, I can't have you getting halfway through and realizing I am completely ignorant of the subject matter and then getting all pissed off as if this was some nature documentary.

It's a stupid story.

And it's about to get a whole lot stupider.

You see, there was a time when the first camel came into contact with a horse. And perched on top of that horse was a human, digging his heels into the side of the unfortunate beast and making it carry him to and fro.

The camel took one look at that and said to itself, "fuck that noise." Soon, word was passed around in the camel community and almost overnight, they were busy evolving humps to dissuade humans from trying to ride them. You had the one-hump crowd and the two-hump crowd, and apparently there was an even a three-hump crowd (the tri-hards) that didn't catch on and was soon extinct, but both were soon disappointed as it became clear that humans didn't care if they had humps or not and were soon dragging them into the same sorry shenanigans as the aforementioned horse. Apparently humans will ride anything they can get a saddle on. Camels could have evolved big pointy spikes like a stegosaurus and they'd still have humans lining up to get behind the reins.

So in the end, it's like those signs you see near airports... the ones that read "Caution Low Flying Aircraft." What exactly will being cautious do? What would being cautious entail anyway? How are you supposed to be cautious about low flying aircraft? If an airplane is coming in low, it's either going to hit you or not hit you and there's fuck all you can do about it. No one has ever been hit by a landing plane because they weren't being cautious.

"How exactly are camels and airport signage similar?" you might be asking yourself.

Do I have to do all the heavy lifting?

Even the question seems to indicate that you believe that the airport signage was just a clumsy and/or random segue because the camel observation had run out of steam after only three hundred words... a hundred and twenty of which were explaining that the other one hundred and eighty were complete bullshit.

How dare you?!

A clumsy segue would be noting that at a man's hundredth birthday party, there is some irony in the fact that at the end of the day, he will remember the balloons and brightly-colored paper about as well as he remembered the delivery room he was born in one hundred years prior.

Now that is random.

You can look all you like, but there is no way that you are going to be able to come up with a connection between that and the evolution of a camel's hump(s). Of course if I know you, which I don't, you're going to try anyway, so go ahead and get it out of your system.

I'll wait.

See?

But when I wrote the part about the airport signage, there really was a correlation between the two ideas but you are simply too lazy to get your imagination in gear and figure it out. And if you think for a minute I'm going to explain it to you now after all the attitude you've been giving me, you've got another thing coming. Honestly, if you keep this up you're going to have a hard time finding anyone to write stories for you.

At the end of the day, however you slice it, a camel is just a horse with humps.

## Algorithm And Blues

I wasn't overly optimistic when I heard about the music website Pandora. Perhaps it was because of the mythology of Pandora and her "box." It seemed almost like a warning, that somehow your musical tastes would run amok and the next thing you know, you'd be listening to old Joan Baez songs non-stop. I'm not sure I've ever heard a Joan Baez song, but it's definitely the image that comes to mind when I think of myself dazed and sitting cross-legged and naked except for a pair of Birkenstocks and a crown of daisies in a field.

Odd that a fear of technology would elicit hippie imagery but that just goes to show you... something. If you're getting a bit agitated waiting for me to come to a point, you're in for a long story, but out of respect for your time, I'll try to dig one up.

So I signed up and thought I'd give it shot. Typically, I just listen to whole albums on YouTube, so the idea of hearing new artists every few minutes was appealing. I threw in a few bands I like to get the ball rolling and sat back and waiting for the algorithm magic to begin.

The bands? Do you really want to know? I know you think you want to know but that's only because you view music as some sort of litmus test and if you like my dumb stories, you'll assume that we are musically simpatico and if you hate my dumb stories, you're waiting to revel in my shitty tastes.

But it doesn't work like that. If you don't believe me, believe Pandora and their over-reaching algorithm. Believe me, I used to be like you and think that I was the gatekeeper of all that is tasteful but I learned the hard way I'm not. And neither are you. Some singers that I love, you hate and vice versa and the only thing I can do by listing artists that I think are talentless frauds is sow the seeds of my own destruction. Eventually I'll hit on one that you are passionate about and the next thing I know, you are looking elsewhere for your dumb stories.

In fact, some of the bands I hate are considered hip and cool and by saying anything negative about them, I'm just ensuring that I'll always remain unhip and uncool.

Like Anthony Keidis of the Red Hot Chili Peppers. He's fucking tone deaf. He can't sing and I seem to be the only person on the planet who hears it.

Shit, I didn't mean to mention anyone by name. Happy now? I bet you're probably deciding whether or not to send me an email pointing out why musical tastes suck so much because I dared to slander your precious Chili Pepper.

Anyway, so I put in The Tallest Man on Earth, God is an Astronaut, and Wolf Parade and sat back in my chair, eager to see where that particular road led. If you've never used Pandora, before let me explain how it works. You like or dislike every song they offer up and before you know it they have crawled inside your head and figured out your musical tastes and what songs you *really* want to hear.

Your ultimate playlist.

Or so their algorithm would lead you to believe.

Their algorithm is crap. It was completely hit or miss and after about five hours they were bouncing

between Simon and Garfunkel, James Taylor, and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young songs. How can anyone bring themselves to dislike any of their songs? It's impossible. If they were Crosby, Stills, Nash, Young, Simon, Garfunkel, and Taylor, all other singers would simply lay down their vocal chords and find other work.

During the first five hours, they were throwing in stuff from all over the place. What part of The Tallest Man on Earth, God is an Astronaut, and Wolf Parade suggests I'd like to hear a fucking Morrissey song? I sprained my wrist hitting the dislike button so hard, leaving myself to wonder why I was so insulted by this suggestion.

Then there were the songs that I secretly enjoy but didn't want to have popping up on my Pandora in case someone came in. Sorry again, Bee Gees.

Maybe those are the ones that Pandora considers their little victories. The ones they know I like but don't have the balls to acknowledge.

Still waiting for a point?

Holy shit, you're persistent! Good thing there isn't a Pandora for short stories.

Manion? Dislike.

(Or so you tell yourself... I'm the "More Than a Woman" of writers.)

## Empty Spaces

Let's talk about empty spaces, shall we?

As a side note, whenever I read something where there writer says things like "Shall we?" I want to punch them right in their pretentious mouth so if you'll give me a minute, I would like to punch myself in the mouth.

Done and done.

Not sure what the second done is all about, but I've heard the expression used in these types of situations, so I refuse to apologize.

