

◇ Defenestration ◇

Volume I, Issue VII

Table of Contents

Andrew T. Duncan, Two Poems	2
Jilly Dybka, "Psilocybin Mushrooms Sprout at the Arizona Community College" .	3
Kelly Ann Malone, "The Cat"	4
Al Bixby, "Morey Feldman—Private Detective"	5
Jay Wexler, "What Do You Like Best About Me?"	9
Jonathan Redhorse, "The War"	16
Julie Britt, "The Love Diet"	24
Michael Hulme, "Val Kilmer's Revenge"	28
Sylvia Son, "A Walk In the Park"	30
Andrew Kaye, "Advanced Puppet Theatrics"	35
Jerry Rychlo, A Comic	36
Contributor Biographies	37

Two Poems
by
Andrew T. Duncan

A Haiku

Haiku is awesome
Japan gave it to us, free
Then we gave them bombs

Another Haiku

I reign over earth
Smashing all those in my way
Much like Jesus did

Psilocybin Mushrooms Sprout at the Arizona Community College
by
Jilly Dybka

Memo to school maintenance personnel:
given our recent inclement weather,
there's been an unprecedented upswell
in fungi on the grounds, and in particular
the psilocybin mushroom (see attached).
As this fungus is a psychoactive
it must be immediately dispatched.
Psilocybin mushrooms are attractive
nuisances for the students and they pose
a health danger. Any personnel caught
with these psychedelic mushrooms may lose
their position so please give it some thought
before you give in to your temptation.
Thank you for your kind cooperation.

The Cat
by
Kelly Ann Malone

That poor little cat up the street
Who instead of "meow" she would "tweet"
She climbed on the roof, nonchalant and aloof
Tried to fly but then hit the concrete

Morey Feldman—Private Detective
by
Al Bixby

Being a private eye is no bed of roses. You get no respect, you associate with lowlifes, and crazed lunatics are always trying to put a bullet through your Medulla Oblongata. On the plus side, you get to have your name on the door in big letters. Although in my case they'd made a mistake and instead of "Private Detective" they wrote "Dry Cleaner." It worked out okay. When my caseload was down I pressed the odd pair of pants.

I was straightening out the hem on a pair of "32 longs" when in walked a blonde beauty named, Poppy Leibowitz.

"Mr. Feldman?"

"That depends sugar. Are you with the mob?"

"No."

"What about the IRS?"

"No."

"The Forest Hills Library? I have a couple of overdue books."

"No."

Poppy looked scared. Real scared. I tried to ease the tension by doing an impression of James Cagney, but she got a headache after the third "dirty rat." I turned the conversation back to business.

"Mr. Feldman, I was a secretary at Whitcomb University. Two weeks ago, Seymour Popodopolous, a wealthy philanthropist, offered to give the university an endowment. All he requested in return was a meal consisting of New England kippers."

"Kippers? I don't know if I'm right for this case. Have you tried The Galloping Gourmet?" I laughed inside.

"If you're not gonna help me, Mr. Feldman..." Poppy stood up to go.

"Take it easy, sugar. I was just getting interested." I grabbed a pack of gum and started chewing. Then I made a mental note for next time, to take them out of the package first. Poppy took her seat and continued.

"When the time had come for the kippers to be brought out, they had mysteriously disappeared. The university never got their money and I was fired. Mr. Feldman, I need you to find the kippers so I can prove my innocence."

It was a typical case. I told Poppy I'd handle it for a hundred dollars a day plus expenses. But after an hour and a half she had wheedled me down to fifty-seven fifty and a piece of

her crumb cake. She was one good negotiator.

My first stop was Poppy's daughter, Pearl. I made arrangements to meet her at a nearby bistro. When I got there, I found out that there was a dress code. But I flaunted it by wearing my bow tie upside down and hanging some cheese string out of my pocket. I love getting Maitre De's steamed.

I scanned the room for what seemed like fifteen minutes, 42 seconds, with no success. Then, suddenly, I saw her sitting by the condiments. I looked at her close and realized that here was a really beautiful woman. Oh sure, she had the odd scar, was ninety to a hundred pounds overweight and walked with a limp, but these were small things.

I sat down beside Pearl and began questioning her about the Popodopolous affair. However, I had the feeling that she wasn't giving me her full attention. The average bozo on the street might have a hard time noticing. But a master detective like myself could read those subtle, almost imperceptible details - the slight twitching of her index finger, the faraway look in her eyes, her head in the soup.

After an hour of questioning with no answers and just some gurgling sounds, I somehow managed to wring a small amount of information out of her. It turned out that the butcher for the Popodopolous event was Lennie "The Weasel" Bernstein, a small timer with a record. I'd once caught him with his thumb on the scale when he was weighing meat for a customer. I called him on it. He tossed it aside by saying "So what, that's one of my lighter fingers."

He was behind the counter as usual. I yelled out to him with a sneer he'd never forget.

"Hi Lennie, how ya doing?"

"What do you want, Feldman? My nose is clean."

"Yeah, but your tie's a mess, and your pants are all wrinkled. I want to find out what you know about the Kipper Caper."

"The Keeper Cooper?"

"No, the Kooper Ceeper. I mean the thing about the fish."

Lennie feigned innocence, but I could tell he was hiding something. I picked him up by the collar and threw him against the wall. Then I grabbed a piece of meat that was on the counter.

"You're hiding something, Lennie. Now give it to me straight or you'll never see this brisket again."

"Okay, okay, Vito Moscowitz. I heard he's involved." I put him down and threw the meat on his pants. I hope it left a big stain.

Vito Moscowitz owned a fashionable fish restaurant in the best section of town. His employees all loved him deeply. As much as you can love someone who gave you hourly thrashings with an eight-pound flounder. He had the market cornered on kippers. Any caterer who needed the fish had to go to him whether they liked it or not. And if you didn't

pay up, Vito would send some lackey over to your place and have him put a nasty ring around your bathtub. He was tough.

I entered his "House of Kippers" restaurant, and two of his henchmen immediately frisked me. I don't know about you, but every now and then I enjoy a good frisking. Unfortunately, after the seventh time on the left leg, they'd had enough and proceeded to usher me into the back room.

The door opened and there was Vito having a massage by two shapely blondes whose skimpy outfits left little to the imagination. Sometimes, it paid to be a bad guy.

Suddenly, one of the thugs stood up and ambled over to the restaurateur.

"Can we rough this guy up boss - huh..? Can we... huh?"

"I'm not sure that's necessary. Is it Mr. Feldman?"

"Not unless your hood likes to see blood... his own."

One of the girls massaging Vito gave me one of those "come hither looks." I returned the favor by giving her one of my sexiest smiles. Unfortunately, I had forgotten to floss after lunch and there was a big piece of spinach between my teeth. I think it turned her on.

Finally, Vito spoke. "Mr. Feldman, how can I be of service?"

I moved in close, stared him straight in the eyes and came clean. "Where do you get women like this?"

"Mr. Feldman, I'm sure you didn't come all this way just to find that out."

"No I didn't. But it certainly would have made the trip worthwhile."

"I put ads in the paper. Okay?"

I asked Vito if he'd ever heard the name Leibowitz. He gave me a smug look and claimed that it didn't ring any bells. Something told me it was a lie. I wasn't sure if it was his body language or the "I love Pearl" embroidered on his pants. I took a shot.

"Are you having an affair with Pearl Leibowitz?"

Vito froze and his henchmen got ready to pounce. Either that or they were rehearsing a scene from "Cats."

"I wouldn't ask that question again, Mr. Feldman, if you're fond of your legs."

I thought about it for a moment and realized that I was pretty fond of them. Of course, sometimes they disappointed me by making me trip over things - like my shoes. But on the whole they were good legs. I was about to leave when Moscowitz grabbed me by the nose and started squeezing. Vito knew his business.

"Alright, Feldman, I'll give you a free one. I did have an affair with the Leibowitz women. My wife and I had become strangers to one another. She had to wear a nametag so I'd know

who she was. But I had nothing to do with the missing kippers."