Anyway, empty spaces. The truth is I'm the guy you see at the mall looking into the store that went out of business. I'm sure you always assume there is a good reason that this person, or me, is peering inside but there really isn't. I just consider it a way to mourn the death of a person's business. You could even say the death of person's dream. I'm just paying my respects.

I stand there and imagine the first day it opened. The excitement of it all. I imagine customers walking through it. I can almost picture them on a typical day. Ghosts of shoppers past. The silent hustle and bustle of the holiday crowds.

And then the quiet realization that the store can't keep going.

Then the final time the steel security gate was pulled down.

The finality of it all.

I can only imagine the hurt of having to walk by it if you are the former owner. If it were me, I would move far away so I wouldn't have to be reminded of my retail failure.

All of this is what's going through my head as I stare into the empty store.

I've had policemen come and ask me to move along when I've pulled this trick with empty houses.

Walking around outside and looking through all the windows and imagining all the dinners and nights watching TV and heartaches and triumphs that make up the lives of a family living in a house. I close my eyes and can almost hear the laughter and tears.

Almost.

Now it's all shadows and stillness. Couches longing to be sat on and tables holding bowls and silverware like a painting. Houses that are empty always seem a little more than just empty. They seem hollow. Especially when you consider how many people would love to live in a house and yet don't.

I guess you could say the same thing about an empty store. Most people have an idea for a product or service they think they could sell and would love to have a spot in a mall to sit and peddle their ass off. I've never imagined myself sitting in the middle of an empty store behind a table filled with Lance Manion books but you can bet I will now. With a big sign behind me saying "Book signing today!" and the store being just as devoid of buyers, as I sit and squirm in my embarrassment over nobody wanting a signed copy of my book. Sitting on a cheap folding chair as a final indignity.

And then I'm at the funeral home looking down at an old friend in a casket. But he is empty too. No lights on. Nobody home. I feel bitter that we ended our relationship badly and I never got the opportunity to punch him the mouth.

So I do.

As another side note, whenever I read something where there writer says something that ruins the mood because it's completely unbelievable, I want to punch them right in their lying mouth so if you'll give me a minute I would like to again punch myself in the mouth.

Done and done.

This time, I don't feel so badly about repeating the word done. My mouth is now swelling on both sides so it seems appropriate.



I could apologize for dancing around a deep topic only to run away (like the coward I am) when it came time to make a point, but somehow my words would feel a bit empty.

## How ants ended up living underground

Two ants stood lamenting the number of predators that seemed partial to ants.

“I’ve heard tell of a new beast called an anteater. Big fellow.”

“Really? Are they dangerous?”

The ant slowly turned his head in the direction of his comrade. “They are called anteaters. What do you think?”

The other ant said nothing. His friend continued. “No matter where we build, there seems to be something that wants to eat us. Is there no safe place to raise our kids?”

After a few moments the other ant said “What about...?” and he looked down.

His buddy followed his gaze down towards the ground and then back up to his face. “I don’t follow.”

In order to properly enjoy this image, it might help to imagine the ant having the voice of Ricky Gervais and many Ricky Gervais-like features as he gives a little nod in the direction of the ground.

“What about underground?”

“What do you mean? I still don’t follow.”

“I mean, what if we lived underground? Just burrow under the earth away from all the things that eat us.”

A light wind began to blow and momentarily distracted our insect protagonists, a light wind being capable of lifting an ant and depositing them a few counties over. After the wind subsided a bit, the one ant still looks unconvinced. Finally he mustered up one of many objections lurking in his head.

“What about when it rains?”

It’s at this point in the story that I must admit I have no idea why anthills don’t immediately fill with water and drown all their inhabitants. You can see how this might cause the story to come to a grinding halt.

“What about it? We’ll dig places for the water to run off.”

If you think the other ant’s face looked befuddled, you should see mine. I have no idea if that would work.

“Lots of insects live underground. You have to think outside the box.” All of a sudden he got very animated and did a quick test run of using his mandibles for grabbing a rock and moving it out of the way. After doing this a few times a small hole started to open up beneath him.

“See? There’s nothing to it. If we get everyone to help, we could be living quite comfortably underground in only a few hours.”

“Then what? What is there to do underground?”

Obviously his less-industrious friend was having none of it. He stood there quite incredulously as his more-industrious friend began to disappear into a hole of his own making. Soon he could only see the top of his head.

“You know this will never catch on right? It’s dark. How is anyone going to see?”

“We’ll use these antennas on top of our heads. Nobody knew what they were for; maybe this is why we have them.”

“Oh sure, everyone is going to be fine trying to see a sunset using their antenna ten feet under the ground.” He then went on a long rant about how sitting in a dark hole will really bring out the yellows and reds of a sunset.

About that time another ant came along to tell them the bad news that a large number of their colony had just been eaten. The ant that had wanted nothing to do with the idea of living underground took a long look into the hole his friend had dug and sighed and long sigh.

“Hey pal, why don’t you give us a hand? We have an idea we’d like to run by everyone.”

And a few days later they were all living underground.

Meanwhile a few miles away a couple anteaters were talking. "I haven't seen ants lately."

"Is that bad?"

"We're anteaters, what do you think? I'd like you to do me a favor and stand on my tongue."

"Why?"

"I'd like to stretch it out. I have an idea where the ants went."

# Motorcycle Gangs Have Got To Go... But They Won't

The question I'd like to put to you today is this: what kind of a civilization allows gangs of known criminals to roar around on motorcycles?

It makes you wonder. How does a decent society allow it? How did it get so bad that these scumbags feel they can publicly wear vests announcing to the world that they enjoy selling meth?

I guess, to be fair, those vests do suggest that these thugs are at least tolerant of homosexuality because they are about the gayest thing I've ever seen. Freddie Mercury would have thought they were a bit over the top. Fall asleep in one, and you wake up with a handlebar mustache.

These tattoo-clad villains want us to believe that they are somehow expressing their dual loves of freedom and comradeship by dressing the same and hitting the open road on choppers when the fact is, these men/children are nothing but bullies. If they want to join a gang who uses the threat of physical violence to achieve their goals, they should just join any of the unions in the construction industry.

But no, instead they spend their time raping, murdering, and distributing narcotics like they are living in a warped video game. And what's worse, we stand by and let them, even though they wear gay vests to let us know who the bad guys are.

I watch these TV shows where they interview cops about the various motorcycle gangs and they sit there and read off a litany of hideous crimes that they know without a shadow of a doubt that these men committed. They show videos where it's clear exactly who is stomping someone to death. Then they explain why the six-year investigation resulted in exactly zero arrests.

Even these motorcycle thugs must find it hard to believe that they can tool around with guns and knives and get away with it.

In the unlikely event they are arrested, we get treated to an interview with them about how many things they did that they were never charged with and how they spent their time in prison, murdering rival gang members before they were eventually dumped back onto the streets to continue their rampage.

Of course, you might wring your hands and ask what is to be done. The blinders of justice are so firmly affixed to your head, that it never occurs to you that the solution is easy. So easy that we will never have to balls to do it. We would rather hide behind terms like due process and probable cause. Terms that ensure that we continue to get preyed upon by these pieces of filth.

The solution?

Acknowledge that we are in a war and treat these people as enemy combatants. Tell the police it's ok to enforce laws and if these laws are broken by people wearing gay vests then it's perfectly acceptable to shoot them in the head. Don't romanticize the lifestyle and face up to what has to be done. Denial is just your way of avoiding responsibility for your culture.

Criminals have got to go. If they think they can wear gay vests and crash around intimidating law enforcement and decent people alike as they get into "turf wars" with other Neanderthals, then it's time to stop playing nice.

Fuck them. Fuck them up. I'm sure that Larry the primate with the teardrop tattoo on his face and the spider web on his elbow is a wonderful human being, but if he wants to ride around with known scumbags, it's time for Larry to be put in a box.

If I have to explain that groups of normal men who enjoy riding motorcycles and join clubs to engage in that activity together in a social setting should not be lumped in with the filth, then you're probably too stupid or too cowardly to understand the point of this.

The alternative is to lose a war without even firing a shot.

Which we will no doubt do.

## Apple Bottoms

Gentlemen, if you want to make a splash with the ladies I would suggest enduring an afternoon of apple picking. I realize that spending hours wandering around looking for apples in trees along with another dozen poor bastards when you could have easily gone to a grocery store and finished not only your apple picking but also your orange picking and beef jerky picking in half the time might seem like a colossal waste of time but you have to remember the value of appearing wholesome.

Your gal will see you plodding around holding your bag and squinting and getting sunburned and swatting bees and think to herself "How wholesome! I've really landed a wholesome guy."

How does this benefit you?

Well, aside from all the apple pies and apple sauce and apple whatever-the-hell-else-you-can-insert-an-apple-intos there is also the unspoken rule of wholesomeness.

It allows you some unwholesome wriggle room.

I think we all know what I'm hinting at.

Anal.

Apple picking leads to anal. I don't write the rules, I just expose them.

Now the first thing you might do if you've ever actually been apple picking is to wince and try to get the image of the people you saw picking apples having anal sex out of your head. I'll tell you right now you can't. There is something about wholesome-looking, dumpy, crunchy, earthy people in bad sweaters plowing each other in the ass that stays with you. Forever.

You're welcome.

Actually I apologize. This was really written for people who have never been apple picking. Perhaps I should have started the story with a warning.

This little theory of mine explains why women on farms always have an apple pie cooling on the windowsill. It's the rural way of announcing that she is a slut. Traveling salesmen will keep their car windows rolled down in the hopes of catching a whiff of apple so they know where to pull in. Some of those farm girls are only too enthusiastic to add a few places to the whatever-the-hell-else-you-can-insert-an-apple-into list. Which explains why country folk stay away from farm stands offering 'Fresh Squeezed Cider.'

Sort of longing for the image of wholesome-looking, dumpy, crunchy, earthy people in bad sweaters plowing each other in the ass now aren't you?

At this point it's perfectly reasonable to be asking yourself what the hell apple picking and anal sex have to do with each other. Perfectly reasonable if you're not paying attention to human nature.

The point is that I've been to some of the wildest clubs in the darkest corners of the most heartless cities and found some of the most repressed girls to ever walk the planet so it only stands to reason that everybody who goes apple picking is a sex maniac.

It's science.

It's in our DNA. You think that it's a coincidence that a girl's ass looks like an apple? That it was an apple that got Adam and Eve chucked out of the Garden? That a girl can be the apple of someone's eye? That the whole gravity thing was started by an apple? That it was an apple that William Tell had to shoot of his son's head?

Ok ... maybe not the William Tell thing or the gravity thing but the rest of the evidence is hard to ignore.

Is there anyone who loves anal more than Fiona Apple?

I rest my case.

# Trapped

When you hear the expression “timing is everything,” it makes you think of something important. Perhaps even a life-changing experience.

I think you need to relax.

I was sitting in a clogged passageway that ended at a set of three large double-doors leading outside the building with about a hundred other people waiting to see if the rain would ease up enough for us to venture out. We had been waiting for at least twenty minutes as the skies seemed to have an unlimited supply of water to deposit on the city and the crowd was getting antsy.

Then it happened. One person decided to brave the elements and pushed open one of the sets of doors and out he went. What happened next was similar to a wildebeest crossing I saw on a nature documentary.

What seemed like a million of these dumb animals sat at a river crossing waiting for the first wildebeest to make his move and then they all started to make their way across. Trouble is that the river was too deep and the water moved too fast and it was littered with crocodiles the size of luxury automobiles and after about the third wildebeest had climbed up the muddy slope on the other side, it turned into a giant Slip N’ Slide & Get Trampled or Drown and soon the river was clogged with dead wildebeests.

It was exactly like except that there weren’t any crocodiles and nobody drowned. Actually, it wasn’t much like a wildebeest crossing at all except for the fact that everyone got caught up in the surging crowd and whether you wanted to or not, you were going out into the rain. I’m sure that given the choice between being eaten by a crocodile the size of a luxury automobile and being pushed out into a light drizzle, most wildebeests would roll their eyes at the absurdity of it all and take the latter, but I’m guessing it might have a little more sympathy for my plight had that same wildebeest been wearing an expensive suit.

Anyway, showing the resiliency of a grizzled writer, I began my walk to my hotel but Mother Nature had different plans and decided to crank up the rain about seven notches, so I was forced to seek refuge under a nearby awning and wait out the downpour.

It was then that timing was everything. I say it that way so you will forever remember that even if timing is everything, it doesn’t mean that the event is in any way special.