It all clicked. With that information, I headed down to Police headquarters. I did some checking and found out that I was still wanted on that old ventriloquism charge. Strict town. Then I headed out to see Pearl.

She ushered me into her apartment, and asked if I wanted a drink. For what I had to do, I needed the hard stuff. I told her to get me a screwdriver and hold the Vodka.

I watched Pearl move around the room with the grace of a ballet dancer even though she kept on bumping into walls. Finally, she brought the drinks over and sat down, missing the couch by inches.

The next thing I know her lips were on mine like crazy glue. On the outside I remained as stoic as one of those wax figures at Madam Tussaud's. On the inside my glands were doing somersaults that would have made The Flying Walendas dizzy. Somehow, I remained calm enough to turn the conversation over to business.

"Pearl, I know who stole the kippers."

She turned to look at me and seductively crossed her eyes. Oh how I wanted her, but I knew I had to be strong.

"Don't give me those big baby blues, honey. It was you and you know it." With that I reached into my wallet and produced two kippers the size of Coney Island Reds.

"I found these in your evening gown."

"No wonder no one would dance with me at that club. Darn."

"Look sugar, don't play smart with me. I got it all figured out. You always wanted kippers for supper, but mama wouldn't give them to you - said you didn't deserve them cause you never cleaned up your room. So one day you'd had enough. You washed away your morals with a bottle of bourbon and a jug of scotch and stole the fish." Pearl sat stunned for a moment.

"Yes I did it - but do you know what it's like to have meatloaf every night?" At the mention of the world meatloaf she burst into tears.

"Don't take it so hard, sugar."

"I do. I broke four teeth on it."

She was babbling now. I felt sorry for Pearl, but it was an old story - daughter turned against mother turned against kippers. As I watched her being put behind bars, I felt a small tear roll down my cheek. Sometimes you hated being a private eye.

What Do You Like Best About Me?

by
Jay Wexler

Vera Salvaggio arrived on time for her 3:30 dentist appointment at the office of Dr. Robert Q. Smolover, DDS. Three hours earlier, after finally succumbing to the throbbing pain in her upper left molar that had been driving her mad for the past week, she decided to find herself a dentist right away, with no delay, on the double, at once, pronto, straight-away, forthwith, tout-de-suite. As a member of a health maintenance organization, she was then of course forced to choose a dentist randomly out of a book filled with men and women at the nadir of their profession, most of whom had gone to dental schools at places like the University of The Arctic Circle or the Chad School of the Dental Arts, to name two of the particularly strong ones. Armed with both pieces of information provided on each dentist by the HMO book, Vera decided that Dr. Smolover, who had at least attended a dental school in a developed nation and was somewhere between 24 and 84 years of age, would have to do the trick. Though she nearly gave up on the whole idea when Dr. Smolover answered the phone himself at his office by saying nothing but "hello," leading Vera to ask if she had indeed reached a dentist's office, to which Dr. Smolover had said simply, "uhh, yeah, I guess," the intense upper-molar pain impelled her onward to secure an appointment, which, it turned out, was easy to do, since Dr. Smolover hadn't had a patient since 1992.

When nobody answered her repeated knocks on the door, Vera let herself into Dr. Smolover's office. Vera decided that the place resembled more of a shoe repair store than a dentist's office; she reached this conclusion by observing that she was surrounded on all sides by shoes in various states of disrepair and shoe-repair equipment and a sign that said "Smolover's Shoe Repair" and also by noting the complete lack of a dentist's chair or a waiting room or any dental equipment of any kind. She looked around for the dentist tentatively, still mindful of the pulsating pain in her mouth and vaguely hopeful that somebody in this dusty shoe-strewn cavern could make the pain go away. "Hello?" she said. "Is anybody here? Dr. Smolover? I'm here for my 3:30. Hello?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm right here," said a voice coming from a far away room. Vera waited for the source of the voice to enter the room she was standing in, but nothing happened. After waiting another minute or so, Vera ventured in the direction of the voice, opening door after door until she arrived in a small living room, outfitted with a fake Persian rug, two worn black leather couches, an outdated hi-fi system, a large black and white television with a round channel dial and no remote control, lots of dust bunnies, and a full-sized dentist's chair with a working overhead light and spittoon-type contraption. A middle-aged man wearing a white coat was reclining in the dentist's chair smoking a cigarette.

"So, there you are. I thought you'd never fucking make it," said Dr. Smolover.

"Here I am," Vera responded, relieved to find that she apparently had made an appointment with a real live dentist. "But what type of dentist smokes and swears at his patients?" Vera wondered.

"Well, you gonna have a seat or what?" Dr. Smolover continued. "I ain't got all fucking day. I've got lots of shoes to put back together, you may have noticed."

"Oh, yes, of course I'll sit down," Vera said. "But, umm, right now you're in the dentist's

chair. I'll just wait for you to get up. I mean, it wouldn't be appropriate for me just to sit down on top of you, now would it? How would you be able to examine my teeth and gums?"

"Oh, great, a goddamn intellectual," the dentist said, taking a long drag on his cigarette and blowing out a stream of smoke in Vera's direction. "I got Max fuckin' Weber over here."

"It's not really that I'm an intellectual," Vera responded. "I was just making a basic point about how it's impossible for one person to examine another person's teeth if both people are sitting on the . . ."

"Oh, shut your muffinhole already," Smolover blurted, rising slowly from the chair. "Just sit the hell down and open your muffinhole so I can take a look." The doctor crushed his cigarette out in an ashtray on top of the tray holding his various mirrors and scrapers and lit up another one.

Vera, unsure whether she had made a terrible, terrible mistake, nonetheless took her position in the dentist's chair and waited for further instruction. "But what kind of dentist refers to a patient's mouth as a muffinhole?" she wondered.

"Well, you gonna open your muffinhole or what?" Dr. Smolover asked, approaching his fidgety patient.

Vera opened her muffinhole.

"All right, then, let's take a look." Smolover pulled a flashlight out of his coat and shined it at Vera's mouth. He looked up top and then down below. He studied her incisors and looked with great interest at her molars. He shook his head in disgust. "This shit's fucked up," he barked. He stood up, looked down at Vera with dismay, brought his cigarette to his lips, inhaled deeply, and blew a cloud of smoke into Vera's face. "They're gonna have to come the shit out," he announced.

Vera was shaken. "What do you mean, come out? Only one of them is giving me trouble. And why are you smoking? Is that right?"

"I'll tell you what's right and what's wrong," Smolover retorted. "Who do you think is the shoe repairman, I mean dentist, around here?"

"Uhh, you?"

"That's right. It's me. And I make the rules around here. You got that?"

Vera felt a painful twinge in her upper left molar and decided to submit to the dentist's authority. After all, he had graduated from the fifth best unaccredited dental school in all of North Dakota. "Yeah, I got that," she answered.

"Good," said the dentist. "I'm glad you have finally come around to see it my way after all this time." He stared at her for a few seconds and took a deep drag from his cigarette. He turned his head and blew the smoke out away from Vera's face. Vera was pleasantly surprised by this apparent newfound concern for her welfare on the part of the dentist.

"Can I ask you a question?" asked Smolover.

"I don't see why not," Vera replied.

"What do you like best about me?"

The question took Vera Salvaggio completely by surprise.

Vera had expected a question bearing on her dental condition. Perhaps something that inquired into her flossing habits, or brushing habits, or her choice in mouthwash. She also would not have been surprised if the question had concerned her eating habits, such as whether she ate a lot of sugar, how much celery she consumed, that sort of thing. And although it would have been a little odd if the dentist had asked her something about her dressing style, she would not have been nearly as surprised as she was by the question the dentist actually asked. For example, if the dentist had asked her whether she usually wore skirts (she was wearing one now) instead of pants, or whether she preferred natural fibers to artificial ones (she didn't), she would have been surprised, sure, but not so surprised as she was now.

"Uhh, umm, well," she muttered.

"It's not that difficult a question," Smolover retorted. "It is simple, straightforward. What do you like most about me? Is it my personality? My skills? My looks? My dental degree? The way my many leg hairs peep out between my nylon socks and my woolen pant leg?" He raised up his woolen pant leg to give Vera a peek at his black and bristly leg hair.