On the other side of the street was a girl with an umbrella, walking along minding her own business. It was then that she came across a stream of water cutting across the sidewalk making its way to a nearby grate. It was at least two feet across with a depth that was hard to judge. In a very unwildebeest-like manner, she took a few steps back and decided to leap across the watery divide. Obviously she was not consumed mid-leap by a lunging crocodile the size of a luxury automobile because had that have been the case, that would have been the very definition of timing being everything and instead, she landed on the other side without incident.

Almost without incident actually. Had it been completely without incident, there would have been no reason for a grizzled writer to have mentioned it and I don’t think anyone would argue that this story has all the earmarks of being written by a grizzled writer.

In the process of jumping up and then landing, her umbrella somehow turned inside out and upside down. While the physics might have eluded me, I couldn’t help but notice the end result was that she was holding a large cup over her head and what’s more she was completely oblivious to that fact. Onward she walked without a care in the world and completely unaware that her umbrella was quickly filling up with water. This went on for another fifty or sixty feet when the amount of water hit some sort of critical mass and the umbrella ripped and soaked her.

Until that time, sitting trapped under an awning, I had been wishing I had an umbrella. I had been cursing my decision to go without one into an uncertain world plagued by fickle weather. After watching the aquatic exploits of this unfortunate soul, it occurred to me that sometimes there is nothing you can do to avoid your fate. If you are meant to get wet, you are going to get wet.

Turns out that would have been a much better expression to have started this story with than “timing is everything.” Anyone reading this is going to shake his or her head and say “While his writing might be grizzled, this writer is all over the place and can’t seem to figure out the point of his own stories.” You might even be an influential person who was thinking about giving me a big break in my career and will now move on and find some other writer to help because of this inexcusable gaffe.

Turns out timing really is everything.

## St. Thomas

If you sit and look out your window- if you are lucky enough to have a window that faces the water- you will see them coming in and out all day. Each one thinking they are living some crazy unique adventure. In their early 50s, they left their high paying jobs and bought a boat and are spending their time island-hopping.

Floating clichés.

Most are on their second wife and third high blood pressure medication and they fight the daily urge to buy a captain's hat. They watch *Caddyshack* on their DVD player in the cabin and long to say "You scratched my anchor!"

And here they were, surrounding me at a dinner party on St. Thomas. Why I agreed to attend, I don't know. Sometimes I feel I should make time to spend it amongst the uncommon folk. "It will make a good story," I tell myself.

So halfway through the main course, I shared with them my idea to create a diving mask that can identify fish. "You would just have to get the fish within sight and it details of it would appear on the inside of the mask like in the *Iron Man* movies and it would also log which fish you saw on the dive. It would use 'fish recognition software.'" They thought I was kidding and roared with laughter.

I wasn't. I realize the technology doesn't exist at present but it can't be that hard to borrow human facial recognition whatnot from the FBI and apply it to all things aquatic. If the boys in the IT department roll up their sleeves, I'm sure they'd get it done over a long weekend. People would print out what they saw after every dive and I could easily imagine people comparing notes and being envious of a rare fish sighting.

These former titans of corporate bureaucracy snorted and thought it was about the funniest thing they ever heard, many of them shaking so hard that if they would have ever worked up the courage to buy the captain's hat they always wanted, it would have no doubt ended up in their Clams Casino. These titan swindler pirate pigs with their sunburned bald spots... laughing at my fish recognition software.

So then I told them another thought I'd been mulling over, after composing myself for a full half hour of course, a thought I had not planned on sharing due to its rather offensive nature but as I was cast as the jester for the evening, I figured I'd play along.

I put my elbows on the table and gave a stern look as if I had something serious that I needed to get off my sunburned chest. All heads turned in my direction.

"When cheerleaders lift their leg up to their head and hold it there, it strikes me that they should do away with the underwear and just admit that on some level they are showing off their vaginas."

The table grew silent.

"As if they are showing how much nicer their vaginas are than the other team's cheerleaders."

It appeared that my fellow guests were digesting the scene I'd presented and soon heads started to nod in agreement.

So when I was serious, they thought I was kidding and when I was kidding, they thought I was serious. And after I'd abstained from rum most the day so I wouldn't make a spectacle of myself. After I'd found shoes with laces and showered. After I'd listened to a hundred stories that all ended with "The sunsets in blah fucking blah are the prettiest in the whole Caribbean" without nary a snort of derision.

"They stand there with their leg by their head knowing the whole crowd is staring at their snatch and imagining the other team's cheerleaders couldn't possibly possess such stunning genitalia. In fact, after a full minute of the girl standing there holding her leg by her head, everyone can reach no other conclusion than intercourse with the other team's cheerleaders would begin with an act similar to removing the cover off a pool."



It took a while for these barely-millionaires to wrestle with the imagery I was going for. When they finally did, their faces soured one by one, as if someone had turned the contents of their bowls of Clams Casino into a noxious cloud of methane and Clam Casino and sent it floating down the table.

“You know what I’m saying, right? Oral sex with these beastly other cheerleaders would be like building a tent out of blankets and having it collapse on you.”

“Not our gals though!” one of them suddenly piped up.

“Nope, not ours. I bet you could bounce a quarter off their private parts,” another added.

Then conversation resumed, as normal as it had been before. Well, as normal as mid-life crisis stereotypical dick-measuring contests can be. I had hoped to be the storm that tossed their tiny ships but instead they rallied around the vaginas I had identified as belonging to the home team with a surprising fervor.

Their newest wives were lucky women.

As the night wound down, I fielded various offers to come sailing but I explained I’m already adrift.

## A Mouthful Of Sand

A mirage is an optical illusion caused by atmospheric conditions, in particular the appearance of water in a desert caused by the refraction of light from the sky by heated air.

That's one explanation.

It forgets entirely that this image has to appear on the retina of somebody for there to be a mirage in the first place. So the question that begs to be asked is what the hell were they doing in the desert in the first place?

The next question that pops up is whether or not there were actually people who were crawling through the desert looking for water only to see some but assume it was a mirage. Perhaps they crawled right past some perfectly good water because they saw a larger pool only a little further down the dune and that pool had some palm trees around it.

Another definition, and one that lends itself much better to storytelling, is something that appears real or possible but is not. Now this question neither begs nor pops but it ends up in my head anyway; if fool's gold is something that looks valuable but isn't wouldn't a fool's mirage be something that looks like it's too good to be true but actually is too good and true?

Somehow it still has negative implications. It might be the fact that it has fool in its name. But who else would be in a damn desert to begin with? The same fool who might argue that who's to say that the desert isn't the mirage? One man's desert is another man's beach.