"Oh, no, it's not that," Vera exclaimed. "Sweet Jesus, it's not that."

"Well, then, what is it?" Smolover probed.

Vera tried to think of something. She looked up and down at this swearing, smoking dentist, and tried to figure out what she liked best about him. She didn't much like his looks. He was mustached and sort of creepy. She certainly didn't like his chair-side demeanor. And his dentistry credentials weren't tip-top either. So, what was it that she liked most about him? She thought about it a bit longer, and then it came to her.

"I like your participation in my health maintenance organization best!" she exclaimed.

Smolover stared sternly at Vera. He took a deep drag on his smoking stick and blew a cloud of smoke into Vera's face.

"What's wrong with my tennis shoes?" the dentist spat.

Vera coughed. "Can you please not exhale smoke in my face again?" she pleaded.

"What's wrong with my tennies?!" he asked again. "They're from the New Balance company, and they've got great insoles!"

Vera didn't really know what to do. She looked down at Smolover's feet. His sneakers were pretty natty, she had to admit. They were blue, with a nifty yellow design. They appeared to have excellent side support, and the fabric was impeccable. "But what kind of dentist asks what you like most about him, and then insists that you should like his sneakers best?" Vera wondered.

"What's it gonna be, Salvaggio?" inquired the dentist.

"Well, uhh," Vera muttered. "I guess your sneakers are very good. I suppose they are what I like best about you."

"Yes! Fucking A, YES!!!!" exclaimed the ebullient dentist, breaking suddenly into a wild Irish jig. "My tennies are the best, my tennies are the best," he sang.

Just then, a young and perky blonde woman threw open the door to the dentist's office and strode confidently inside. She took off her stylish black leather coat and laid it down over the arm of one of the leather couches before anyone could react to her presence. "Am I late?" she inquired harriedly. "I'm sorry if I'm late, Doctor Smolover."

"Oh, no, you're just in time," said the dentist. He turned to Vera and introduced the two women. "Vera, this is Katerina, my intern. Her favorite cheese is Muenster."

"Actually, I like Stilton just as much as I enjoy Muenster," Katerina said, outstretching her hand to shake Vera's. "Very nice to meet you."

"We've got a really interesting case here, Katerina," Smolover reported. "Would you like to take a looksie?"

"I'd love to," responded Katerina.

Katerina took the flashlight from Smolover and approached Vera. "Can you open up for me?" Katerina asked.

"Don't you want to say the word 'muffinhole'?" Vera asked.

"What?"

"Oh, uhh, nothing."

"I know what you're thinking," Katerina said, as Vera opened her mouth so Katerina could look inside. "You're probably wondering how come I can like both Muenster, which is a mild cheese, and Stetson, which is rather pungent."

Vera nodded her assent. She had thought the dichotomy was odd, although not really as odd as the fact that Katerina had brought the subject up at all.

"I'd explain it to you," Katerina said, looking carefully at all of Vera's gums and teeth. "I'm afraid, however, that I just don't want to."

"Mmmmm," Vera grunted.

Katerina fell quiet. She examined Vera's mouth for quite a while longer, periodically shaking her head in abject disgust. Finally, she stood up, sighed, turned toward the spittoon contraption at the side of the chair, hacked a few times, and spat a huge loogie onto the floor. "You're up shit's creek without a paddle, sugar blossom!" she exclaimed.

"What? Wait a minute," Vera replied. "I don't know what you're talking about. I just have

one small tooth that's giving me a problem, and you're acting like I'm going to need a mouth transplant. Just where did you go to dental school, anyway?"

Katerina let out a robust guffaw. "Dental school?" Katerina asked through the laughter, "I think you've got it all wrong there, sister. I'm Doctor Smolover's shoe repair intern."

"Shoe repair intern?" Vera yelped.

"Yeah. That's right. And I'm damned good too. You should see what I can do with a worn out insole. I fixed those very sneakers on Dr. Smolover's feet right now for goodness sake. Now just sit back and relax. This will only hurt a bit." Katerina took a long needle from the tray and poured a hefty amount of a well-known antihistamine into its chamber.

Vera was crestfallen. Not only had she made a dental appointment with a smoking, swearing shoe repairman who hadn't worked on a dental patient in nine years, but she also had not even had the mental acumen to realize that Smolover's shoes were hand-me-down pieces of crap. What the hell was she doing, she wondered. Had things really come this far? Were Smolover's shoes really so worn down? She looked at Katerina with her enormous needle, and at Smolover, who had lit up another cigarette and was looking intently at a pair of purple pumps, and she figured that her life had become a joke. What should she do? Should she lean back and accept the quasi-oral surgery that it looked like Katerina was about to perform on her, or should she break out of her mental imprisonment and flee the scene without ever looking back? Time was running out, the needle coming closer. Vera closed her eyes...

"Open up," Katerina ordered.

Vera knew this was her last chance. She gathered her strength. She felt her wits returning to her. "No," she said, quietly.

"What?" said Katerina.

"Hold on a minute," said Smolover, dropping the pumps.

"You heard me," Vera said, sitting up in the chair. "I will not open my mouth. You two are not competent dentists. You are primarily shoe repair people. And I am not confident that you will adequately be able to treat my dental problems. I'm afraid that I'm just going to have to leave. Thank you for your help, but . . ."

"What?" interrupted Katerina, pulling back her needle. "You're not actually going to leave, are you? Did somebody hit you with a silly stick or something?"

"I cannot fucking believe this shit," bellowed Smolover.

Vera was taken back a bit by Smolover's outburst and by Katerina's reference to a "silly stick," whatever that was, but she had seen enough in the past fifteen minutes that she was no longer surprised by anything. "You better believe I'm leaving," she explained. "I just wonder why I didn't leave the minute I stepped foot in this place. I mean, you've got to be kidding me. You were just about to try to numb my teeth and gums with an antihistamine, for Christ's sake."

"You can't leave," Katerina said. "You've got an appointment. You have obligations to

fulfill. You have responsibilities."

Smolover, meanwhile, started shaking uncontrollably with anger.

"What do you mean, responsibilities? My only responsibility was to show up for my appointment at the appointed time, which I did. I have no further obligations to you or to anyone else. I'm out of here."

"But this is a reciprocal relationship," pleaded Katerina. "There's reciprocity to deal with. What are you going to do about that? Do you have a plan for that?"

"SIT IN THE GODDAMNED CHAIR RIGHT NOW," screamed Smolover, jumping up and down. "SIT YOUR CABOOSE DOWN!"

"You can't just do whatever you want," Katerina added, a tear coming to her left eye, "just because you feel like it."

"PARK IT, CHIPMUNK!" screeched the dentist.

"There are rules in this world, you know," said Katerina, the tears seriously welling up now. "These rules exist to guide human behavior. And you are a human, so you have to follow the rules. You have to follow the rules because you are human."

"I WAS BORN ON THE MOON."

"I'm going to have to call the morality police on you," blubbered Katerina.

"MY UNCLE WAS A PANDA BEAR."

"All right, that's it," Vera said, heading for the door. "I'm going to report you to the better business bureau, or the American Dental Association, or the American Shoe Repairperson Association, or whatever the appropriate association is."

Smolover fell to his knees, dropped his cigarette, and grabbed his head with his hands. He shivered uncontrollably. He started weeping. The cigarette bounced off the implement tray, rolled on the floor, and came to rest by the door to the office, where it smoldered and sizzled like a smoldering, sizzling rolled up stick of tobacco.

Katerina wiped her tears and scowled at Vera, who had opened the door and was about to walk out into the hallway. "Will you look what you have done?" Katerina said. "I hope you're proud of yourself. I bet you think you're some big hero or something."

"Umm, I'll be seeing you later," Vera answered, with a dismissive wave of the hand.

"You're going to regret this someday," said Katerina, sitting down on the dentist's chair and pulling a piece of Muenster cheese from her pocket. "Someday you will regret what you have done here today. Someday you will be confined to the fires of hell for what you have done this afternoon."

Vera walked towards the door and stopped short at the sizzling cigarette. Realizing how dangerous it would be to leave a cigarette smoldering in an office full of such incredible lunatics, Vera stomped the thing out with her right foot, breaking her heel in the

process. "Oh, damn," she exclaimed, taking off the shoe and looking disappointedly at its brokenness.

"Is anything wrong over there?" Katerina asked, shaking the slice of Muenster in Vera's direction.

"Umm, uhh, well, yeah," muttered Vera. She held the shoe towards Katerina. "Do you think you could take a look at this?" she asked.

"No," answered Katerina. "I don't know the first thing about shoes."

**The War
by
Jonathan Redhorse**

The President of the United States loved salt.

He loved salt so much that he was constantly accompanied by a bowl of potato chips wherever he wandered.

The Oval Office

Foreign summits

The Rose Garden

Church

Bed:

"Gee whiz," the First Lady would say, "You'll get crumbs all over the comforter. Gee whiz."

The purpose of these potato chips did not extend to their actual ingestion. Instead, the President was interested only in licking the salt off these chips. After every particle had been licked off, the desalted chip was placed in another bowl whereupon it awaited resalting via a shaker that the President insisted carrying around with him at all times.

His physicians were upset.

"See here, Mr. President," they'd say, "We can't have you just frittering your health away with this salt business. It's time to exercise some self-control."

But the President's resolve was strong and he refused to budge and show weakness to his human frailties. He trudged forward with the intent of enjoying his presidency to the max.

"What's on our plate today?" he asked his secretaries and department heads.

"Well," began the Secretary of Defense, "I'm happy to say that we're no longer threatened by any country. Anywhere."

There was a silence followed by the unmistakable slurping noise of the President's tongue undressing a potato chip.

Finally:

"Just what do you mean by that, Alfonso?"

"Well you see Mr. President..."

"All the countries in the world have agreed to non-aggression treaties?"

"Yes. They have."

"What?!"

"We've been getting calls left and right. It's a miracle."

"It's a trick."

"No really, it's true. We're gonna be booked for a long time just going around signing things..."

"But why?"

"I'm not really sure... I think it has to do with the whole God suicide bit. A lot of people seem to realize that there's more to the universe than we expected."

Earlier in the month, God had blown God's brains out all over the place with a revolver. The brains were stuck in the Smithsonian for all to see.

"That sounds severely trite, man. Is that what they teach you in presidential cabinet school? The basics of triteness?"

"Now see here, sir..."

"What about the communists?"

"They're willing to see things our way."

"The anarchists?"

"They're pretty bummed. What's there to do after killing God?"

"The fundamentalists?"

"They've become existentialists."

"The socialists?"

"Basically the same as the communists."

"There's differences. Don't tell me there aren't any differences."

"There aren't any differences."

"Well, Alfonz, seems you've defended yourself right out of a job."

"Mr. President?!"

"Call security and tell them to escort our ex-secretary of defense out the door."

"Yes sir!"

"While we're waiting I want your badge and your gun."

"Sir, we don't get guns."

"Further insubordination! Out, out, out!"

"You heard the man, get out of here."

"Get Kirby J. Malloy on the phone. Tell him he's the new secretary of defense."

"Yes sir!"

"Now where were we?"

"Defense, sir."

"Ah yes, now listen up everybody. I don't want anyone telling me that we've run out of people to defend against. That's sloppy. Write that down. I want everyone to write that down."

"..."

"In fact, that's no defense at all. It's the opposite of defense. What's the opposite of defense?"

"Offense, sir?"

"That's right. A bad defense amounts to an offense and we all know that there's always some busybody out there willing to be that offense to our bad defense. All these ists. Ist this and ist that. In fact, I want everybody to stop what you're doing."

"..."

"I want everybody to start making a list. A list of ists. We're going to brainstorm a list of ists, so that our new Secretary of Defense has something to do when he gets here. If anyone's prepared, it will be us! We're the United States of America! God bless us!"

Respectable, stout, bespectacled Kirby J. Malloy read through the lists prepared by his colleagues, arriving at this conclusion on foreign policy:

"I don't believe," he said, "that florists represent much of a threat to our interests."

The President, upon hearing this news, furrowed his brow and licked a potato chip with a grave expression that inspired Secretary Malloy's follow-up comment:

"But I guess that wouldn't be the proper attitude, eh?"

The increased vigilance promoted by the President was indeed justified. Just at that moment, the President used his salt shaker, revealing that its top had been unscrewed. The shaker's entire contents dumped into his resalting bowl, revealing a prize too attractive for the President to resist.

"Holy God! That much salt will..."

"Stop him!"

The Secret Service agents dove into action, trying to wrestle the bowl from the President's grip.

"Arrgh!"

"Augh, he bit me!"

"Please sir..."

The President fought off their advances and protected his bowl with the ferocity of a maternal brontosaurus protecting her nest. The cabinet members and Secret Service agents in the room tried to determine a manner in which they could overcome the President without harming him, many staff members putting their hands in their suit pockets and an Agent Tickers holstering his pistol after drawing it out and pointing it around the room. Realizing he had the upper hand, the President knocked over a few conference chairs as obstacles and took refuge in a corner of the room behind a ficus plant. A break in the stalemate finally came when an Agent Smittee upended the bowl in the President's arms by pitching a well-aimed dayplanner at a critical nexus, scattering salt and potato chips all over the room. Befuddled, the President was tackled and ushered out of the area.

Thus, the threat was identified:

"Pranksterists..." the President mused aloud

"I think it'd just be 'pranksters'" Secretary Malloy said.

"By Jove, you're right! No wonder we missed 'em," The President's face lit up, "All this time we've been looking for ists when we should've been after the sters! In fact, there's a whole host of suffixes we should pursue."

"First things first though."

"Yes, good thinking. We don't want to spread our forces too thin."

"Well sir," the Secretary began warily, "I'm not entirely sure we should be doing any force spreading just yet..."

"What do you mean?"

"It's not as if we've got any evidence of a national threat posed by pranksters."

"You saw it with your own eyes Kirby. It just fell off. And I know quite a bit about screwing things."

"I'm just saying... maybe we should wait for more evidence. The last thing we need is a scandal."

"You're right Malloy," the President glared out the window, "Mustn't work everybody into a frenzy over nothing. That'd be irresponsible of our administration."

Some time passed, and eventually:

The time for the State of the Union Address arrived. Everyone was hopeful and the TV networks blanketed the airwaves with identical images of the President entering the hallowed halls of Congress, shaking hands and grinning ear to ear. Upon reaching the podium, the President began his speech, informing everyone across the nation that the State of the Union was quite swell, causing his party's members to rise and applaud while the opposing party stayed seated. The festivities were quickly interrupted though, as the President made a face of intense discomfort, and then scuttled off to the restroom for an emergency bowel evacuation. There was a liquidy noisy stream that erupted into the toilet, a sound many witnesses would describe as the trumpeting of a new era of national security, due to the event's cause announced by a cabinet spokesman the next day.

The spokesman described the findings of an investigation into the President's diarrhea as such:

A cup of coffee consumed by the President on the way to his speech contained residue of a popular over-the-counter laxative. The identity of the perpetrator was still being investigated.

Meanwhile:

The President was up in arms. He now had the proof that he was personally being targeted by those seeking to do him harm and he sent out his best military units to round up those suspected of pranks.

The immediate sweep was very successful:

A gang of lads with a basement full of itching powder was detained and locked up in a prison camp. There were some people up in arms about the civil liberties issues presented by this treatment of U.S. citizens. But they were quieted by threats of arrest, to which they responded with, terrified:

"Just kidding."

Which got them locked up anyway, because joking was no longer a laughing matter.

All in all, everyone in the country was pretty jazzed about the rooting out of pranksters. They waved flags; told people they didn't like to "slog off"; drove to the malls in solidarity; and when the time came to cast their votes, the public certainly did, phoning in all their support for their favorite singer, Eddie Babblebop on a popular TV show where nobodies became somebody by singing hits from the past (the runner up, by the way, was disqualified by a horrific tabloid scandal when it was revealed that he had intimate relations with a piece of uncooked linguine).