Except for the shiny water off in the distance that may or may not be real.

I guess it would just be nice for it to work out well for the fool once in awhile.

## Tom-ish

I'm glad I don't look how I feel. Don't get me wrong, I love the way Tom Waits appears all disheveled but I feel like I'm that and more. It's not that I think it's a fine line between disheveled and ruined, in fact I think the line is measured in miles, but I'm afraid I'm so far on the side of ruined that I can't even see disheveled anymore.

After hundreds of stories, there is the creeping fear of writing about the same things. Duplicating some thought or quote. This fear being balanced out by the reality that nobody is reading any of it. But somehow it still matters, not repeating myself.

Which makes the fact that I look completely normal even funnier. I know that everyone thinks that they are somehow darker on the inside, like some inside-out Oreo cookie, but I'm so painfully like everyone else in this regard that I believe there are exceptions to be had. I don't smoke but I always feel the butt hanging off my lips and I lay in bed wishing that I drank so it could explain the way my head swims and the room spins. It's like the alcohol never leaves my stomach. I never have to drink it because it's always there and never leaves. Sloshing around, impairing my decision-making.

The main problem being that there are a few basic things that motivate me to write. Inspiration is random and but it's also true that lightning never strikes on a cloudless day. There will always be certain things that spur creativity, if that's what you'd call writing stupid things, and after a while you can't tell the dark clouds apart because you're just so damn happy when one of them produces a flash and a crashing sound.

I shave most days but the man staring back at me from the mirror always has a shadow. Haggard. No amount of sleep seems to help. Cheeks that have such deep crevasses, they can carry away any tears unseen. Like movie stars being hustled from the stage door into their waiting limo.

And poor. So very poor. The kind of poverty that no amount of money seems to help. A soggy match that won't light no matter how many times you drag it across a rough patch.

They say in space nobody can hear you scream, which explains why everyone needs their space. And I have mine. Plenty of it.

Which might be why nobody sees through my normal visage. I know that all the other normal-looking people don't feel like this because if they did, nothing would get done. We would all just sit on a big circle playing Russian roulette, waiting for our turn to put the gun to our heads, without knowing that someone long ago forgot to put a bullet in. Never knowing how empty our little victory was when we pulled the trigger.

Maybe the reason nobody reads my dumb stories is that I prefer the imagery of thunder over rain splashing down on an upturned and expecting face or even a chilly wind moving over tingling skin. Thunder claps are underappreciated and usually cause pets and loved ones to go running for shelter.

But you're reading this so I guess it's not true that nobody reads me. When you think about all the things that had to happen for me to write this and then for you to read it, like two lines intersecting on a piece of graph paper, it makes the hair on my neck stand up ever so briefly. A lot like how I suspect it feels just before you get hit by lightning.

Fake smiles and fake laughs. The laugh being the worst. Anyone could tell its fake if they bothered to listen but they don't. Why would they? They are wrestling with their own disguises. Fighting the feeling of needing everyone and no one. Being someone. Being everyone. Being no one.

Same thing.

But I think I've said that before.

## A Can Of Emotional Worms

Sometimes the mistakes you make are the only thing keeping you from making bigger mistakes. Let me illustrate in a way that the typical Lance Manion reader has come to expect. By that I mean, if you are a reader of Stieg Larsson for instance you expect every damn thing to be explained in great detail but if, on the other hand, you are a reader of mine you expect to have to fill in most of the details of every damn thing mentioned and not mentioned.

Mostly not mentioned.

And mostly with run-on sentences.

I'm not trying to say one is superior than the other, only that if you expect me to explain exactly what I mean by saying that the mistake I made was the only thing that kept me from making a bigger mistake I suggest you give ol' Stieg a call and ask for his input because all you're getting here is enough information to draw your own conclusions. By that I mean I was almost done with a long rambling, weepy-ass, introspective story that had me questioning the nature of relationships and love and lust and was only a few lines away from finishing it up and forever labeling myself as an enormous pussy when the aforementioned occurred. This story was a shining example of what happens when you hand over the keys of an otherwise brilliant wit to a sap riddled with momentary weakness.

But then it happened. A wonderful, story-saving mistake.

What I meant to type was "an emotional can of worms", which gives you an indication of just how deep I was in the pussy zone, but instead I ended up typing "a can of emotional worms." It broke the spell. I laughed out loud at myself and the giant pile of literary crap I had been writing down in the name of sorting out my feelings.

A can of emotional worms. My imagination soared. What exactly would an emotional worm look like? I guess it would depend on the emotion. All I could picture was a worm with a big smile, which led to about a dozen separate story ideas. Each of them better than the shit I was spewing.

I copied "a can of emotional can of worms" and quickly deleted the rest. Had anyone had the misfortune of reading even a few lines of it I would have been forced to cut off their head to save face.

Mine, not theirs. I would have probably buried their face along with the rest of their head.

This is where the savvy Lance Manion reader insists on knowing why I had started writing this shit to begin with. I bet Mr. Larsson never has to deal with inquisitive readers like this ... but there you are. I'm happy to have any readers at all so I can't whine too much.

I also know that my readers don't really care about the actual details of my life, only what drove me to be such a mega-pussy in the first place so they can avoid going down that very same road in the future.

A girl.

I know. So painfully cliché that Stieg Larsson would no doubt roll his eyes and feel the colossal difference between our books sales was completely justified. Maybe so Stieg ... but at least I don't need a thousand words to describe her. Simply by letting my readers know that she turned Lance Manion into a giant pussy, for however brief a moment, they know all they need to about her.

And I don't want to rub it in or slander your sizable audience Stieg but I'm now going to describe the dream I had about her and I have no doubt that your readers would have no clue what I am talking about.

I was driving across a long bridge and on one side was a large, scenic stream flowing along and on the other was a dried up river bed. I drove on and kept looking back and forth wondering how I could be seeing what I was seeing. Trying to figure out where the water from the one side went.

Now I have to admit that my readers probably have no clue what I am talking about either but the difference is they like it that way. I also know that Larsson readers never get a pop culture reference

thrown in to make sure that they are forced to re-examine their hastily-concocted conclusions about the dream.

Mine comes from the movie I was just watching before sitting down and typing this. I got almost all the way through it without thinking about her. Which for a weekend is a pretty significant accomplishment. In *The Da Vinci Code* the female leads turns to a very earnest-looking Tom Hanks and says "We are who we protect."

That made me think of her and the bridge and my can of emotional worms.