Unfortunately:

Nobody in the international community regarded this potential threat with the grave attention necessary. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom found himself in quite an

incident when, upon receiving the President at Downing Street, he saw fit to shake hands with a joybuzzer directed at the President's sensitive palms.

"Gahh!" the President screamed in surprise as flashbulbs fired, capturing in time the tactical joybuzzing of the most powerful man in the world. Retaliation was swift and successful as the President delivered a fierce uppercut to the Prime Minister's lower jaw, breaking it and knocking the target unconscious.

"Gaghh!" The Prime Minister gargled.

"Lights out baby!" the President shouted, tossing his clenched hands over each shoulder in triumph.

(This international PR disaster resulted in a spate of anglohatred that permeated throughout the United States, finding itself most prominent in the halls of Congress wherein both houses passed bills that were a ridiculous waste of time and totally pigheaded and We're sure you can think of a better fictional equivalent for what those stupidly symbolic bills that they passed said than We can for such an obviously unveiled reference (and if you don't know what We're talking about then well...(...(...(etc. adnauseum))), so this is probably the only point where We'll be asking you to please Use Your Imagination to fill in the blanks because any actions on Our part would be seen as Cheap and Easy and We could rant and rave forever and ever but We're tired and We just can't deal with a lot of things anymore and and and this is such a Cheap way to get out of something and sometimes We're just Off and Overwhelmed and We're sorry to have mentioned it and I seem to have lost myself and I'm afraid things are going to be uneven from now on and if you'd like to stop reading right now then go right ahead because I'm really serious about the Unevenness part, and I mean, it won't even be intentionally uneven in some sort of wink wink conspiratesque way and I'm sorry for ruining the continuity of what might have been a mildly distracting piece with this big blathering parenthetical and throwing in the towel sotospeak especially with the effort that you may have put in sofar. There's nothing I can do about it. Apologies for the inconvenience. Please believe me.)

Well:

The war slogged on and on. Occasionally the public became distressed, but they were always quieted by the news of a whoopie cushion kingpin being brought to justice, or some other equal piece of news. However, despite any gains made, it seemed that an endless supply of pranksters always emerged.

For instance:

Someone had managed to beat security and TP the White House (it didn't look all that different, to tell you the truth).

The Washington Monument was defaced with a GIGANTIC naughty drawing.

And the House Majority Leader received something like, 689 obscene phone calls (although this number was later reduced due to revelations that 12 of the 689 were from mistresses trying to arouse said politician through vocal means (which led to some amusing moments wherein the HML tried to get said mistresses arrested as threats to national security with no such luck)).

The President of the United States muttered to himself in the Oval Office, pacing and pulling at his hair. He could see no end to the conflict and was severely troubled. How did one repress the common urge to take the piss out of a larger power through malicious humorous intent? The President was baffled.

Until:

One day, the First Lady and the President were sitting, dressed for bed in their pajamas. The President's customary slurping of chips was matched by the rustling of the First Lady turning the page of a political journal she read to put herself to sleep. The First Lady, flipping furiously here and there, found an article that seemed of interest.

"Lookit this," she said, handing her husband the article which read something to this effect (in nonamended more formal/less colloquial language):

A great nation such as us, the U.S., should not have to tolerate the grave national threat posed by barbarous scumbags wishing for our cultural annihilation through pranks. Furthermore, the President's action of using traditional military force is misguided as it gives the impression that these jokesters are worth our time in funding and manpower. How dare the President place our youth in uniform within harm's way (and dare I say, temptation, as we all know that there's many an incident wherein young disaffected soldiers frag their officers as forms of malicious pranksterism) when a much simpler solution presents itself, a solution that should be obvious to any halfwit with a working knowledge of international affairs. The feeble weakkneed infant at the helm of our proud established country oughtta quit succumbing to his political rival's whinings and do what's best, namely, drop the neutron bomb and scare the shitwits out of our enemies. Like the result of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, this will scare any little fucker out there into submission and reaffirm our supremacy in the face of any resistance and then we'll see who wants to mess with us then, eh? Furthermore, the use of such a humane weapon as the N-Bomb will reduce structural damage to our great country and will instead weed out those unfortunates who wish to cleanse us from what is rightfully ours Etc.

Needless to say, the President found the idea quite winning.

And so what he did was this:

He ordered the gathering of intelligence by whatever means possible (imprisonment, hard interrogation, wiretapping etc.) with the intent of finding the main prankster cell operating within the country. A location was found. And a bomb was dropped.

The news anchors more or less said:

"In today's news, tactical nuclear weapons were used against a large factory complex identified as a major supplier of practical jokester materials in addition to serving as a prankster training ground. The weapons used were neutron bombs, which are different than conventional nuclear weapons in that they kill biological targets through increased doses of radiation instead of explosive force. Structural damage was minimal. It is the first combat use of such a weapon on domestic soil."

"In other news, Vitabotics, a robotics manufacturing plant was under siege today by malfunctioning products. Witnesses inside the factory report that newly designed cybernetic

prototypes ran amok, literally dancing a waltz, throughout the factory. Five workers, including the project supervisor, were beheaded upon trying to stop the malfunctioning units. A spokesperson for Vitabotics said that the company is still evaluating what went wrong..."

The Love Diet
by
Julie Britt

On the first day of my diet, I only cheated once. But I sort of made up for it by taking the stairs at work and parking far away from the entrance to J.C. Penney.

I went to the mall to look at the sexy outfits I would buy as soon as I could get rid of the ten pounds that jumped on me after Bud left me for that hussy who sold him a cell phone and a roaming plan.

After trying on a bunch of overpriced clothes that were way too tight, I had one more good-riddance romp with Bud. I figured the stairs, the long walk across the parking lot in high heels that sank into the sizzling asphalt with every step and the almost-but-not-quite orgasm burned off all of the calories from that emergency hot fudge sundae. Well, maybe. I got nuts on it, which probably required an honest-to-goodness orgasm to metabolize.

I had let Bud in to pick up some of his stuff, the odds and ends that I hadn't already thrown at him or in the dumpster. I screamed at him a while, then he apologized a while, saying "Oh, Baby" a lot: "Oh, Baby, don't talk mean to me." "Oh, Baby, I won't do it again." "Oh, Baby, she don't mean nothing to me." On and on like that.

That got me real hot. Bud was always "Oh, Babying," when he was in the throes of passion. I couldn't help remembering that, and he looked real sincere and sorry. So before I knew it we were doing it on the floor right on top of the duffel bag full of his stuff.

I was sorry the second it was over. First I was sorry about the lack of orgasm. I mean, if you're gonna humiliate yourself and ruin a perfectly good break-up scene with sex, you ought to at least get a quiver or two.

But I was mostly sorry that I had set myself back another whole day in the getting-over-him cycle. According to my best friend, Vera, the sequence goes like this:

"No. 1. You're gonna be miserable. Accept that, Trish, eat the chocolate, wear the pants with the elastic waist and watch a lot of bad TV. This is the time to be kind to yourself.

"No. 2. You're gonna have to wait a while until you feel better. If this stage lingers, just wear the muumuu and eat more chocolate while watching Oprah. If she has a segment on diet and exercise and fitness and such crap, change the channel. You're not ready for that yet.

"No. 3. You're gonna want a man. This stage might coincide with stage one, since men and misery often travel together. But you will resist because you know you can't get one while you're wearing baggy pants stained with hot fudge and strawberry sauce. If the desire for a man hits you at stage two, watch Oprah. She often has segments about being happy with yourself even if you don't have a man. Course, that's easy for her to say. There is a certain income level you can attain that cancels out the man-repulsing flab. Oprah is there. You are a receptionist. You will never get to that level, unless you marry your boss. But forget that plan because his girlfriend is both skinny and rich, and she is allergic to chocolate. But if you

get to the man-wanting stage after wallowing for a while, you are cured and ready to embark on your makeover and search for true love, again."

According to Vera's little system, doing it with Bud after we broke up was worse than prematurely buying Oprah's fitness book and some walking shoes. So after I kicked his satisfied butt out again, I took a shower and then took stock.