And the last thing we fought about. I was trying to convince her that the idea of waiting half an hour before swimming was just an old wives tale. Life is short, I implored, never miss a chance to get wet. She gave me a "So much for the noble friend huh?" look.

I take a great deal of pride in the fact that my readers will process all of that and come up with a way to connect with me. Stieg Larsson readers would probably pelt his house with rocks and demand their money back and Dan Brown readers would assume that the emotional worm is just another way of saying penis and the can is really her vagina and then Ron Howard would make a movie where he illustrates it with shiny phallic worms and colorful cans and chalices floating above my head.

Speaking of directors, I know which side John Hughes would have been on in my ongoing girl drama. How many girls would really prefer Blaine over Duckie after the initial burst of romance had worn off? Mr. Hughes made it perfectly clear that Blaine was the sort of guy who would end up vaping and riding those motorcycles with two front wheels, i.e. a total douche bag. There was no way Blaine was going to be able to fuck Molly like Duckie would have. Remember the scene where he kisses her friend in frustration? That girl ran right home and named her favorite vibrator after him. At first I was afraid of becoming her 'Duckie' but now I think about it I'm proud to wear the moniker and if she doesn't come crawling back to me then it's her loss when she ends up stuck with Blaine.

The problem is that there are still girls who didn't learn a damn thing from *Revenge of the Nerds*. One plowing in the moon bounce with the nerd and the cheerleader was his love slave.

I'm starting to see why Steig stays away from pop culture references ... once you start you can't stop. One leads to another. I end up all over the place and regretting I opened up that particular can of emotional worms.

What this story really need is another wonderful mistake.

Just like her story.

And mine.

(Movies have the innate advantage of having soundtracks playing in the background so if you don't mind I'll throw out the lyrics to a Chris Trapper song for you to read before you leave ... and maybe you will figure out if any person is worthy of the kind of ache that has you wincing as you sing.)

*I've been fading for so long I'm lost completely  
I long to just get washed out in the waves  
And feel the ocean floor fall out beneath me  
Feelings without weight*

## And In Conclusion ...

If life hands you lemons and you don't like lemonade, then what?

It's awkward when you share something that you think is universal but then you find out it's only you. For instance, recounting to a friend how before a big date you plucked the hairs on your dick... without knowing that not everyone has rogue hairs halfway up their pole.

I hate when I'm listening to someone being interviewed and they respond to a question by saying "Well, that could be a whole show right there." You're ON a whole show, dimwit. Stop taking yourself so seriously and answer the fucking question!

The magic of movies is that from the most unlikely source something profound can emerge. Something transformative. A simply truth that transcends the moment. Such was the case in "Kindergarten Cop" when an adorable little tyke stepped up and uttered the words that would forever change me: "Boys have a penis, girls have a vagina."

Nothing tells me that the person I'm listening to is a complete moron faster than hearing the words "You know what I'm saying?" said after every sentence. I want to explain that if at any time they lose me in their incoherent babbling, I will stop them and say "I don't know what you're saying," but otherwise they should assume I'm on board and not keep asking me because it makes me want to shoot them in their empty head.

The next time you see a group of teenagers laughing at you, just remember that when you were a teenager you would have laughed at you too.

There's something weird about having only one nostril drip but I can't quite put my finger in it.

Every time I see a dead fox by the side of the road, I wonder if the car that hit it was particularly wily.

Just imagine that you're wood pulp. Sitting there not knowing if you're destined to be a newspaper, a post-it note, or toilet paper.

The married man scrunched up his face and thought "For better or worse is one thing, but poison ivy? She looks hideous!"

Certain things you eat can change how your farts smell. Like feces. If you eat feces, your farts will smell like shit.

Earlier today, I was driving with the window down and I couldn't help notice how loud the crickets sounded. Then I realized it was one particular cricket. I know you're expecting me to say that there was a 40-foot high cricket crashing through the brush next to the road... but don't be stupid. That wouldn't make any sense at all. It's actually insulting that you believe I would say something like that. It was actually a normal-sized cricket. Running 50 mph next to the car.

I started out thinking the best way to explain how easy it is for a centipede to manage all those legs would be to give an example of how a one-armed creature might think that a second would be unwieldy when it's not. Then of all a sudden I was wondering if I had to choose between one arm or one leg which I would choose, i.e. did I want to spend my life crawling around and pulling myself forward with an arm or did I want to hop around with no way to grab anything? It's exhausting being me.

Sitting on the couch watching TV last night, I got so sleepy. My eyelids were so heavy I could barely keep them open. Even I had to admit to myself how adorable I must have looked.

As lowbrow as it may be, I can't help thinking to myself how funny the mascot of the Hershey Bears of the American Hockey League could be if they changed the name of the team to the Squirts.

I'm not sure what to make of a man who drives an enormous truck yet also has an enormous penis.

Throwing the baby out with the bathwater seems more serious than you'd think. Especially when you're babysitting.

One of the downsides of being a serial killer is not being able to keep a dream journal for fear that it would end up being used against you at the trial. Probably the number one reason I'm not a serial killer.

Most people are so terrified that others will discover their flaws, they don't realize that they're the only endearing things about them.

A trip to Costco answers the question of what to do with the spare room. "That's our crackers and chips room."

Sometimes you write a story so powerful that it makes you wish you knew how to use Photoshop so you could paste the face of a koala onto the body of one of the Planet of the Apes soldiers.

Ever have a fart that relaxes your ass to the point you feel you could back a truck up into it?

Ever get introduced and feel you could have used further ado?

I watched a nature show where a lion toyed with a young deer for hours before consuming it. During that time there were moments where it showed it genuine affection. Yesterday at the deli I saw a fat guy do the same thing with a corned beef sandwich.

If Christians really believe that Jonah was able to live in the belly of a whale (or Dhul-nun living in the belly of a fish, I assume it was a whale shark, if you prefer Islam), don't you think that at least one of them, given the large number of both whales and whale sharks, would have looked into this as a possible solution to homelessness?

You want me to believe it's a coincidence that the same day an Africanized man was shot in St. Louis a colony of Africanized bees killed someone in Arizona?

You're going to tell me that "off the beaten path" doesn't refer to masturbation when two of the four words are beaten and off?

Happy Columbus Day! It IS Columbus Day, not Indigenous People Day. Columbus discovered America and anyone who thinks differently is wrong. Before he arrived it was an empty wasteland. He literally brought the trees and animals to America.