In order to get over this, I had to go all the way back to stage one, even though I was sure I was really ready for the manhunt. So I put my fat pants back on, ordered a pizza and flipped the channel to the USA Network. Halfway through a movie about some man who killed people and kept their faces in jars, I got hungry and turned the kitchen upside down until I found some M&Ms. Plain. Only 200 calories per serving; only ten servings in a bag. I decided to eat only half the bag, but I got scared at the end of the movie when the detective and the maniac were playing cat-and-mouse in that dark warehouse. Before I knew it I had scarfed down every one of those candies. At least my hands were still clean.

The next day I decided I felt good enough to skip step two and move right into the manhunt. Course, my confidence would have been more convincing if I hadn't had to try on everything in my closet just to find one skirt that didn't choke me.

"So you'll have a salad for lunch, dressing on the side," Vera said when I called her for advice. She knows everything.

But before you know it I was back to the men-and-misery stage. Mr. Wright, my boss, called me into his office to explain something about whatever. He is so smart. I noticed he seemed to have an extra little twinkle in his eye. Maybe I was sending out I'm-available vibes. He had never smiled so much or stared at me so hard. Pretty soon I was tuning out his lecture on telephone courtesy or typing without errors or whatever it was this time. Instead I just nodded and smiled like I was paying attention when what I was really doing was checking out his crotch and wondering "Boxers or briefs or nada?"

He finally finished his boss stuff, and I was ready to make my move, when out of his private bathroom came the lovely Lucy. Her hair, her expression and her twisted pantyhose all screamed: "I just had sex and you didn't, nya-nya-nya-nya-nya."

But all she said was, "Oh, hi, Trish. Putting on weight?"

Bitch.

I escaped to lunch and ordered my green salad, dressing on the side. I also ordered a cheeseburger, fries, baked beans and a slice of chocolate cheesecake. The kind with the curly things on top. And a Diet Coke.

After work, I went back to the mall. I parked right outside the door, took the elevator to level two and bought three pairs of stretchy pants and some big tops. If I was gonna be miserable, I was gonna be comfortable.

All that shopping made me hungry, so I moseyed down to the food court. Cold and Sweet had a special: a fat-free, fake-sugar frozen yogurt brownie sundae. Whipped cream optional, fifty cents extra. Yum.

I sat down with my healthy treat and a Diet Sprite and started people-watching. You see all kinds of weird people at the mall. I don't know where they come from. I finished my dessert, discreetly licking the bottom of the dish. Just then I saw Bud coming toward me.

Oh, my. He was fine. Had on those tight jeans I like so much. And I knew what he had on underneath: nada darn thing.

"Trish, oh, baby, I'm glad I found you. Vera said you were shopping."

So what was Vera up to? Was she confusing the stages of overcoming the loss of a love by siccing my lost love on me? Or was this some kind of test? I was so confused. I didn't know whether to be miserable, hungry or horny.

Fortunately, I didn't have to debate it for long. Bud went on and on about how he missed me and how good we were together and how that new cell phone didn't even come with a battery charger. Then he just stopped in mid-sentence and started laughing.

"Oh, baby, you look so cute sitting there all cuddly with that chocolate fudge on your nose."

Then he just leaned over and licked it right off.

"That's almost as sweet as you," he said. "Oh, baby, let's go home."

Oh, well. I guess I'll be back on step one tomorrow.

Bud took my hand and started pulling me toward the door. I almost did it. I almost went back to him. But I just couldn't stand the thought of another Oprah marathon; I'd already blown my Kleenex budget.

"No," I said, pulling my dainty hand from Bud's slimy grasp.

"Oh, baby, come on, now," he said.

"Don't you 'Oh, baby' me, Bud. It won't work this time."

Then I just turned around and headed for the other exit, leaving him looking surprised and shocked and all. He didn't even try to follow. The back of me must have looked pretty determined walking away from his big dumb self. I almost bounced along, in spite of all the food I'd inhaled that day.

On my way out of the food court, I saw a chubby teen-ager daintily nibbling on a hunk of cheesecake. She was taking small, slow bites, gently slurping all the goodness right off that plastic fork, occasionally swirling the tines through the gloppy red strawberry-flavored goop. Vera's diet books tell you to do that: Savor each bite; don't gulp your food. You'll fill up faster that way. But that girl's face was so round, and the jelly roll on her tummy was so pudgy you just knew she'd savored every bite of many a cheesecake.

For a second I thought about passing along Vera's wisdom about the steps and men and muumuus, then I felt my skirt digging into what used to be my waist, and I still had that thick chocolate taste in my mouth.

"Go stuff your own self, Vera," I muttered as I headed out the door to my little red Chevette.

It was time for Oprah by the time I got home, but I didn't turn on the TV. I just couldn't stomach any more of her positive thinking and training for marathons and whining with skinny actresses about how hard it is to be famous, not to mention the idol-worshiping Chicago housewives in her studio audience.

"I don't need an attitude adjustment or a personal trainer; I just need me some exercise," I told the dark screen. Then I took off my Candies and started doing jumping jacks, the only exercise I remembered from junior high gym class. I just about jiggled myself to death, and, Lord knows, I probably scared the living daylights out of old Mr. Smoot who lives downstairs, but I could tell the pounds were finally melting off.

Val Kilmer's Revenge
by
By Michael Hulme

Buzzy on beer and wine and beer, I was trying to blast my yellowy jet through the electric blue pisscake. Some guy unzipped at the other urinal; I sneaked a look to make sure he wasn't queering me. Turns out I was pissing next to Val Kilmer! He smelled funny; I don't know, maybe that was the piss. Anyhow, he had on this blue suit and one of those big thick 'I'm somebody' kind of ties. I stared at him and he looked right ahead at the white tiles, but he knew I was watching him.

"Hey! You're Val Kilmer, right?" I said. He half-nodded. I swear I could have sanded wood on his face. Celebrities bitch about how they want to be treated like "normal people", but if I arrived at the store all unshaven like that, Uncle Tommy would grab my swingers and squeeze real hard. I don't know. Maybe he was making a western or something.

"C'mon," I said, "don't be embarrassed about it. You're pretty good sometimes."

He smiled, kind of. "Thanks."

"You really are Val Kilmer, right?"

"That's right," he said.

"Wow!" I kept on staring. "Man, you were great in that movie."

"Yeah?" he said to the tiles.

"Yeah," I said. "You know, you banged chicks and did drugs and partied. You were that rock and roll guy."

"Jim Morrison," he said.

"Yeah," I said. "That was one sweet film."

"Glad you liked it," he said.

"Didn't like *Hot Shots* though," I said. "Waste of three bucks."

He didn't even blink.

"That film was dumb. It sucked. What were you thinking?"

"Sorry you didn't like it," he said.

"Yeah well," I said. "Forget it. Listen. I've got this great film idea."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." I twisted round to watch him wash his hands. "This guy, OK, finds his girlfriend's

screwing his best friend, so he starts screwing his best friend's girlfriend. So this one time he's screwing her in his Uncle's store, in the warehouse or something, and this girl, man, she's hot like you wouldn't believe, skirt up, thong down, hammertime -- this guy's an animal, OK? You could play him, maybe, but he needs to be younger. No offense. Anyway, he's banging her ass off, and then these zombies come out of nowhere and he kills them all with a load of different guns and a baseball bat."

"Nice idea." He looked at me funny and smiled. "Send it to a studio."

"I will," I said.

He looked me up and down. "Good luck," he said, and he left.

I got back to the table. "Jimmy," I said, "get this. Val Kilmer just took a piss next to me!" I wiped my hand dry on the tablecloth.

Jimmy looked up from his spaghetti-twirling. "Yeah? He try and queer you?"

"Nah," I said. "But he's one arrogant prick."

"Figures," said Jimmy.

I sat down. I discovered my goddamn trousers were soaked.

A Walk In the Park
by
Sylvia Son

Joe wanted to spend a perfect Saturday afternoon reading the newspaper. And he did. Lying back against the couch with his head on the arms of the chair and his legs and sock covered feet stretched out on the cushions, he felt cozy, comfortable and not very motivated to move until after he finished the sports section.

Joe didn't even bother to lift his head up when the front door opened and then closed. A playful voice from the foyer called to him. Joe just grunted a response and turned the page.

"Back from your walk in the park already, Vicki?"

Vicki shuffled something into the closet, then walked into the living-room where Joe was. She heel toed her shoes off and dropped bonelessly onto the sofa chair across from him. "What?" Vicki jumped, suddenly startled by Joe's question her eyes nervously glanced back to the hallway for a few seconds. "Oh yeah. It was really," she struggled to find the suitable adjectives to describe her afternoon. "Great."

"That's nice," Joe said non-committedly and went back to his reading. He stopped in mid-paragraph when he felt something was on him that didn't seem to go away. He lowered the paper, Vicki was staring at him and then around the room scrutinizing with her eyes looking at something that was in the room that Joe couldn't see. Oh no, he thought what did he do this time and what did she want? She leaned her head towards him waiting, expecting him to respond.

"What?"

"You noticed it too?"

"Noticed what?" Joe didn't see it. The living-room? The house?

"It's Saturday."

"Yeah, I know." Saturday was the day after Friday. He knew that because every Friday evening they would go visit Joe's parents for dinner. But Joe didn't think that was the answer Vicki wanted and it was shown by the deep and heavy sigh that seemed to sink her deeper into the couch and onto the floor.

"Nothing to do and nowhere to go," said Vicki.

Joe sat up. "That's not true, we went to my parent's place last night."

Vicki shuddered. "I know, but we do that all the time."

"So what's your point?"

Vicki sighed again which Joe really hated. "You know 7 out of 8 homes with some form of companionship believe it's psychologically stimulating for couples in their lonely decrepit

years."

Joe's couldn't raise his eyebrows any higher if he tried. "What?"

Vicki continued without waiting for Joe's reaction, then her arms mimed out the space of the entire room as if there were an invisible presence or flaw that Joe couldn't see. "That's why I think this place is screaming for a pet."

A pet? Joe exhaled and relaxed back on the couch. For a minute there he thought she wanted a baby or something really expensive. "A pet?" Well that was not a bad idea. They both liked animals and a small dog or cat wouldn't create too much chaos. "I guess we could go to the animal shelter or something."

"Great!" Vicki bounced out to the room with joy. "I got it this afternoon. It's outside the front door."

Joe twisted his body around so that he could yell directly in the hall. "Shouldn't you have at least consulted me, I mean we are living together."

"I know," Vicki said, half-apologetic and half-consoling. "But if I didn't get him I might lose the chance."

Joe shook his head. Dumping his body back onto the couch he held the newspaper up to where he last had it and resumed his reading. One day, he sulked miserably on Vicki's latest impulse buy, that woman is going to buy something so strange it's going to put our relationship in serious question.

A puff of warm breath blew down the back of Joe's neck which caused his neck to itch and sweat irritably. He felt fingers poke his ear. Without really looking Joe slapped at the thick fingers. He wasn't in the mood for Vicki's attempt at persuasion. "Stop it, I'm trying to read. I'm not in the mood, especially since you got a pet without even asking me."

The fingers carded through his hair and vigorously rubbed his scalp.

"Vicki!" Joe grabbed the hand. "I said," Joe held a large dark grey and furry hand. He craned his head back and was face to face with Vicki's smiling face and a scowling gorilla.

"Ahh!" Joe let go of the gorilla's hand and rolled, then fell off the couch and speed crawled behind the sofa chair. "What is that?" Joe tentatively poked his head up from behind the chair.

Vicki non-chalantly sat on the now unoccupied couch while the gorilla sat on the floor by Vicki's let. "It's a gorilla," she said. She began to peel a banana for the gorilla.

"I know it's a gorilla," Joe said from behind the couch. "I mean what is it doing here, in our house."

"You agreed we could get a pet!"

"I though maybe tomorrow or sometime in the future when we were really ready to decide. I didn't agreed in the discussion in buying a monkey."

"It's a gorilla," Vicki corrected. She broke a small piece of banana and fed it to the gorilla's mouth. The gorilla made loud wet smacking noises as it gummed the banana.

"Whatever. Why couldn't you get something simple like a fish or rock. Why a gorilla?"

Vicki patted it on the head, "He reminded me of my cousin George."

"George?" George the gorilla picked up Joe's newspaper and proceeded to bite the corners. Outrage overtook fear and Joe lunged for the paper grabbing every section he could get except for the sports section. George was biting at the corners of the sports section. "Where did you get him?"

Vicki found the ashtray on the coffee table quite fascinating and avoided looking at Joe. "Somewhere." She picked up the edge of the sports section, "Oh look, there's a sale at Sears on lawn-mowers."

"You stole him from the zoo. Please tell me you didn't steal it from the zoo. I'm begging you, even if it's a lie just tell me you didn't steal a wild gorilla from the zoo."

"Okay." Vicki shrugged and pulled out pages of sports section from the gorilla.

A nerve in Joe's right eye twitched and when he tried to speak his jaw dropped and froze and it sounded like he was coughing up hairballs. They had a stolen gorilla and Vicki was sitting there calmly reading his paper. Vicki turned a page without even looking up.

"Stop that Joe, it'll freeze if you keep it that way."

The shock finally swallowed down his throat into pure indignation. He grabbed the paper from Vicki's hand. "Well?"

"Well, what?"

"I deserve some explanation, I am your boyfriend."

She rolled her eyes, "Oh alright. I was walking in the park today. And then he followed me home." She pulled a small brush from her purse and started to comb the gorilla's back.

"Wait a second," said Joe. "Back up between the park and the home."

"Apparently, they built a mini-zoo there so there were some animals. A giraffe, some elephants, a few seals and I think a couple of polar bears."

Joe cut in. "Where does that," jabbing his finger at the gorilla, "fit into all this?"

"I was wandering around and met George."

"George? Which one, the cousin or the gorilla?"

Vicki pointed at the Gorilla. "Well anyway he was sitting all by himself"

"In a cage?"

"We're all in cage one way or another. His was in the zoo."

Joe couldn't believe he was hearing this. His girlfriend was mixing philosophy and grand theft again, and yet he didn't hear any police car sirens. When will she ever learn?

"There were balloons tied to his wrist and he didn't look very happy and after spending an hour talking about my life, my hopes and dreams he decided to follow me home."

"Just like that? You walked out of a public place with a gorilla?"

Vicki shrugged and tried to bat her eyes innocently. "Magic?"

"That is it! I have had it up to here." He mimed his hand at the height of the gorilla. "With your 'borrowing' items from other people." This must have been, Joe mentally calculated the 63rd time since they have been together. Joe had to face facts. Vicki was a kleptomaniac. He read it off the back of a match-book for Kleptomaniac Anonymous. At first it was kind of cute. Oh look Vicki had taken his landlord's false teeth to make an authentic snowman. Why? Who knows. He even turned a blind eye when she "borrowed" the next door neighbour's pine tree, because it would look so good on their front lawn for Christmas. It was only her charm when Mr. Sawyer came out full of righteous anger that calmed him down and the promise she (meaning Joe) would return it after the holidays.

"Vicki, one of these days your stealing will get you into real trouble. And no matter how much I love you, I am not going to go jail for you. You're going to return him."

"Now?"

"Yes, now."

"Really?"

"Yes! Now!"

"Alright, you don't have to shout. Come on, George."

The gorilla looked up and then spoke. "Uh, excuse me?"

Joe took a step back. "Did he just speak?"

The gorilla stood up, grabbed his head and pulled it off, which caused Joe and Vicki to scream in shock. Underneath the gorilla's head was a young man's face, a little flushed and sweaty. Parts of his blond hair was in clumpy spikes and the rest was plastered to his scalp.

"Whew! I was sweating in there. I couldn't stand it for another second."

Vicki grabbed the gorilla's 'head' and shook it back at him. "Who are you? What have you done with George?"

"Nothing," the guy said. "There was no gorilla, only me."