If you know the thread count of your towels, we are not going to get along. I may not have it all figured out as of yet, but you clearly have no idea what's going on around you.

I sincerely believe that the current WWE champion should also serve as the US Ambassador to the United Nations.

I'm envious of the way the butter embraces the toast.

I don't know how to define pornography but I know it when I see it every day.

I had a lot of dogs growing up. My father loved puppies. Their energy, the way would endlessly romp around and show their affection. So much so that after a year, he would kill them and buy a new puppy. I had a lot of dogs growing up... and moms. My father loved honeymoons.

Just thought of a good premise for a Halloween story" "The Pumpkin Who Came Alive And Complained All Night About The Candle Inside It." Someone remind me to write it next year.

I am a grizzled veteran on the War on Women, with three Purple Hearts no less.

It was a particularly poor choice of words to ask Darryl, an aspiring chef, to put his career on the back burner.

I'm sick of hearing about what we're learning from insects. You don't think they've picked up a thing or two from us?

Only two more weeks until the 2015 Babes of Feminism calendar comes out! A soapy Pam Allen washing up her pick-up truck, a bikini-clad Jane Alpert, Lauren Bethell in a French maid's outfit, the sexy cop D.A. Clarke... mmm mmmmmmm!

I'm not letting the failure of my first children's book, the whimsical one concerning erectile dysfunction, get me down. I am determined to get into the lucrative genre so I will soon be sending out

two new books to publishers to see if there is an interest: "Leon The Vegan Lion Starves To Death" and "Eric The Three-Legged Horse Comes In Last." Hopes are high.

The carrot *is* the stick.

Why is it as a kid, I assumed that when Superman ejaculated that he killed the woman? Relationships haven't gotten any easier.

I like when I get so pissed that I grab the wrong end of a metaphor and beat the shit out of it.

Earlier today:

"It's not even the tail wagging the dog. It's the tail wagging a larger tail. A giant fucking tail sitting there with another tail sticking out of it. Wagging."

If I was working for a company that I knew was monitoring which websites I visited while at work, I would start each and every day by going to the most twisted hardcore '70's Vietnamese bestiality snuff porn site I could find. The kind where you'd need to drop napalm between the legs of the lead actress just to get through her thick bush.

I detest dumb expressions like "You never learn anything doing something right." No shit. You did it right. You didn't need to learn anything.

I fear that if I awoke in the 1920s, I'd giggle every time someone used the word gay to mean happy.

I sounded by battle roar from my bed, the place where my best battle roars are usually roared.

There's an important lesson to be learned as you watch the documentary R.E.M. by MTV. The moment the band went from viewing the creative process as a mysterious and sacred process to wanting to express their political views is exactly the time that their music began to suck. I will try to remember this moving forward. It seems inevitable that celebrity would cause Michael Stipe to go from a cool eccentric type to thinking he is the smartest person in the room. Apparently it's true even if you're borderline retarded... like Janeane Garofalo (admit it; you wanted me to give an example).

In Manion's World of Tomorrow, cars won't be controlled by the driver but by the car next to them.

I would empathize more with "protesters" if they were supporting the rights of victims as opposed to criminals. I know that writers and artists are supposed to be more sensitive/empty-headed and all but I just can't seem to give a shit if a career criminal with health issues dies resisting his 33rd arrest. Not when a 12-year-old boy gets assaulted and curb-stomped and nobody cares because the assailants were the same color as he is.

I was asked to write a holiday story for a mainstream magazine, which I did, only to have it rejected for publication because I wouldn't change the title. It was a heartwarming tale about a family putting up their Xmas tree called "The Erection." Struggles.

Less than 20% of iceberg lettuce is visible from the aisle. "Whoa! This will barely fit in the cart." Remember to lift with your knees, not your back.

My nerd lover was killed by her 50,000-sided die... and she only needed an 18+.

I remember a gift given to me by an ex-girlfriend. Truly the Red Rider BB Gun of adult gifts, a handmade coupon book good for 10 blowjobs. I'm sure if she ever gave a similar gift she would make sure to include the following: "Cannot be redeemed all at the same time." It was the greatest Xmas day ever... but she wasn't able to move her jaw comfortably until well after the New Year.

When the Weather Channel tells you that there is 100% chance of precipitation and then it doesn't rain, it makes you wonder if they understand what 100% chance of something happening means. Technically speaking, there isn't even a 100% chance of weather tomorrow. Any weather. I hope the Weather Channel doesn't start to gamble. I'd hate to get my weather updates from a channel with broken kneecaps.



Driving today on a new road that my GPS was unfamiliar with. It showed me plowing through subdivisions and farms without a care. The rest of the drive the GPS's female voice seemed sultrier ... like she thought I was a bad boy.

Recognize.

Everyone has that one person in their past that has a weird effect on them. I'm no different. Sometimes when I think about her, it feels like my stomach is filled with butterflies. Other times, I simply shit myself.

"Where is it written that a man can't smell musty?" After a moment he was handed an ancient and, ironically enough, musty tome.

I have a feeling that we're going to be disappointed when we finally figure out what whales are saying. I'm guessing that all the fish in the ocean are sick of them running their mouths. That's why giant squid attack them from time to time. One too many Jew jokes.

The nice thing about writing under a nom de plume is that while people know me as funny, they don't know I'm "professionally" funny. I feel like Clark Kent.

The thief told me to give him to give him my wallet if I knew what was good for me. I told him, through my cigarette-adorned lips, that because one hand held a Big Mac and the other a double espresso macchiato, I wouldn't comply because obviously I didn't know what was good for me.

Sexy is easy. Just say something interesting. A girl at a bar once told me that she only dreamt during thunderstorms and I remember her to this day.

Just because you have servants doesn't mean that breakfast is easy. All I want is oatmeal with raisins and walnuts. How hard is that? But every morning I'm furiously thumbing through my Guatemalan-to English phrasebook trying to get the help to understand I don't want Maple-flavored or Cinnamon-flavored or JUST raisins or JUST walnuts, I want fucking raisins and walnuts, and every morning I'm forced to hurl the bowl of oatmeal at her empty head. If this woman shows up tomorrow with a bowl of anything but oatmeal with raisins and walnuts, she's going to end up in a hole next to the gardener who kept over-watering my ficus.

I threw a box of Viagra into the fireplace and the chimney got bigger.

Anyone familiar with finding romance online has probably run into a scenario where the person they thought they were talking to ended up being a catfish. For those of you would decide to move ahead with the relationship anyway, let me warn you about the barbs embedded behind their fins. They can be quite painful.

Sitting on the toilet taking a dump when I hear this steady ticking noise either in the wall or outside. Weird thing was that every time I pushed, it stopped. As soon as I stopped trying to crap, it started up again. Sort of freaky.

I'm incapable of imitating the sounds of a blow job without moving my right hand up and down vigorously in front of my mouth.

LinkedIn has an amazing algorithm that acts much like frat guys in "Animal House" that constantly herded the nerds away from all the other cool pledges and sat them down with the other rejects. I don't mean any offense to the people I've connected with but let's be honest; the vast majority of you are nobodies like myself. Try as I might, I can't connect with any influential people in my industry. Every time I try, I get pushed back into people like myself. This is high school all over again.

People assume that famous people are more interesting. They are not. The terrible truth is that everybody and nobody is interesting.

If there was a hit TV show starring a hamster, most people would get all giddy about being in the same room with it. Over a fucking hamster.

It's so cold out that you don't simply get back into bed, you retreat under the covers. Which explains the bugle on my nightstand.

When people are talking in their sleep, it might just be aliens practicing controlling them.

There are just some people you meet who you imagine their asses have a lot of pimples and nothing will change your opinion.

Every time I watch a UFC fight, I keep expecting an adult to climb over the cage and break it up.

I've always been a sucker for those scenes in movies where the character is presented with some bad news or intense situation where he does some crazy thing in response, either violent or brave, only to find out a few moments later that it was only in his head and in reality he did something much more meek or expected. I have that happen so often now I sometimes get lost as to where I'm actually at. Sometimes I'm back in childhood and sometimes I'm years in the future, or so I think. I'm moving like a ping pong ball back and forth between what is and what I'm thinking. My consciousness is like a badly edited foreign film, with low production and poor acting.

Having finished a story that began "I have a dream," I realized that many people will immediately think of the famous MLK speech and my story is only slightly more memorable so I decided to delete it.

Little known fact: After a dip in icy waters, members of the Polar Bear Club will often times kill and eat a seal.

You're never sure when it happened but one day you look at your dress shirts and you see a shiny colored one. Then for some reason you're wearing it and then you're dancing.

It's a rare and wonderful moment when someone sincerely asks for your advice and you know deep down in your heart how bad badly you're going to blow it.

When someone is practicing the shotput, do they use a bucket of shotputs? And who's the big fucker who brings that out to the field?

If there is an afterlife, I wonder if you can still whack it.

Critics always say my books are disjointed. I would counter that most writing today is too jointed.

Manion's Marital Aids: A long plastic device that automatically offers up a chipper "Good morning Honey!" to start each day so your spouse wakes up believing you care. Oh... and it's also a vibrator.

Show me a salad bar and I'll show you an old man going the wrong direction like a spawning salmon. Places like Ruby Tuesday's should have a salad bar bear.

She never liked morning sex. She said her vagina always had a "left out all night" feel to it.

My grandma always used to say "If it walks like a duck and quacks like duck, it's a duck." The problem was that she couldn't tell the difference between a duck and a goose. So in a way, she unintentionally taught me a great life lesson.

I don't really have a problem with feminism but when I saw her buying the Just For Men, it was the last straw.

Are initials and hearts carved into them the tree equivalent of ink? Does it make them the most bad-ass tree in the forest?

For reasons I can't explain, whenever someone asks me to "step right this way," I make an exaggerated step forward with my right foot.

Tips for the fashionable outdoorsman: After you've shaved off your bush, the freckles are most likely ticks.

If Bruce Jenner can be a woman, then Rachel Dolezal can be black. You can't have it one way and not the other. I would know... I'm a giraffe.

People who ask me why I don't wash my hands after going to the bathroom clearly don't appreciate how clean I keep my genitalia. In fact, after peeing, I should wash my dick.

Whenever I'm out for a walk, I always see the same scenario: an in-shape girl walking with her chunky boyfriend. He thinks it's just a nice romantic stroll and is completely unaware that she is trying to walk off his extra weight. He doesn't suspect a thing as she keeps up a brisk pace. She keeps

sneaking a look over at his jiggly stomach to see if it's gotten any better. She just won't accept that he is flabby and that they will run out of country before he loses any weight walking. They could start in Nebraska and walk until they are neck-deep in the ocean and he's still going to be fat. Poor man. Poor woman.

Most of the humor in Marmaduke comes from his enormous size. Same with my penis.

A Netflix spokesperson has issued a statement defending the comedic content of the Adam Sandler film *Ridiculous 6* after approximately a dozen Native American actors reportedly walked off the set on Wednesday, saying they were "offended" by the flick's stereotypical subject matter. While actor Loren Anthony said that he understands the film is meant to be satirical, he believes some of the jokes were taken too far. "We were supposed to be Apache, but it was really stereotypical and we did not look Apache at all. We looked more like Comanche," he said. To get them to come back, it took three jugs of whiskey, two blankets and some shiny beads.

I wonder if men headed to prison ever consider stretching out their assholes a bit.

Whenever I'm drinking something as I pee, I somehow expect my urine stream to get stronger.

One thought leads to another... thinking about how much my erect penis reminds me of a gavel leads me to think about how hard it would be for a judge to bring a court to order with one that had the properties of my flaccid dick.

People hear that Lamar Odem was found unresponsive after a three day binge of cocaine and prostitutes and they feel sympathy? If they want to feel sympathy they should check out what they did the last three days.

What kind of fucked up language has the word tender meaning loving and gentle but also something offered as payment? Am I the only one who sees a difference? Maybe language is only there to warn us

## About The Author

The poet Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote “How sad that most people die with their song still inside them.” Perhaps in some cases it's for the best.

Lance spends too much time thinking about all the ways life would be different if our eyes were on the top of our feet as opposed to perched over our noses.

Shoes for instance...

Or karate.

He doesn't enjoy thinking thoughts like these, but grow them as he might, the beards never help. So off they come. Hairy reminders clogging up the sink, if hairs were thoughts and plumbing was being normal. Lance should know. Lance is a plumber.

Well, a plumber in the sense that you and I are plumbers.

When you get down to it, writers and truck drivers are paid to do the same thing; sit in the same spot and go all over the place. As Lance has never earned a dime from his writing he basically sets off with nobody waiting for him to arrive.

That sounds much sadder than intended but there it is.