"Then who are you?" Joe finally stepped in and was now very embarrassed for not being able to tell between a fake and a real gorilla.

The fake gorilla man held out a furry hand. "I'm John. I'm an actor and that," he titled his head at the gorilla mask. "Was my latest gig."

"Pretending to be a gorilla?" said Joe.

"I'm a method actor." That was his entire argument. "I believe in throwing myself completely into my role. A gorilla who sells balloons."

"Wait," Vicki chimed in. "So the zookeeper knew you were a fake all along?"

John rolled his eyes and sucked his lips into his mouth.

"Well then, I want my 10 dollars back for buying you."

"Fine." John unzipped the side of his suit and pulled a wrinkled bill and gave it to Vicki. "Some people do not have a sense of humour at all."

Joe felt a headache forming. He walked towards the stairs.

"Where are you going?"

"Bed."

"But it's only five thirty."

"I know," he continued walking up the stairs grumbling. Why couldn't she obsessively yearn to have babies instead like any normal woman?

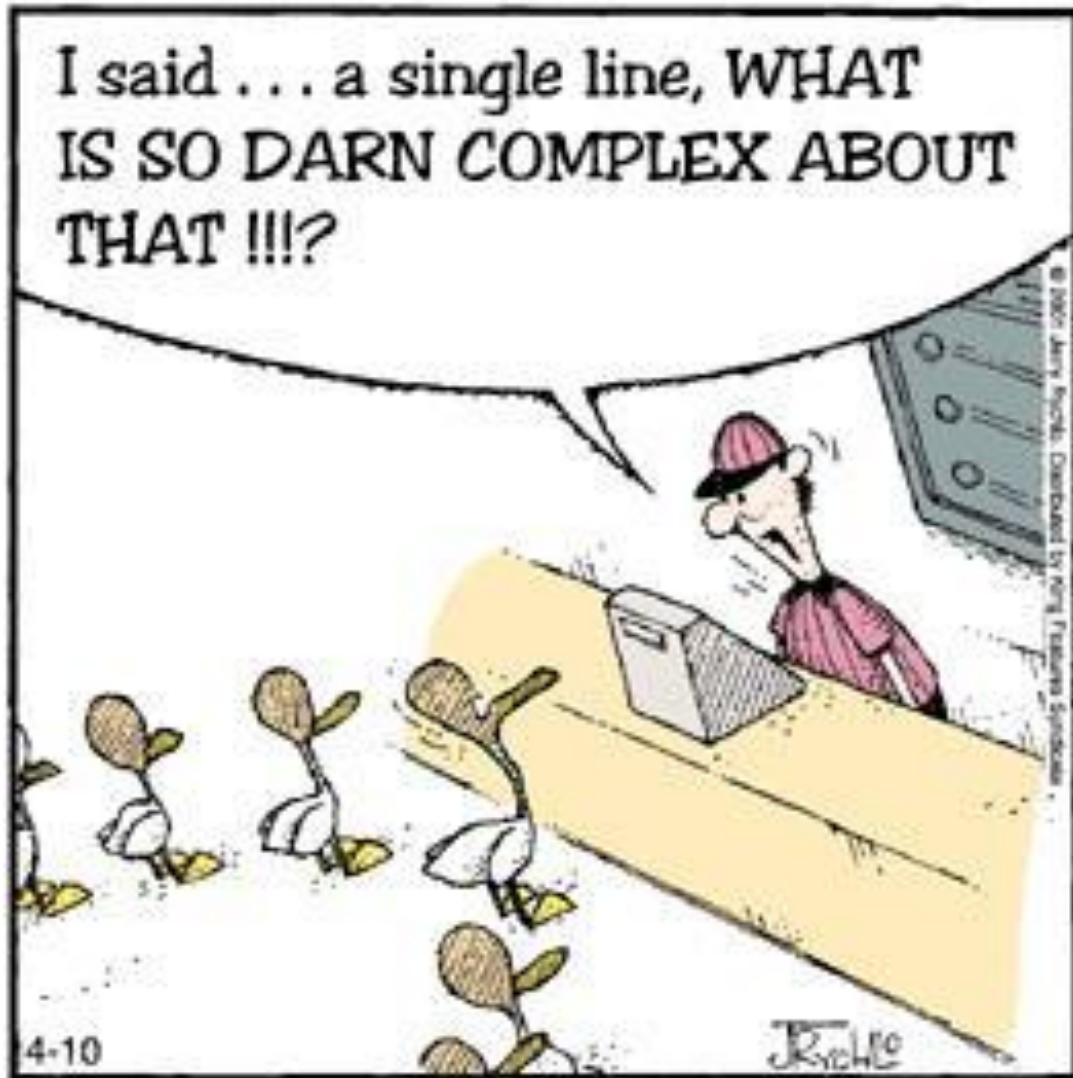
Advanced Puppet Theatrics
by
Andrew Kaye

Advanced Puppet Theatrics

By Andrew Kaye



A Comic
by
Jerry Rychlo



Contributor Biographies

Andy D (born **Andrew T. Duncan**), is the illegitimate child of Lee Van Cleef and Punky Brewster. After birth, his mother and father retired to a peaceful suburban manse in Indiana. There he developed a martial art form dedicated to dropkicking all jerks and fools. Now Andy D rocks New York City vomiting forth gold in the ancient Japanese art form called "Haiku," which means "Wind sweeps over the mountain to the place where dinosaurs and unicorns dance forever!" He is also working on his rap career. If you like his poems let him know: Whiteumbrella@lagomorpho.com. To hear music: <http://homepages.nyu.edu/~atd210/rockslow.mp3>

Jilly Dybka says: "I was raised in Detroit by the Flying Zimbabwes, a circus family. My favorite color is red. No, blue!"

Kelly Ann Malone is a writer of Irish decent, thus making her a Limerick Specialist. Sure she has been published in numerous magazines, journals and periodicals, but she tends to shy away from tooting her own horn. She was born in sunny Southern California in May of 1963, and she is still there. Three boys, one husband, one dog. What more could you ask for?

Al Bixby used to wrestle alligators in his spare time, until it became too dangerous for him. Now he wrestles bears. Small stuffed ones. With adorable button eyes.

When asked for a biography, **Jay Wexler** was heard to reply: "Bio? How about Jay Wexler lives in Manitoba where he eats lunch and cares day and night for his pet skunk Stanley."

Jonathan Redhorse is a student at the University of Denver. He is currently challenging you to a thumb war. "1, 2, 3, 4, I declare a thumb war," he says. You are on the defense, weaving like a seasoned warrior when suddenly Mr. Redhorse's thumb lunges in an illadvised grab for victory. You utilize this lapse in judgment to promptly pin and throttle the appendage. "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 9, 10" you count to victory. The ref pulls your arm into the air as victor. Flashbulbs fire. You spit your mouthguard onto your opponent. Everyone cheers!

Julie Britt, a Lumberton, N.C., native, is an award-winning journalist in Alexandria, VA., who aspires to be an award-winning novelist in Manhattan. However, the last half of her novel is mostly in her head. (But it's really good, her imaginary friend declares.) In an attempt to pry it loose, she recently completed an MFA at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. She hopes that degree, hanging alongside her bachelor's in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will shame/inspire her into finishing the book before Daylight Savings Time ends. Nag her if she doesn't.

Michael Hulme is 29 and lives and works in Norwich, a small provincial town in the United Kingdom chiefly famous for its Norman-era castle and cathedral, its Victorian market, and its ancient Egyptian attitude towards inbreeding. As a result, Michael is a fast runner. In the mythical land of Mississauga where she lives, **Sylvia Son** comes out at night to sacrifice dot matrix printers to the writing gods for inspiration. When that doesn't work she picks up a pen and writes on a notebook.

Andrew Kaye is editor-in-chief of this fine magazine. He spends his time juggling oysters, raising manticores to maturity, and glaring at all the artists out there who haven't submitted pretty visuals to *Defenestration*.

We're not sure who **Jerry Rychlo** is, but every once in a while he sends us a cartoon.... and a threatening note saying if we don't publish his cartoon he'll send us more.